

America

JANUARY 2022

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

THE VISION OF VATICAN II

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secure the council's legacy

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SPRING 2022 events



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“Pope Francis, the Ethicist: Ignatian Roots, Jesuit Priorities, Contemporary Challenges”

Rev. Thomas Massaro, S.J., Fordham University

Wednesday, Feb. 9, 2022 | 7:30 p.m.

Hybrid Event: In person at Dolan School of Business Event Hall, or register for livestream at fairfield.edu/cs



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Jason Berry, Writer and Filmmaker

Wednesday, March 2, 2022 | 7:30 p.m.

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Kerry Robinson, Leadership Roundtable

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and The Corporatization
of Higher Education:**

Wednesday | February 2

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5 p.m.

Wednesday | March 23

**“How Do We Serve the
Underserved?”**

DiMenna-Nyselius Library
Multimedia Room
5 p.m.

Wednesday | April 6

**“Racial Justice and the
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Of Two Things

For the past 78 years, every issue of **America** has included reflections on sacred Scripture. Since the Second Vatican Council, these reflections have tracked with the three-year cycle of weekly readings for the Sunday Mass. While **America** remains committed to providing this commentary on the Sunday readings, it has become clear that trying to fit what is essentially a weekly column into a monthly print magazine makes for a heavy editorial burden as well as a cumbersome presentation for the reader. So we have decided to move “The Word” commentary to our website, which will allow for a more timely presentation of the column.

As you know, all of the content of our web site is included in a print subscription, so print readers will continue to have access to this material free at the point of use. If you have not already done so, you can link your print subscription with the **America** website by following the instructions at this link: americamagazine.org/link-print-sub. Going forward, you will be able to find all of “The Word” commentaries at a new dedicated web page: americamagazine.org/word.

As always, please let us know what you think.

•••

On Jan. 21, 2022, thousands of men and women will gather in Washington, D.C., for the annual March for Life. In our pro-life commitment, **America** is allied with the sentiments expressed in the statements by the Society of Jesus of the United States, “Standing for the Unborn,” which was published in **America** on May 26, 2003, and “Protecting the Least Among Us,” published on Jan. 18, 2018. As is our

annual custom, we republish excerpts from these texts here:

As we continue to engage on the topic of abortion, we wish to proceed in a way that rests on the following insights: First, the foundation of the Catholic moral tradition is the dignity of the human person. The second key insight of Catholic moral life is that we are social beings and that solidarity matters. The social acceptance of abortion is a profound moral failure on both counts. It undermines the claim that every life is infused with God-given dignity, and it often pretends such decisions can be relegated to individual choice without having negative consequences on society as a whole. Sacred Scripture, the witness of early Christianity, Catholic social teaching, and the magisterium consistently teach that we cannot in good conscience ignore this tragedy.

Second, Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit history offer unique lenses through which to view the topic of abortion that should deepen our resolve to work in this area. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola are motivated from beginning to end by the laboring presence of God in creation and redemption. We are invited to co-labor, not because we are perfect, but because we are loved, and in recognizing God’s love for

us we cannot but act on it. Jesuits throughout history have lived out this insight to transform the world, and we are asked to do the same today.

Third, beyond the actual content of “what” we say in making a case against abortion, it is critical to pay attention to “how” our defense of the unborn takes place. As St. Paul reminds us, we must “speak the truth with love” (Ephesians 4:15). Success will not come through force of will; it will only come by changing hearts. Therefore, we must always keep watch over our own hearts and ensure they are filled with the love and hope needed for this holy work.

Our Jesuit brother and our Holy Father, Pope Francis, highlights our concern: “Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this” (Evangellii Gaudium, No. 213). May we always listen to the lives of the most vulnerable in our society and use our voice on their behalf.

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



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CNS photo/Paul Haring

Pope Francis and Orthodox Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus attend a meeting with Orthodox bishops at the cathedral in Nicosia, Cyprus, on Dec. 3.

Cover: Seminarian Toby Offiah leads the opening procession during a Mass on Nov. 21 marking Black Catholic History Month at Our Lady of Victory Church in Brooklyn, N.Y.

CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

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Eucharistic Politics

*In November, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a teaching document on the Eucharist at their fall meeting by a vote of 222 to 8, with three abstaining. The bishops had approved the drafting of the document in June, sparking an internal debate about whether it should be used to sanction pro-choice politicians. That week, **America** covered the issue from various perspectives, including an interview with Senator Dick Durbin, a Catholic who supports abortion, and an episode of “The Gloria Purvis Podcast” featuring Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco, a staunch pro-life advocate. Our coverage elicited hundreds of comments. Here are some samples.*

We would like to acknowledge Senator Durbin’s lifelong dedication to public service and his commitment to advancing many policies and programs that recognize the underprivileged and marginalized. In these areas, we are grateful for his contributions to causes that are of great importance to the church and her faithful. However, Senator Durbin’s comments in the **America** interview must be corrected, out of concern for his soul and out of concern for the confusion and scandal his words and actions present to the faithful of the church.

Senator Durbin suggests that the standard for worthy reception of the Eucharist is a “well-formed conscience.” This is untrue. Rationalizing one’s actions does not equate to a well-formed conscience, and one’s own self-assessment does not erase the objective reality of one being outside of communion with God and the church. Pope Francis recently affirmed this reality. Noting that there is no theological ambiguity in the matter of pro-abortion politicians, the Holy Father said, “Those people who are not in the community cannot take Communion, because they are out of the community. It is not a punishment: Communion is linked to the community.”

The Most Rev. Thomas J. Paprocki, Bishop of Springfield, Ill.

The Most Rev. Kevin W. Vann, Bishop of Orange, Calif.

(For the full letter, visit www.americamagazine.org/durbin-communion.)

Many no longer regard the church as the ultimate moral authority on a number of issues. I think that the “culture wars” the church is engaging in is an attempt to reclaim lost credibility. Unfortunately, [church leaders] have decided that the way to do this is to become players in the secular world of politics. It really doesn’t matter if President Biden or Speaker Pelosi are mentioned by name in the forthcoming document because the harm has already been done.

L. Kenney

As I read the interview with Senator Dick Durbin, I was struck by the depiction of the church as an organization rather than the mystical body of Christ. Either view affects how one sees these topics. Everyone is welcome in the body of Christ, so it makes me sad to hear that the senator feels unwelcome. At the same time, he is held to a different standard than your average Catholic because he is obstinately supporting and advancing a practice that is heterodox to not just a teaching of an institution, but the commandment of God to not kill. His last line about conscience is troublesome. Against what is that “well formed conscience” measured?

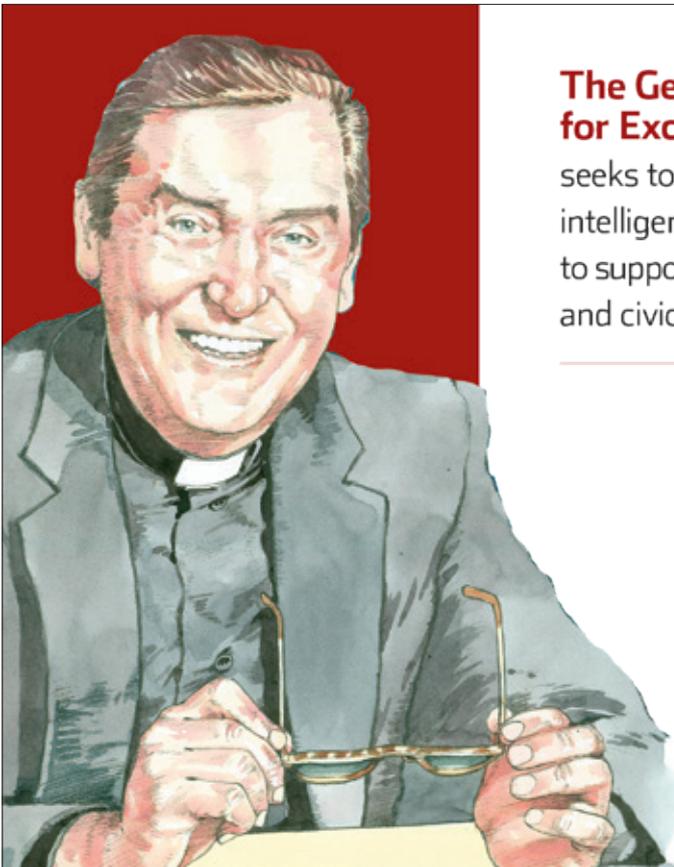
Michael Donlan

Mixing politics with the faith is pure poison, and the church would have been grievously harmed had the bishops decided to subordinate the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church to any political party, no matter which one.

Robert Prokop

When a believer is made to feel unwelcome in the church for any reason, a greater sin has been committed. And that sin can be committed not only directly but indirectly. We are a church of sinners; we welcome sinners. The sooner we keep that reality in the forefront of our minds, the sooner faith, hope and charity become the true and obvious hallmarks of our church. You can’t bring about conversion by exclusion. Many regard the Catholic Church as an instigator of much evil for its history of exclusions. And these instances of excluding our own only reinforce their impressions.

Vincent Gaglione



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The January 6 Insurrection Is Still a Crisis for American Democracy

The first anniversary of the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 will no doubt bring plenty of commentary and analysis on that shocking moment, when we and the world saw that the United States, too, is a fragile democracy, as vulnerable to demagoguery and the exploitation of populist sentiment as anywhere else in the world. It is important to notice, however, how our reactions to that political nadir have changed over the past 12 months.

Jan. 7, 2021, was a day for shock and facing hard truths about an event that, had it occurred overseas, would be described by American media as a failed putsch. Even while some continued in their cynical objections to ratifying the results of a fair and transparent election, there was bipartisan consensus in denouncing the lawless and violent assault on a space previously held to be sacrosanct.

Yet one year later, even while a House committee continues its investigation of the storming of the Capitol and various rioters on that day are prosecuted and sentenced, the degree to which our elected officials feel any sense of urgency in mounting a response to—or even to provide an account of—the events of Jan. 6 has become a largely partisan position.

The most significant political fallout has been borne, absurdly but perhaps predictably, by those Republican legislators principled enough to try to hold former President Donald J. Trump to account for his part in fomenting the attack on the Capitol. They are being purged from the party and its leadership, or are retiring in expectation of primary challenges from the right, and even their Republican colleagues who are not hounding

them out are responding to this purge with silence.

To be sure, in observing that the response to Jan. 6 has become partisan, we are not arguing that the blame for that outcome must be equally shared by both parties. The Republican Party has become addicted to feeding the outrage and conspiracy theories of its base, and even those Republican officeholders who do not join Mr. Trump in cynical exploitation of that outrage have largely abdicated their responsibility to oppose it. In particular, moderate Senate Republicans have cooperated with their leadership's project of obstructing Democrats at every turn, seemingly without extracting any concessions in defense of democratic norms or anything other than their own security in office.

The Democrats, however, have been mostly ineffectual in response to the moral collapse of the Republican Party. They have prioritized maximizing their expansion of the social safety net with the slimmest of majorities. Even though many of their policy goals are laudable, this political strategy means issues like voting rights and election security, as well as investigation of the Capitol riot, have been starved of public attention even while they are technically still on the legislative agenda. In consequence, Republicans have been able to decry the dangers of the Democrats' "socialist" spending agenda while facing little to no political cost for their failure to oppose the demagogues controlling their own party.

There have been portents of this phenomenon elsewhere in our political history. President Richard Nixon resigned in 1974 before his impeachment came before the House of Rep-

resentatives, but even if the House had voted to impeach, he would have faced a Senate trial in which a two-thirds majority would have been needed to remove him. And the Democrats held only 56 seats in the Senate, 11 short of conviction if the vote were along strict party lines.

Nixon resigned anyway, an outcome ensured by the realization—and the opinions of his close advisors—that after a year of damning evidence in the Watergate investigations, many Republican senators would vote against him in a Senate trial.

The immediate aftermath held no internal purges of Republicans who said they would have voted to impeach; no one argued that Mr. Nixon's resignation was the result of fraud or was coerced, nor did it lead to disastrous political results for Republicans beyond that year's midterms. While the new president, Gerald Ford, would narrowly lose his election bid in 1976, a Republican would occupy the White House for 14 of the 18 years that followed Mr. Nixon's resignation.

Some have argued that Mr. Ford's pardon of Mr. Nixon was itself a partisan move—and that it avoided disclosure of the whole truth about Mr. Nixon's involvement in Watergate and its aftermath. At the same time, however, it is worth noting the following: that the senators and congressmen in Mr. Nixon's own party did not offer a timorous fealty to him, and this made justice a possibility; that Mr. Nixon accepted responsibility, if not for his actions, then for their impact on the nation; and that some of Mr. Nixon's political allies and appointees—including the future vice president Nelson Rockefeller, the future senator Daniel Patrick Moyni-

han and the Supreme Court appointee Harry Blackmun—proved to be anything but blind loyalists to Mr. Nixon’s politics.

In contrast, many of today’s Republicans are still actively seeking Mr. Trump’s approval and endorsement, or at least are trying to avoid having him target them for retribution. And Democrats seem to have resigned themselves to accepting that a large portion of the electorate, sufficient to hold power as a minority given gerrymandering and the design of the Senate and Electoral College, simply cannot be reasoned with or appealed to.

Before the 2020 election, **America’s** editors warned that Mr. Trump posed a substantive danger to the constitutional order of American democracy. While we did not then expect that caution to be as sadly vindicated as it was on Jan. 6, the anemic response following that day is no less a cause for concern.

To “secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity,” the United States must be capable of holding to account those who abandon deliberative self-governance for a politics based on exploiting outrage and resentment even to the point of violence. That requires politicians and legislators who are courageous and strategically adept enough to arrange political incentives in support of that end, even at temporary cost to other priorities or their own electoral success. If our present officeholders are not up to the task, then at the same time that they protest and critique incumbents, the American people should also prioritize electing better replacements, even when our constitutional house is not visibly on fire. By the time we see the smoke clearly, it will be too late to run for the hoses.

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The Feminist Revolution Has Stalled. Blame Roe v. Wade.

The U.S. Supreme Court is now reviewing the constitutionality of a recent Texas law banning abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detectable, as well as a Mississippi law that prohibits most abortions after 15 weeks, with decisions expected this spring. Advocates for legal abortion say that if the court upholds one or both laws, it would represent a significant rollback of women's rights in the United States. But have the Supreme Court's landmark rulings on legal abortion—from *Roe v. Wade* (1973) through *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992)—led to greater equality or liberty for women? Or has the opposite been true?

Despite the attention given to equality arguments for abortion rights, the Supreme Court has never held that abortion restrictions violate the equal protection clause of the Constitution. Still, when the court upheld *Roe* in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the new and prevailing equality rationale for abortion rights seemed foremost in the minds of several of the justices. In their plurality opinion, Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Anthony Kennedy and David Souter wrote that although they could not affirm that *Roe* was rightly decided, its "precedential force" required them to uphold the decision, albeit with substantial changes. The justices deemed that the country, over the intervening 19 years, had come to "rely" on the right bestowed in *Roe* as a centerpiece of women's liberty and equality, whatever the Constitution said (or did not say) about the matter.

This "reliance interest" is what gave *Roe*, according to the plurality opinion, its "precedential force. Since *Roe*, the three justices wrote in 1992, "people have organized intimate rela-

tionships and made choices that define their views of themselves and their places in society, in reliance on the availability of abortion in the event that contraception should fail. The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives."

But *Casey*, like *Roe*, was weakly reasoned as a constitutional matter. In the past, as the law professor Michael Stokes Paulsen observed in a Yale Law Journal article in 2002, "people organized personal relationships and defined their views of themselves" in reliance on the legal regime of racial segregation. But this did not transform their (deplorable) legal claims into constitutional trumps. On its own, reliance is hardly a solid foundation for a constitutional claim.

Casey's substantive claim as to women's equality also lacks merit. Abundant evidence exists that there is a correlation between lower fertility rates and higher rates of education and labor force participation among women, but no evidence exists that abortion itself, rather than fertility regulation of various kinds, is specifically correlated with these (imperfect) markers of women's equality. Instead, societal reliance on widespread contraceptive use with abortion as a "backup" may actually have had distorting, detrimental effects upon women and women's equality, most notably among the poor.

A Revolution in Risk-Taking

Rather than merely offer a fail-safe in individual cases "in the event that contraception should fail," the easy abortion access granted in *Roe* seems to have inspired a large-scale,

society-wide increase in sexual risk-taking on the part of sexual actors. Dr. Alan Guttmacher, then president of Planned Parenthood, was prescient in this regard when in 1968 he said: "When an abortion is easily obtainable, contraception is neither actively nor diligently used." But easy abortion access does not only tend to disincentivize contraceptive use. By offering sexual partners the false confidence that their acts will be definitively sterile, the abortion-backed contraceptive revolution ushered in an unprecedented mentality of risk-taking that is often unwarranted by the couple's level of commitment and their ability to assume parental duties in the case of an unexpected pregnancy.

In practice, then, the sexual insurance policy of the 1970s, putatively taken out to insure both sexes against childbearing, seems to insure primarily men. Not only were the new abortion-backed contraceptive provisions the chief catalysts in erecting casual norms around sex, norms that are increasingly disfavored by most women. In addition, the still-high rates of unintentional pregnancy, nonmarital births and abortion that accompany the new sexual insurance scheme disproportionately affect women, especially those who are poor. The now common mentality that sex has no consequences too often leaves women alone with their pregnancies—to procure abortions or rear their children on their own.

Just as the 18th-century British philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft and the 19th-century women's advocates anticipated, relatively easy access to abortion has relieved men of the mutual responsibilities that accompany

Image from the March for Life rally in Washington in 2020.



sex, and so has upended the duties of care for dependent children that fathers ought equally to share. Sexual intercourse and potential motherhood remain an unshakable biological reality, but the connection between sexual intercourse and potential fatherhood—the connection that irresponsible men have always sought to avoid—has withered even further since Roe. Here again, Dr. Guttmacher saw the consequences all too clearly in the years before the Supreme Court’s fateful decision in 1973: “Abortion on demand relieves the [man] of all possible responsibility; he simply becomes a coital animal.”

Indeed, if the institutionalized male sexual prerogative was finally undone by legal reforms to marriage and criminal law in the last century, relatively easy abortion access has emboldened men to reclaim that prerogative once again. As the #MeToo movement has revealed in spades, the new “coital animal”—lacking the formative schooling of desire expected of an aspiring gentleman—will not so readily heed the word *no*.

The 1960s and 70s were decades awash in new questions that emerged with the revolutionary release of the birth control pill alongside women’s increased social status and the unprecedented entry of mothers of young children into the workforce. As the distinctive women’s movement moved apace, alongside both the population control movement and the emerging sexual revolution, but not yet together, Americans had before them a new set of yet unforeseen and entangled questions: first, how to enable women to participate more fully in the public sphere; second, how to manage the significant “technology

shock” created by the advent of the pill (far more effective than its predecessors, but importantly not 100 percent so); and third, how to maintain utmost societal concern for the perennial need to nurture dependent children who heretofore had been the primary responsibility of their mothers.

The Supreme Court in 1973 chose one definitive route, short-circuiting the impassioned debates going on across the country in state after state, and thereby frustrating a better compromise among contending perspectives. The court in 1992 then doubled down on this particular response, explicitly acknowledging that over the course of nearly two decades, the country and its actors had come to “rely” upon abortion for women’s equal participation in public life.

It may be that when the justices in Casey maintained that “an entire generation has come of age free to assume Roe’s concept of liberty in defining the capacity of women to act in society,” it was an altogether accurate description. When Casey reaffirmed the “right to choose” abortion, employers and other public institutions remained “free” to be unchanged by women’s participation in them.

That is, relatively easy abortion access has made it unnecessary for businesses and other institutions in the United States to acknowledge an

essential cultural reality: Most working persons are (or ought to be) deeply encumbered by their obligations to their families. In the end, it may just be that an unmitigated right to abortion serves a profit-driven market above all else. But caring for dependents and participating in the economic and social life of the nation need not be a zero-sum game. Only our lack of imagination, and our culture-wide capitulation to the now reigning logic of the market, has made it so.

Given the centrality of abortion rights in the feminist movement today, it is no surprise that work-family balance remains such a pressing issue, and that it is women’s status as mothers, not their status as women, that causes the greatest inequities socially and professionally, even as women have made remarkable gains over all. If the “feminist revolution” has stalled—elevating women in the workplace without a concomitant elevation for the work mothers and fathers do in the home—constitutionalizing the right to abortion shares a good deal of the blame.

Erika Bachiochi is a fellow at the *Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.* This essay is adapted from her new book, *The Rights of Women: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Notre Dame University Press).



Young Catholics: Will they come back after Covid-19?

By Robert David Sullivan

Only 8 percent of young U.S. Catholics (ages 18 to 35) said their faith was weakened by the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a recently released national survey by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, but nearly one-third expect to attend Mass less often after the pandemic than they did before.

The survey indicated that 13 percent of Catholic young adults attended Mass at least once a week before the Covid-19 pandemic, and 6 percent of respondents said they had been “very” involved with parish activities other than attending Mass. Allegations of Catholic clergy sexually abusing minors was the most frequently given reason for not being more active in parish life.

The CARA national survey, “Faith and Spiritual Life of Catholics in the United States,” polled 2,214 young adults between July 10 and Aug. 16, 2020. The survey was designed to develop a better understanding of the faith and spiritual life of Catholics in the United States, especially Hispanics and young adults, and to explore ways to meet their needs.

The survey also indicated that more than one-third of young Catholics have participated in a faith-related group as an adult, with weekly Mass attenders most likely to report such participation, according to the survey.

Overall, 37 percent of respondents said they had participated in at least one Catholic group during their lives; these included young adult groups (15 percent of the total), religious institute volunteer groups (9 percent), the Knights of Columbus (6 percent) and pro-life groups (5 percent).

Seventy-four percent of those who were active in a Catholic group agreed “somewhat” or “very much” that they are motivated to participate out of a desire to learn from new experiences. Other common motivations were: to nourish spiritual life (70 percent), to “reduce negative feelings” (69 percent), to act or express important convictions concerning serving others (69 percent), and to develop and strengthen social ties to others (65 percent).

Thirteen percent of Catholics ages 18 to 35 reported to CARA researchers that they attended Mass at least once

a week before the Covid-19 pandemic. Another 21 percent of young Catholics said they attended Mass at least once a month, 31 percent attended a few times a year, and 36 percent said they rarely or never attended Mass. The most common reason given for not attending Mass was a lack of time (57 percent), followed by not believing that missing Mass is a sin (55 percent), family responsibilities (44 percent), identification as “not a very religious person” (43 percent) and a preference to practice their faith outside of their parish (43 percent).

Six percent of respondents said they were “very” involved with parish activities and ministries, other than attending Mass, prior to the pandemic. Thirteen percent said they were “somewhat” involved, and 17 percent were involved “a little.” Most (64 percent) said they were not involved “at all” in these ministries and activities.

When Catholic young adults were asked about possible reasons that they were not more active in parish life, 44 percent said allegations of Catholic clergy sexually abusing minors were “very” or “somewhat” important, followed by the church’s teachings on homosexuality (42 percent), feeling that older generations have too much influence in the parish (35 percent), the church’s teachings on the use of birth control (34 percent), the roles available to women in the church (33 percent), a

feeling that the church is not open to dialogue with other religious faiths (33 percent) and the church’s teachings on divorce and remarriage (32 percent).

Effects of the Pandemic on Catholic Life

Eleven percent of Catholic young adults said they watched Mass on television or online “very often” during the pandemic. A majority, 54 percent, said they did not watch Mass “at all.” Most respondents, 57 percent, said they have not changed how often they pray during the pandemic, but 28 percent said they have prayed more, and 14 percent said they have prayed less often.

A majority (51 percent) of respondents said they will return to their typical frequency of Mass attendance once the pandemic has passed. However, 36 percent said they will attend Mass less often, and 14 said they will attend more frequently. Of those who had attended Mass weekly, 31 percent said they will attend less frequently in the future.

In an open-ended question about how they practiced

their faith outside of the parish before the pandemic, 31 percent indicated they did so by praying; that figure rose to 42 percent when asked about activities during the pandemic. But 21 percent indicated they were not doing anything to practice their faith at home during the pandemic.

Twenty-one percent said experiencing the pandemic has strengthened their faith, compared with the 8 percent who said their faith has been weakened. Seventy-one percent said experiencing the pandemic has not changed their faith. Those ages 18 to 20 were more likely than those ages 30 to 35 to say the pandemic has weakened their faith (14 percent vs. 6 percent).

Faith at Home and in Everyday Life

More than a quarter of Catholic young adults (27 percent) in the CARA survey said they wear or carry a crucifix or cross. Seventeen percent said they wear or carry a religious medal or pin of a saint or angel, 12 percent said they carry prayer cards or coins, and 4 percent said they wear or carry a scapular. Hispanics were more likely than non-Hispanics to say they wear or carry a crucifix or cross (31 percent vs. 24 percent) or prayer cards or coins (17 percent vs. 9 percent).

Asked about a list of possible religious items, 45 percent of respondents said that they have a visible cross or crucifix in their homes, followed by a rosary (42 percent), art depicting Mary or Jesus (24 percent each), holy water (21 percent) and prayer cards (18 percent).

Twenty-four percent of Catholic young adults said they pray individually at least once a day, and another 21 percent said they do so at least once a week (outside of Mass). About one-quarter said they prayed with family members at least once a week, and 11 percent prayed with a group outside of their family at least weekly.

Seventy-three percent of respondents agreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that they could be a good Catholic without going to Mass every Sunday. Forty-four percent agreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that they think of themselves as a practicing Catholic. Fifty-seven percent agreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that helping the poor and needy is a moral obligation for Catholics.

Thirty-nine percent agreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that they could never imagine themselves leaving the Catholic Church, 33 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, and 28 percent disagreed “somewhat” or “strongly.” Seventeen “strongly” agreed that there have been times recently when they struggled with their faith, and another 29 percent “somewhat” agreed.

Respondents were most likely to say they did the following at least once a month before the pandemic: helping neighbors (34 percent), volunteering at a school (20 percent), assisting a fundraiser with donations (20 percent), a community service project (18 percent), and visiting the sick or elderly (18 percent).

Among those who indicated that they do community or volunteer work, 16 percent said that their Catholic faith is “very” important in motivating them to do these things. Thirty percent said their faith was “somewhat” important and 34 percent said this was “only a little” important in motivating them. One in five said their faith did “not at all” motivate them.

CARA conducted the young Catholics survey between July 10 and August 16, 2020, with NORC’s AmeriSpeak Panel as a sample source (394 respondents) that was supplemented by a nonprobability online opt-in sample (Dynata; 1,820 respondents). This study was offered in English and Spanish and was administered as an online web survey and telephone interviews. The margin of sampling error for the sample is ±3.59 percent. The full report is available on the CARA website (cara.georgetown.edu).

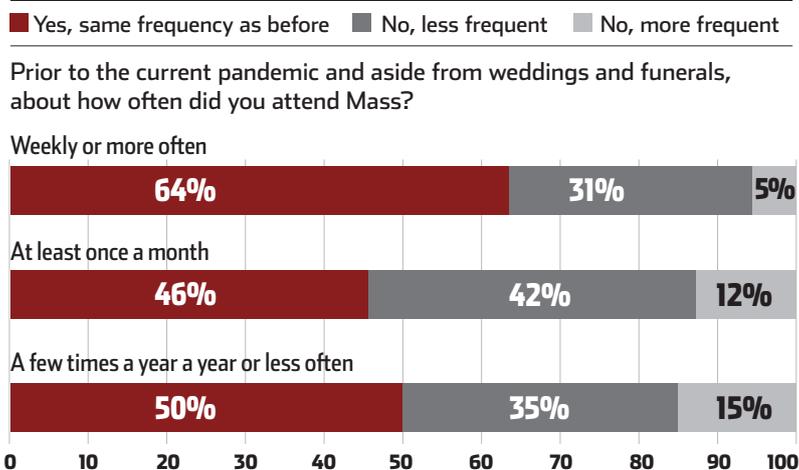
Robert David Sullivan, senior editor.
Twitter: @RobertDSullivan.

CATHOLIC YOUNG PEOPLE IN AMERICA AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

There are 20.1 million Catholic young adults between the ages of 18 and 35—21% of all U.S. young adults.

Of the young adult respondents, 70% were baptized Catholic before the age of one; 18% were baptized as children; 4% as teenagers; 6% were baptized or were received into full communion as adults. Among those who became Catholic as adults, 41% previously had no other religious affiliation, commonly referred to as “nones.”

When stay at home orders have lifted and the pandemic has passed, do you expect you will return to your typical frequency for Mass attendance?



CHANGES IN FAITH

Those aged 18 to 20 are more likely than those aged 30 to 35 to say the pandemic has weakened their faith—14% compared to 6%. The more often respondents attended Mass before the pandemic, the more likely they are to say the pandemic has strengthened their faith—40% of weekly attenders, 30% of monthly attenders and 15% of those who attended Mass a few times a year or less often.

What keeps them away?

44% of respondents say that allegations of clergy sexually abusing minors has made them “somewhat” or “very” much less likely to be active in parish life.

42% say the church’s teachings on homosexuality make them less likely to be active in parish life.

35% are “somewhat” or “very” much less likely to be active in parish life because of a feeling that older generations have too much influence in their parish.

Other factors: the church’s teachings on birth control (34% “somewhat” or “very” much less likely); the roles available to women in the church (33%); a feeling that the church is not open to dialogue with other religious faiths (33%); and the church’s teachings on divorce and remarriage (32%).

Source: “Faith and Spiritual Life of Catholics in the United States” from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University

Cardinal Scola condemns 'harsh and insolent attacks' on Pope Francis

Pope Francis embraces Cardinal Angelo Scola of Milan during a meeting with clergy and religious at the cathedral in Milan, March 25, 2017.

In *Betting on Freedom: My Life in the Church*, written with the Italian journalist Luigi Geninazzi, Cardinal Angelo Scola, archbishop emeritus of Milan, writes about his joyful life as a bishop over 26 years and his concern at the decline of the Christian faith in Europe.

Speaking from the perspective of a “tired” church in Europe, he told **America** that the pontificate of Francis has been “like a punch in the stomach from the Holy Spirit to wake us up.” He noted that some in the church have reacted negatively to Francis’ leadership, with what he described as “harsh and insolent attacks against the pope.”

“This is wrong,” Cardinal Scola said. “As a child, I was taught the expression, ‘The pope is the pope’ and that one cannot question this.”

Asked what he thinks about brother cardinals who publicly criticize Pope Francis, Cardinal Scola said, “I will say frankly that while I can understand their internal turmoil—and I think all of them start with good intentions—I do not see the necessity to do this, especially in public.” As an alternative, he said, “there is always the possibility for a cardinal to write to the pope, to request an audience and to seek to explain himself.”

He attributed the origin of these attacks to “the lack of understanding of the great majority of Christians of the necessary link between experience and doctrine.”

“Francis is a pope who starts from experience; he starts first of all from his own personal experience and has no shame in communicating it,” Cardinal Scola explained. “And from there he arrives at the formulation of dogma.”

Pope Francis insists on a culture of encounter, not confrontation, Cardinal Scola said, adding that “this is the road that the Christian should follow.”

In *Betting on Freedom*, the scholarly Cardinal Scola comes across as a passionate man who enjoyed carrying out

the pastoral duties of a bishop. He recalls that when John Paul II called him to the episcopate at 49, “I perceived that that was the road that the Lord indicated for me, namely, to accompany the life of the People of God. I liked working together with people, my method was synodality!”

Cardinal Scola said that he thought Pope Francis was on the right track by pushing the whole church onto a synodal path. “I believe the project is very good,” the cardinal continued. “And it is necessary for us to accompany the pope, as one should always do—following him, obeying him—because the pope is the ultimate point of reference for the navigation of the barque of the church, [even] when the sea is stormy.”

“Some people foresee dark scenarios for a church that is allegedly threatened by schism,” he writes in *My Life in the Church*. However, in his interview he said, “I do not see the risk of schism.” He is instead concerned with “polemics and divisions—which grow ever sharper, even at the expense of truth and charity.”

“We can debate and discuss questions, but we must do so with mutual respect and never underestimate the common belonging to Christ,” he said.

“I have great hope in the possibility of change because the times are never ours.”

Ultimately, Cardinal Scola says that the church should adopt the wisdom of T. S. Eliot, when he wrote, “Take no thought of the harvest,/ But only of proper sowing.”

“The harvest is in the hands of God, so we must not be frightened,” he said. “It is the Spirit of the Lord that guides the church and gives the harvest.”

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



Church sends mixed signals while Canadians lose patience with the unvaccinated

The increasingly aggressive admonitions from the Canadian federal government could not be any clearer: Get vaccinated, Canadians! And the consequences are becoming equally clear: a loss of employment for civil servants and anyone working in federally regulated industries who declines to get the Covid-19 shot. In October, Canada's federal jobs minister wielded an even bigger stick—the loss of Employment Insurance benefits (called unemployment insurance in the United States) for anyone fired for remaining unvaccinated.

Canadians have embraced vaccination in large numbers. After a slow initial rollout, more than 83 percent of Canadians over 12 are now fully vaccinated. An ACS-Léger poll found that 83 percent supported the introduction of vaccine passports, and 69 percent of respondents said “they do not trust people that are unvaccinated.”

Still, the unvaccinated are speaking out—often loudly.

The issue of vaccine mandates upended the September election, which Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had believed would be a cakewalk for Canada's Liberal Party, while revealing an unexpectedly unseemly side of Canada's usually staid politics. Anti-vax protesters dogged Mr. Trudeau on the campaign trail, berating him with coarse language and disruptive chants. One person even threw gravel at the prime minister.

Maxime Bernier, leader of the populist People's Party of Canada, held “freedom rallies” across the nation, attracting sizable crowds of folks intent on eschewing masks

or social distancing precautions, especially in the prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

“People imagine that [Canada is] the liberal utopia, and sometimes it may seem like that. But underneath the surface, there's a strain of resistance and populism,” said D. W. Lafferty, an independent scholar and observer of the Catholic Church in Canada. Those extreme right sentiments do not often rise to the cultural surface, he said, but they have “always been there.”

In the end, campaigning hard against vaccine passports and mandates, Mr. Bernier's P.P.C. captured 5 percent of the national vote.

How much cultural vibrancy the P.P.C. and other Canadian movements against vaccine mandates and passports will have in the future remains to be seen. But they are not going away quietly.

Anti-vax enthusiasm may not be enough to build long-term political momentum. The P.P.C. drew some of its support from the Green Party, which collapsed in 2021's elections, but did not necessarily find converts and defectors from the Conservative Party, according to analysts. So the challenge of keeping cohesive a disparate movement—encompassing everyone from parts of the yoga community to right-wing Christians to anarchists to otherwise apolitical people—could prove impossible.

“The only thing they agree on is opposition to vaccination,” said David Seljak, a religious studies professor at St. Jerome's University in Waterloo, Ontario. “That's not a po-



CNS photo/Carlos Osorio, Reuters

Getting a Covid-19 shot at the Toronto and Region Islamic Congregation center on April 1, 2021.

litical movement. That’s a political moment.”

And if P.P.C. leaders were hoping the Catholic Church in Canada might prove an ally to their ambitions, unspoken or otherwise, they have definitely had to contend with some mixed messages from the church.

Some unvaccinated Canadian Catholics have been seeking religious exemptions, but Canada’s Catholic bishops have promoted vaccinations, and many dioceses have publicly reiterated the church’s position on Covid-19 vaccines, declaring them to be morally licit and encouraging Catholics to get them.

The Archdiocese of Ottawa, however, prepared a sample letter for priests to sign for Catholics seeking religious exemptions to vaccinations. But while making the exemption letter available, Archbishop Marcel Dampousse also told the local faithful, “All things considered, I feel it is important to trust the messages of our public health authorities here in Canada and in Ontario.”

Canadian public opinion, meanwhile, takes a dim view of people avoiding vaccinations for religious reasons. The ACS-Léger poll found that 79 percent of respondents do not believe there are legitimate religious grounds for seeking an exemption.

David Agren writes on Canada and Latin America from Mexico City. Twitter: @el_reportero.



Photo by Ekpali Saint

Sister Sylvia Ndubuaku.

GOODNEWS: Missionary sisters provide free fistula surgery in Nigeria

Each afternoon—after neighbors in her village compound in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, in Nigeria’s coastal region, had gone out for the day—Imaobong Dickson would sneak out of her home to wash pieces of cloth she wore under her dress. She placed the cloth there to absorb urine that would otherwise drip down her legs.

The problem began for Ms. Dickson, 36, three days after she lost her second child during a traumatic delivery in July 2019. Ms. Dickson eventually stopped going outside of her home altogether, unable to bear the humiliation she faced from neighbors and people on Uyo’s streets.

Obstetric fistula is a hole in a woman’s birth canal, usually between the vagina and rectum or bladder. The condition can result in an uncontrollable leakage of urine or of feces. Some women suffer from both.

“The most common cause of an obstetric fistula is obstructed labor,” said Christopher Aimakhu, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at University College Hospital in Ibadan, Nigeria. “Fistula is common in areas where women labor for too long and do not have access to [obstetric] care.”

Nigeria’s health services record about 20,000 new cases of fistula each year, about 40 percent of all fistula cases globally. Ms. Dickson finally found help for her condition at the Family Life Center, where the Medical Missionaries of Mary offer free treatment for fistula.

In late January 2021, Ms. Dickson had surgery to repair her bladder and vaginal wall. The procedure was successful.

“We do whatever it takes to help poor families,” said Sister Ngozi Ahunanya. “We understand that having a healthy family is having a healthy world. This is our focus. This is our motivation.”

Patrick Egwu contributes from Johannesburg, South Africa. Twitter: @PatrickEgwu6.
Ekpali Saint contributes from Nigeria. Twitter: @EkpaliS.

INSIDE AMERICA

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

As a new year begins, our commitment to you continues. We cover the stories that matter most by providing news and analysis, and spiritual resources to help sustain you amid the rush of events. We are a community of people who believe in faith, hope and love who are dedicated to our church and our country.

EDITORS' PICKS - FAMILY & MARRIAGE

“The painful process of trying to get my second marriage blessed—even though I feel it already is” - Joe Pagetta

“How imaginative prayer helped me reconcile with my father”
- Pierre Thompson

“Most Catholics don’t use Natural Family Planning. Can better marriage prep change that?” - Ellen Holloway

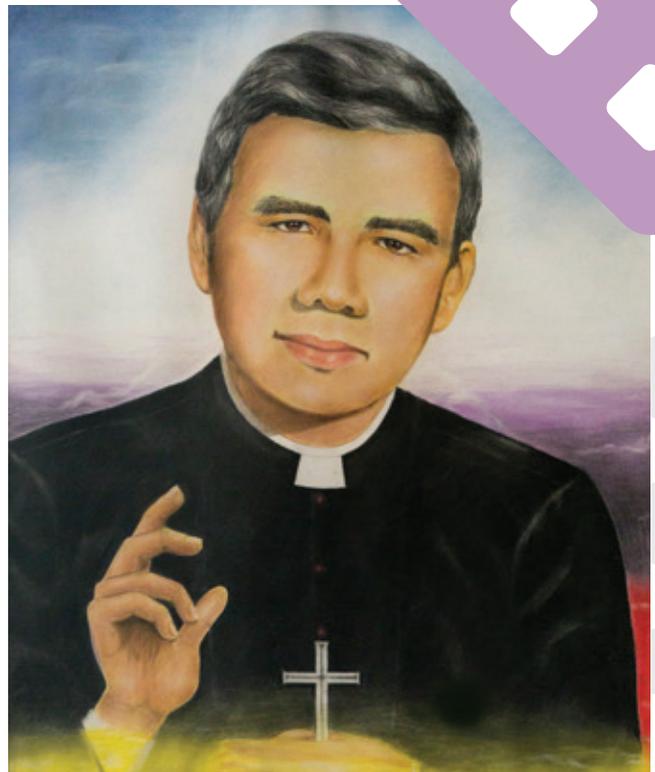
“Never go to bed angry at your spouse (the example of Mary and Joseph can help)”
- Pope Francis

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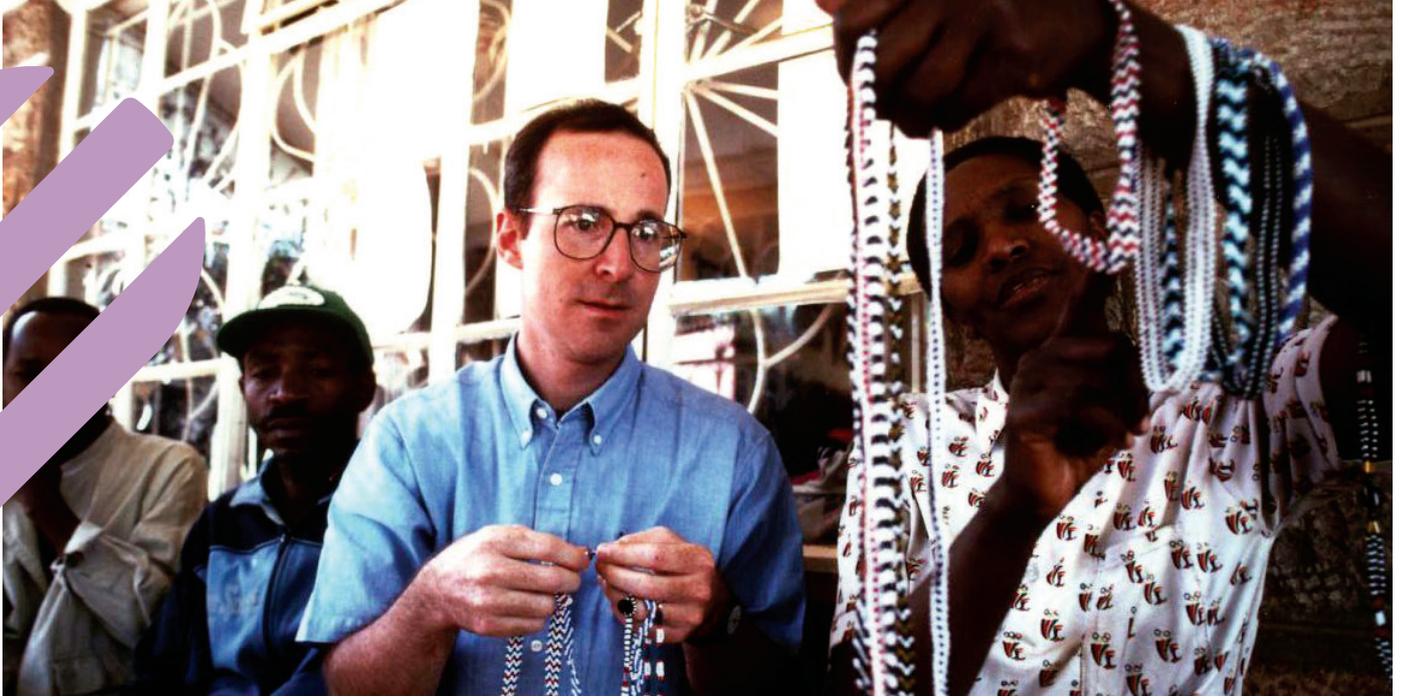
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THE BEATIFICATION OF RUTILIO GRANDE

The Jesuit martyr Rutilio Grande will be beatified in El Salvador on Jan. 22 along with three other Catholics killed during the country’s civil war. Follow our coverage online at americamagazine.org/jesuits.





GIVING TUESDAY—PARTNERSHIP WITH MIKONO, A REFUGEE CRAFT SHOP

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who supported **America's** partnership with **Mikono Refugee Craft Shop** in Nairobi—a ministry of the Jesuit Refugee Service.

\$62,252 was raised from more than 667 donors in 45 states and 13 countries. You all showed that **America's** ministry reaches everyone at the intersection of church and the world! We know there are so many wonderful organizations to support, and we are extremely grateful that on #GivingTuesday you contributed to our two Jesuit ministries.

For more than 25 years, **Mikono** has provided livelihood training and helped East African refugees earn a living by marketing their crafts in the local market and abroad. Your generosity in support of **Mikono** not only provides the resources, tools and training refugees need to make a living wage but gives them the dignity of work that expresses the cultural heritage of their home countries. During these challenging times—especially as Africa continues to suffer from the pandemic—they need our support more than ever.

Thank you so much for being loyal readers and benefactors of **America**, and this year, supporters of our brothers and sisters in Nairobi, working together to craft hope for refugees.

To learn more about all the crafts made by the **Mikono Craft Store** visit mikono.jrs.global.





SEEKING SOLID GROUNDS



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The messy, grace-filled, painful and (hopefully) healing process of seeking an annulment

By Simcha Fisher

Four weddings, but only one sacramental marriage. That was the tally by the time Rob and Shannon made their vows to each other 18 years ago.

Rob and Shannon are not their real names. The couple is not ashamed of their story, but they do not like to dwell on it, either; and it is complex enough that they have not told their own children all the details. It is a story about mistakes, pride, fear and hope, growth and grace, and love and canon law. It is a story, in short, about what makes a valid marriage in the eyes of the church, and how church leaders and structures respond when a marriage is not valid.

For such a theologically dense topic, annulments are a perennially popular topic of discussion and debate among Catholics. They are also perennially misunderstood. Many Americans speak of “getting an annulment” as if it were just the Catholic version of divorce, and many Catholics leave the church when they discover that there is more to it than that. There are per-



The problems surrounding annulments go deeper than rumors and misunderstandings.



sistent stories of rich or famous Catholics who supposedly bought their way out of undesirable marriages; and arm-chair theologians are quick to offer their pronouncement on whether or not a stranger's marriage is valid based on a few online comments.

But the problems surrounding petitioning for decrees of nullity go deeper than rumors and misunderstandings. In 2015, Pope Francis made some reforms, aimed at lowering the costs and expediting the process. He opined in January 2021 that these efforts were being stymied by the desire for money.

But some canon lawyers believe a different kind of reform is necessary, anyway—the kind that takes place on a more personal level, where couples begin their lives together with a better understanding of what the church means by marriage, and are supported during inevitable times of struggle.

What does the church really teach about this widely misunderstood process, and how does it play out in the lives of ordinary Catholics? What does it do to their emotional and spiritual lives to encounter a doctrine that works in the space where law meets love?

Great Expectations

Before Rob got married, he knew what the church taught about the standards for a sacramental marriage, at least on an intellectual level. But he had a lot to learn about what the church expects from people who want to marry, and what those two people can reasonably expect from each other.

His first attempt at marriage was to a single mother who was living in poverty; he met her while doing charity work. She was waiting for her own decree of nullity to

come through and was struggling to raise her two children alone. She and Rob had a passionate but rocky relationship. They fought constantly, and couples' counselling just made things worse.

Rob's partner's inexplicable rages and hostility were a major problem; another was his motivation for wanting to commit to her in the first place. He was tormented by the thought that dating a woman who was still married in the eyes of the church was not licit. Rob was newly rededicated to his faith after years of self-described promiscuity, and he decided that if her first marriage was declared invalid, he would swoop in.

"I felt I could take care of her," he said. "I could be this knight in shining armor and rescue her from her terrible life."

More than one priest counseled him to "get the hell away from her," Rob said, because of her hostility and instability caused by mental health issues; but he was determined and felt a sense of obligation. When she became free to marry, they went through with the wedding. The fighting and hostility and irrational behavior increased, and Rob's misery intensified. But he told himself he had to stick it out. He remembers thinking, "I gotta get out of this, and I can't. I'm married now. A Catholic doesn't say things like that."

He finally divorced her, he said, to preserve his own sanity. Then Rob, an engineer, decided to petition for an annulment because it seemed like the next logical, prudent thing to do.

He remembers thinking: "If the church said no, I can't remarry, I would have been O.K. I can live alone. It won't be very nice, but I can do it."

But the course his life took next was less lonely, more complicated and more grace-filled than that.

The annulment itself was so straightforward Rob was almost scandalized.

“It was like a rubber stamp,” he said.

In retrospect, there was a good reason it was so easy: The woman he married was, he learned, severely mentally ill, and deemed incapable of entering into a sacramentally valid marriage with anyone. Rob had kept a detailed journal of their relationship, which provided copious evidence of this. The tribunal called a few witnesses, and a short time later the case was closed. The marriage had never been valid. Rob was told he must seek counseling if he ever tried to enter into a marriage again.

The whole experience left him feeling bruised and cautious, and the idea of marrying again was not on his radar for years.

In Love With Love

Marriage was not on Shannon’s mind, either. Like Rob, she had strayed from the faith, had a short and deeply flawed marriage and then returned to the church. When she met Rob, at first she saw him only as a friend and possible spiritual guide.

Shannon was the youngest of 10 children. Her dad died when she was a baby, and when she married her boyfriend at age 21, it was mainly a way to launch her life, she said, and to catch up with all her siblings who already had started families. She did love her boyfriend as far as she was capable.

“But I was almost more in love with the idea of marriage and starting my life,” she said.

For most of their married life together, she and her ex never fought. That was part of the problem.

“I was very much a peacemaker and a people pleaser,” she said.

And she did keep the peace, always putting her husband’s needs and desires above her own. But when her older brother was hospitalized after an accident, Shannon spent so much time at the hospital she felt a calling to become a nurse. So she went to school—a move her husband, who did not have a college degree, perceived as a threat. By the time she earned her degree, he was seeing someone else and wanted Shannon to move out.

Shannon had gained confidence over the years and after her divorce was successful enough to move on with her life. She was, she said, doing what she wanted, with whom she wanted. She did not attend Mass more than twice a year.

“I thought the faith was full of crap,” she said.

But for some reason, the idea of getting an annulment

kept nagging at her. Finally she broke down and made some calls to start the process, telling her mother she was just sick of thinking about it.

Like Rob’s, her case was a fairly straightforward bureaucratic process—until she got to the questionnaire.

To tell this story properly, let us first clarify our terms. The fastest way to drive a canon lawyer batty is to use the phrase “get an annulment.” More accurately, a person can petition to be granted a declaration of nullity, which is an official pronouncement from the church that what seemed to be a marriage was never valid. It is not just a semantic difference; it points to something theologically real.

A typical annulment process goes like this: A petitioner contacts their diocese or diocesan marriage tribunal and sends a written testimony as to why their marriage was never valid. If a marriage tribunal decides it has jurisdiction and accepts the petition, a judge and an assessor are assigned to the case. Then the grounds for an annulment are established, and the petitioner’s former spouse is given a chance to respond and provide witnesses and testimony.

Then the petitioner fills out a questionnaire. The questionnaire probes deep, not only into the relationship between the couple and their understanding of what marriage is, but the maturity and psychological capacity of each. It examines their childhoods, how they were raised to think of marriage, what kind of examples they were shown.

For some petitioners, this intimate questionnaire can be humiliating, even re-traumatizing. But for Shannon, it was exhausting but illuminating and gave her a bracing dose of self-knowledge. It took her almost a month to complete.

“It was the cheapest therapy I’ve ever gotten,” Shannon said. “You really had to examine where you came from, what you witnessed growing up. Did you know what you needed to bring to this [marriage]? It really made me look at how I functioned in relation to other people, where I got my self-value and self-worth from, and what I was willing to give up in order to have something I thought was valuable.”

Once the questionnaire is complete, the tribunal contacts witnesses, and their responses are investigated and corroborated. The former spouse can and often does opt out, if he or she is not challenging the declaration of nullity or is simply choosing not to participate. But if the former partner does get involved, he or she may fill out a similar questionnaire or submit another form of deposition. The “acts,” or evidence, is then made available for both parties to read and respond to, and then the judge decides whether that evidence shows the marriage was invalid or not.

As with Rob, Shannon was notified that she must get tribunal-approved counseling before she attempted to get married again. And then it was done. Six months later, her declaration of nullity came in the mail.

“I was like, ‘This is nice, whatever,’ and just put it away,” she said.

‘A Marriage Is Built Over Time’

She did not think of it again until she met Rob, years later. She already had begun to wonder if maybe the church had something to offer after all. Despite her career, house, car, vacations and friends, her life had begun to feel empty. She contemplated the example of her mother, a widow who raised 10 children with joy and perseverance, and she prayed a rare prayer: “God, I want what she has.”

Little by little, she became more active in the faith again. Gingerly, skeptically, she waded into online Catholic dating sites. Up popped Rob.

“This is someone further down the path than I am,” she thought. “Maybe he can help guide me down the path of finding faith and a better life.”

And he did. They became closer; he gently encouraged her to go to confession for the first time in 20 years—and then to go to confession again when the first priest she encountered yelled at her for her sins.

“That’s not what it’s supposed to be like. Please try again,” Rob told her.

They continued talking online; they met for Mass; they spent the day together. Shannon told her mother that he might be the one. Her mother laughed, because a year ago, Shannon would not have given the time of day to a man so dedicated to his religion.

But things had changed. Shannon had changed. And now that she had started thinking of Rob as a possible husband, the inexplicable pull to do the work to get her annulment years ago suddenly made sense. Without it, Shannon would not have been pushed to examine her own life and heart so honestly and minutely; and Rob would never have gotten involved a second time with a woman whose marital status was ambiguous.

Rob had changed, too, but he was still extremely cautious and never wanted to have to go through an annulment process again. At Shannon’s urging, he ended up going to the tribunal-approved therapist far longer than was required, which helped relieve feelings of misplaced guilt. Therapy also relieved him of some of the pride that whispered in his ear and the fear that he had gotten off too easily.

“I think going through some of life’s failures taught me

not to take myself so seriously,” he said. “The church is doing its best to help people who are victims [of others’ actions or of their own sins], so I try to see it that way.”

Rob used to argue with friends who thought the church should be more stern and inflexible regarding annulments in general, but he does not bother anymore. “The church is stuck between a rock and a hard place, trying to be merciful, but upholding the teachings of Christ. It does its best to do both, and that’s hard. That’s how I see the annulment process,” he said.

He has an occasional wistful desire that his past could have been more “clean,” but his present keeps him sufficiently busy. He has a solid career, and he and Shannon have both biological and adopted children together, some of whom have complex special needs. And he has found that their marriage, happy and grounded and valid though it is, does not run on automatic but needs care and attention.

“A marriage is built over time,” he said. “It doesn’t just appear that day you walk down the aisle. Maybe the sacrament happens at that moment, but marriage takes years to actually build. Over time, and with the constancy of the relationship and the things you enjoy together and struggle with, that’s what makes it solid.”

‘We’re Looking for the Truth’

Rob is correct: A solid relationship does not arrive ready-made at the altar. But what the couple brings to that altar can make the difference between a marriage that is valid and a marriage that is not when a case is brought to a marriage tribunal.

“We’re looking for the truth for people,” said Aldean Hendrickson, director of the marriage tribunal of the Diocese of New Ulm in Minnesota. “It’s not about a hoop to jump through so they can be married again.”

The bureaucratic side exists for a reason. Marriage is “something the creator put into our nature,” Mr. Hendrickson said. But beyond the exchange of consent, there is a contract that is demonstrably either sacramentally valid or invalid. What the process is designed to examine is humanity at its most vulnerable, and how humans in a relationship respond to both sin and grace. The legal language is an attempt to sort out the objective truth of what happened both in a relationship and before it.

Petitioners may be shocked to realize how relevant these “before” issues can be. They sometimes begin the process expecting to make the case that their spouse was cruel or unfaithful. But the tribunal often begins by asking



Kathy's attempt to pursue an annulment ended up capsizing her entire relationship with the church.

about the start of a relationship.

“Divorce looks at the end game, when everything has fallen apart. Annulment looks at the beginning, at the moment of creation,” said Jacqui Rapp, a canon lawyer in Kentucky who has worked on tribunals for over 20 years. “We’re trying to determine whether there was a marriage to begin with.”

She said a professor used to teach about annulments using something called “The Pinto Theory.”

“If you had a Ford Pinto, you could drive for two weeks, or 20 years, but if you were rear impacted, it blew up,” she said. “The defect was always there from the beginning. It doesn’t matter how long you drive it; the defect was always there.”

That is what tribunals seek to determine: Whether there were fundamental and irreconcilable problems present in the relationship before and at the time of the wedding.

Sometimes those problems are obvious, but the couple never saw them (or wanted to see them) until long after the wedding. More than one petitioner said that they wished marriage preparation had included a questionnaire as detailed as the one they filled out when things had already gone horribly wrong. It asks questions that should have been asked of the couple when they were still only engaged.

But it is not always possible to say ahead of time that

a marriage is not valid.

“We just don’t know. We can’t look into the future. It’s not our gift. We can’t predict grace,” Ms. Rapp said.

‘Christ Would Have Listened’

Rob and Shannon’s situation was complex in some ways—each of them needed to obtain a declaration of nullity for their previous marriage—but they also each happened to live in a diocese with a well-staffed, functional tribunal ready and able to support them in several different ways, eventually leading them into a much stronger practice of their faith. Not all petitioners are so lucky.

Kathy Hearn said the encounters she had in her diocese were so inhumane that her attempt to pursue an annulment ended up capsizing her entire relationship with the church.

“The diocese was in turmoil at that time,” she said. “It was literally the week before they were turning over the entire staff in the tribunal.”

Ms. Hearn said she had spent almost a year writing out her story, detailing her own immaturity and her husband’s behavior before and during the marriage. She submitted 30 pages of heartfelt narrative, describing what she thought was an open-and-shut case about a 20-year marriage that was, she says, built on infidelity, abuse and deception.

Just over a week later, she was notified that the tri-



What the process is designed to examine is humanity at its most vulnerable.

bunal declined to move forward with her case. In distress, she called the chancery, hoping for some explanation. Ms. Hearn said a secretary told her, “They’re canon lawyers. You don’t question this.” And that was all the answer she got.

“There’s an insane lack of compassion and charity,” she said.

She eventually hired a canon lawyer who helped her to re-start the process, but she was so demoralized by the harsh rebuff she received, she lost heart. Ms. Hearn still prays to God, but she has not been to Mass in over a year, and she is stymied by the conflicting answers she has gotten from church officials about her marriage and about her faith in general.

She said one priest told her that, if her testimony was over three pages long, the tribunal would not even read it. He told her all they wanted to hear was the type of information “they could use to grant a divorce.”

“It doesn’t even feel like my church anymore. I believe Christ would have listened,” she said. “I believe he would have read [my testimony] with interest and not looked for the easy way out.”

Through constant efforts of prayer, she is no longer angry toward her ex-husband. She is now dating a kind and caring man, and she believes God put him in her path. But she knows she cannot marry him in the church. She is not even sure if she would want to.

“I don’t even know [if I would want to remarry in the

church]. I lived for it forever, that annulment that would set me free,” she said. “Isn’t that crazy? I don’t even know anymore.”

‘A Human Process’

For those who do want annulments, the process can be excruciatingly slow, an issue Pope Francis attempted to alleviate with his reforms.

Previously, a petitioner usually had to approach a tribunal in the diocese where the respondent lives, and if the petitioner lived in a different diocese, both tribunals had to agree that the petitioner’s tribunal could take on the case. This process was only possible if both tribunals were in the same conference of bishops, which sometimes meant a dead end for a petitioner whose ex-spouse lived in a diocese whose tribunal had different rules; and the process was nearly impossible for a migrant trying to find an ex-husband in the Philippines or the Middle East, for example. This requirement has been removed.

Another reform ruled that bishops must handle some clear-cut cases directly, rather than turning them over to the tribunal, for a faster turnaround; but Ms. Rapp said she does not know of many dioceses in the United States that are following this practice.

One change that immediately affected cases in the United States was the removal of the requirement that the decision by one tribunal to grant a declaration of nullity had to be reviewed by a second tribunal with higher authority. This created a bottleneck, sometimes causing a delay of three years or more. Now, the decision of the first tribunal is deemed adequate, streamlining the process—and making the tribunal a little more careful.

“Not that we were sloppy before, but we know this is the decision, and it’s up to us to make it right,” Mr. Hendrickson said.

But it is still a human process, and no amount of reforms can guarantee absolute uniformity from one diocese to the next. Even well-staffed and well-trained tribunals vary in their understanding of what the church and a couple are trying to accomplish in an investigation. Some tribunals are more rigid and exacting; some allow for wider interpretations of the evidence. Some emphasize healing; others narrow in on ferreting out the facts.

Ms. Hearn made her case to the tribunal before any of Pope Francis’ 2015 reforms were put into effect. It is possible that, with different timing, she would have had a different experience.

But it is also not entirely clear that the reforms are as revolutionary as many reports made them out to be, at least

in the United States.

“There’s some disagreement, even among canonists, about what problem [Pope Francis] was trying to solve,” Mr. Hendrickson said. Even as the 2015 reforms make some cases easier and faster, Mr. Hendrickson said there is something of a generational shift among canon lawyers underway, and that more tribunals in the United States are arguing that a faster and easier judgment is not necessarily in the best interest of the petitioner. If, in the name of mercy, a petitioner is allowed to emerge without having learned anything about themselves or about marriage, they are likely to make the same mistakes again.

“This is a ministry that has repeat customers,” Mr. Hendrickson said.

Mr. Hendrickson, who has sat on a marriage tribunal for eight years, said his own approach has changed over time.

“There’s an energy at the beginning [of one’s time on a tribunal] to help the petitioner get their happy ending. It’s become more nuanced as the years go along. I haven’t become colder, but I have a more nuanced appreciation about what challenges are in a married life,” he said.

This shift has not necessarily made him more likely to deny a petition, but it has made him more inquisitive in his interviews with parties and witnesses, he said. This is because he is “feeling the need to sort out the problems that are just problems (which are common) from the problems that are signs of fundamental invalidating flaws in the very foundation of the marriage (which are much rarer).”

But there have been shifts, too, in how well the general population of Catholics understands what marriage even means. For non-Catholics, a common ground for a decree of nullity is that, like Shannon’s first husband, they simply did not understand that marriage is permanent.

People do not even realize they harbor these mistaken beliefs about marriage, Ms. Rapp said. This is why the tribunal looks so hard at the couple’s families of origin.

“If you’re used to the rollercoaster, you choose the rollercoaster,” Ms. Rapp said. “People will pick what they know. It’s not unusual that a child of alcoholics will marry an alcoholic, and if you haven’t dealt with those issues from your past, they will come back to bite you.”

It begins to sound as if a valid marriage is almost unobtainable, an ideal state that only whole and healthy people from whole and healthy families can validly contract. But that is not so, Ms. Rapp said. In fact, every marriage is presumed valid until proven otherwise.

“A couple doesn’t need to have a perfect theological understanding of marriage to be married,” Hendrickson

said. “It’s a basic human act.”

And this means that a tribunal sometimes has to tell a petitioner “no.”

“There are situations I’ve judged where [I have to say,] I’m sorry, this was marriage and someone just chose to let sin enter. It was solid, the marriage preparation was solid, they knew what they were doing, and then 15 years in, he had an affair, and I can’t do anything with that. Sin isn’t grounds for nullity,” Ms. Rapp said.

Ideally, the process should be rigorous but not burdensome, illuminating but not exploitative, just but not harsh, merciful but not meaningless. Ms. Rapp said that a good canon lawyer understands that law is really theology in action.

“The process is a good process,” Ms. Rapp said. “I don’t know that humans put it into action in the best way possible. It’s a psychologically healing process if it’s done well. When it’s not done well, and people are just thrown into the machine, they come out feeling eaten up.”

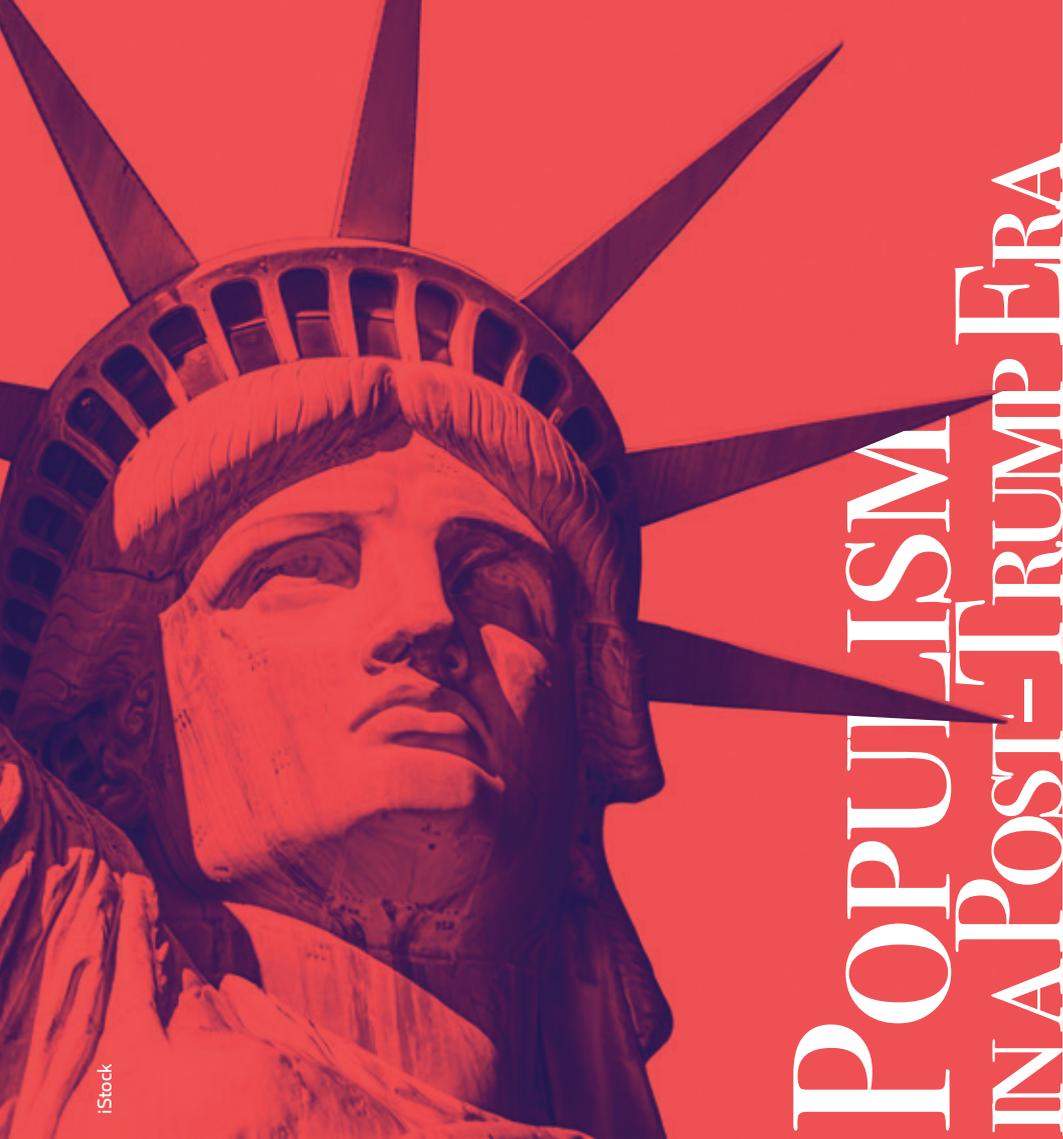
But when it is done well, she calls it “a life-giving process” that can return people to the eucharistic table and to wholeness, whether they marry again or not.

“Good tribunals will help focus the question back on the petitioner and get them to evaluate what they did or didn’t do, saw or didn’t see, chose or didn’t choose, so they can make different choices in the future. That’s the goal. If someone wants to get married, or go into religious life or become a priest, we want to make sure they’re making that decision as healthy people,” she said.

And if they do want to marry again but are holding on to old hurts from past relationships, they ought to hear someone say to them, like Rob said to Sharon, “That’s not what it’s supposed to be like. Please try again.”

*Simcha Fisher is a speaker, freelance writer and author of The Sinner’s Guide to Natural Family Planning. She blogs at simchafisher.com and at *The Catholic Weekly*. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband and 10 children.*





POPULISM IN A POST-TRUMP ERA

How contemporary democracies can move citizens from alienation to engagement

By James F. Keenan

I grew up in a very Irish Catholic neighborhood in Brooklyn in the 1950s. We were almost all of the working class, the descendants of three to four generations of Irish American immigrants. We were profoundly suspicious of the Democratic Party and viewed it as the elite. We thought they had sold us out.

In 1960, though 80 percent of Catholics in the United States voted for John F. Kennedy for president, no one in my neighborhood did. We voted for Nixon—not because Kennedy was a Catholic, but because he was a Democrat. Similarly, though I was only 9 years old, I remember distinctly the day that Eleanor Roosevelt died in 1962. Though *The New York Times* said she was “almost universally admired,” in my neighborhood she was so vilified that we paraded with our neighbors when she died.

I am sure she was derided because of her active support of the civil rights movement on behalf of African Americans, but we were against her not because we thought of ourselves as racists (we did not, though without a doubt we were), but mostly because we thought she belonged to the

elite. We felt that she, more interested in African Americans than in us, welcomed them into her hierarchy but did not welcome us.

In 1964, my parents and their neighbors all voted for Barry Goldwater for president. Though he suffered arguably the greatest presidential loss ever in the 20th century—carrying only 36 percent of the vote and six of the 50 states—no one in our neighborhood thought we were mistaken in our choice. And in fact, Goldwater’s campaign created the pathway to electing Donald Trump in 2016. As *The Washington Post* noted in Goldwater’s obituary in 1998, Goldwater stole the Republican Party from the Northeastern elite and paved the way for Ronald Reagan to become the populist president in 1981. Reagan’s triumphs in the 1980s then led to Trump in 2016-20.

Why did we vote and emote in ways contrary to our own interests? Because of our sense of alienation from a perceived elite.

How can contemporary democracies address the new populism and respond to its challenge? They need to do

it by a clearer and better inclusion of the populist masses that see themselves alienated from those they consider the elite—and whom they want to remove from leadership. The so-called elite in the leadership of these democracies have a particular responsibility to address the populist masses and to restore a sense of public trust that has increasingly been lost.

Five Agents of the New Populism

I acknowledge my own social context growing up in Brooklyn because when we discuss populism, we need to identify what particular manifestations of populism we are talking about. I would prefer to discuss these manifestations through the language of agency.

I believe that there are roughly five different groups of agents involved in the new populism, and that each of the agents has different purposes. The five groups are: the populist masses, populist leaders, wealthy populist supporters, political parties (and other cultural and social leaders) and the rejected “elite” of the neoliberal democratic political leaders.

It is my conviction that the fifth group, the perceived elites of contemporary democracies, needs to restore confidence in social trust by directly engaging the populist masses. This will not be easy, because the contempt of the populist masses is rooted in resentment over how the elites perceive them in the first place.

Populism has classically been defined as an ideology that, in the words of the political scientist Cas Mudde, “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.” But I believe there are not two groups but five; and like others, I am not sure it is right to call populism an ideology. I much prefer to discuss the different ways it frames discourse.

The Populist Masses

When I speak of the populist neighborhood in Brooklyn in which I was raised, I do not speak with pride or righteousness about my past and all its evident racist, nativist and misogynistic biases. Rather, I try to convey the insularity, tribalism and resent-

ful mindset that were so implicit in the culture I grew up in, as well as a moral innocence by which we did not think of ourselves as biased. Rather, we thought of the elite as biased in their condescending disdain of us.

We thought of ourselves as abandoned by the Democratic Party; their elite members were not interested in us. If Hillary Clinton had met us at our toasts to the dead Mrs. Roosevelt in 1962, she would have called us what she called other populists in her 2016 campaign for the presidency: “the deplorables.”

Secretary Clinton’s “deplorables” comment was remarkably obtuse on a political level. When the elites respond to populists with taunts like that, they only further erode the public trust from which populists believe themselves to be alienated. Subsequently, Clinton became more vilified than anyone else in the eyes of populist America.

The populists of today were a long time in the making. Like contemporary populists, we in 1960s Brooklyn rejected others’ assessments of us. While others thought we were racist, backward, exclusivist or the not-yet-named deplorables, we thought that they called us that simply to justify their disdain of us. They abandoned us; we did not abandon them. As populists, our anger was not over economics per se but rather about how the elite socially excluded us. We wanted them out of office because of their perceived condescension.

Resentment governs the populist masses. Indeed, in the literature on populism, the language of resentment emerges particularly when talking about alienated groups. That literature came out in a torrent after Foreign Policy in 2019 referred to a “resentment epidemic.” Since then, many writers have spoken about the specific vice of resentment and its function within this community of actors.

The Populist Leader

The sociologist Bart Bonikowski is completely right when he refers to populism as a “discursive frame.” He states that “framing is the practice of presenting an issue from a particular perspective in order to maximize its resonance with a given audience.”

Here then we need to distinguish the populist leader from the populist masses. The populist leader taps into and articulates the grounds for the resentment of his or her constituents by first casting



The perceived elites of contemporary democracies need to restore confidence in social trust by directly engaging the populist masses.



him or herself as also rejected or held in contempt by the elite. Though the leader does not belong to the populist mass, he or she does give voice to their laments and their cries for recognition.

Indeed, Dr. Bonikowski suggests that the longer populist leaders stay in office, the less inclined they are to invoke the populist's lament, because they have set the frame for their own ascendancy, rather than the masses' needs for incorporation.

It is important to appreciate, however, that regardless of how opportunistic a popular leader is, it is his or her role (and not the role of the populist mass itself) to articulate an understanding of the political situation that is accepted by the populist masses. The leader taps into an unarticulated resentment and gives it voice—by identifying the elite as the source of the resentment. Mr. Reagan and Mr. Trump both did that in the United States. The working class populists were not the leaders of their own movements.

I think the elites would do well to look sympathetically on the rhetoric of the populist leader—not to validate the opportunistic egos of such leaders nor their agenda, but rather to understand why the populist leader is able to connect so well socially with a population that is experiencing alienation.

The elite need to ask, for example, how Mr. Trump connected with, and ignited the passions of, so many people who were previously not able to articulate those passions themselves. The elite need to study the rhetorical

resonance that the populist leader can achieve with an audience, which they so frequently dismiss. The inability of the elite to recognize this talent of the populist leader is not only found in the United States either. It can be seen in numerous political and social situations throughout the world. The success of any populist leader is an indictment of the elite for their neglect of the alienated.

The Wealthy

The third agent of the new populism is the wealthy. In a very provocative essay, “How Billionaires Learned to Love Populism,” Amy Chua, the John M. Duff professor of law at Yale, notes that after his election, Mr. Trump “appointed the wealthiest Cabinet in modern history.” Whether other populist leaders around the globe—Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines—have made wealthy allies so integral to their populist discourse is open to debate, but in the United States this affiliation has been key to the success of populist leaders. Trump was and remains—especially on issues like taxes—very much a friend of the very wealthy.

Professor Chua adds that in affiliating himself with the “people”—that is, the populist masses who have been long unrecognized—“Trump has done a remarkable job presenting himself as being on their team, creating a tribal bond between a celebrity billionaire and blue-collar voters.” Despite how markedly different Mr. Trump's ideas may be from traditional conceptions of the American Dream, for many Americans his monetary and political success is the American Dream made manifest.

Further, Professor Chua notes, “The tribal instinct is all about identification.” For many lower-income Americans, she notes, “being anti-establishment is not the same as being anti-rich. This is the key to the new billionaire populism, and its roots lie deep in American history.”

The billionaires who have helped Mr. Trump mount an enormous war chest in his campaign for re-election can spend at levels far beyond what the populist masses could ever afford. Trump could not have succeeded in 2016 without the wealthy, and he used them to create a regime during his presidency that could afford to be unaccountable to its own constituents.

Though populists who came before Mr. Trump, like Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, have targeted the rich in their rise to power, we need to know more about others who were like Mr. Trump and effectively brought the wealthy on board without alienating their political base.



Trump campaign signs along Route 30 in Lancaster County, Pa.

istock

Political and Social Leaders

The fourth agent of the new populism is the aggregate of political parties and religious, social, and cultural leaders who use the populist leader, and the leader's populist mass, for their own gain. Unlike the populist masses, who have developed a resentful discourse of being alienated, or the populist leader (generally new to the scene) who uses that resentment for his or her own political aims, this group is made up of leaders of aged, long-standing social and cultural institutions.

In many cases, these institutions have proven willing to compromise their core identities in order to profit from a populist surge. Note that most leaders of the Republican Party, once called the party of Abraham Lincoln, were notably silent when Trump attempted to launch a coup against our government on Jan. 6, 2021. Note also that leaders and significant sectors of both evangelical Christian churches and the Roman Catholic Church in the United States offered a sense of civic legitimacy to Mr. Trump throughout his campaign and his presidency despite the glaring disparity between their public convictions and Mr. Trump's policies and personal behavior.

This group of agents harms the body politic and the social trust necessary for society by compromising their cultural and social institutions in their parasitic relationship

with the populist leader. Long after the populist leader has lost power, the effects of compromise by these sycophantic leaders still need to be redressed through the process of restoring social trust. If these social institutions are to survive into the future, they will eventually need to repudiate the actions of their present leaders, who compromised their mission identity by lending their cultural support and momentary legitimacy to the populist leader.

The Elite

While the other four aforementioned agents of the new populism use their discourses to remove or overthrow the legitimacy of the elite in liberal democracies, the elites themselves are not always recognized as agents in populist affairs. But the negligence of the elites—and sometimes their actual attempts to further demoralize populists—contribute to the legitimacy of any populist movement. For this reason, I insist that they too are agents in the populist movement.

Our elites are in part responsible for the original non-recognition of what emerged as a populist movement. This does not mean that those who belong to the populist masses truly are the abandoned masses. Indeed, I think that often the populist masses are more like the elite than they are different. They both consider themselves victims and they

The populists
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making.





Vehicles on Fort Lauderdale Beach display flags supporting President Trump. During his campaign, Mr. Trump effectively brought wealthy donors on board without alienating his political base.

both absolve themselves of any moral wrongdoing. Without question, the elites have overlooked many in their maintenance of liberal democracies and the perpetuation of their own evident hierarchies. But in addition to this neglect or inattention, their agency—their “causative” role in the development of the populist claims—also needs to be acknowledged.

The philosopher and political scientist Nancy Fraser has rightly taken the elites in the United States to task for their role in the emergence of populist movements. “I am not unhappy that those who have been screwed by progressive neo-liberalism are rising up against it,” she said in a recent interview with *Economic and Political Weekly*. “In some cases, of course, the form their rebellion takes is problematic. Scapegoating immigrants, Muslims, Blacks, Jews, and others, they often mistake the true cause of their troubles.” At the same time, she said that “it is counterproductive to simply dismiss them as irredeemable racists and Islamophobes. To assume that at the outset is to surrender any possibility of winning them to the left, whether to left wing populism or democratic socialism... My point is that all these voters (and others!) have legitimate grievances against progressive neo-liberalism.”

In particular, Professor Fraser criticizes the social hierarchy that the elites often espouse, noting that “they lack even the slightest idea of a structural transformation or an alternative political economy. Far from seeking to abolish social hierarchy, their whole mindset is aimed at getting more women, gays, and people of colour into its top ranks. Certainly, in the US but also elsewhere, the left has been colonised by liberalism.”

Rebuilding Social Trust

The real issue in the new populism is not the agency of populist leaders, or that of the wealthy or of parasitic backers of such leaders, most of

whom have no real interest in the common good or in any notion of fairness. Rather, the elite governors of our democracies need to be reconciled with the populist masses by working to eliminate the social hierarchies that they continue to develop. I believe, too, that they also need to engage the populist masses directly, confronting their narratives of resentment with constructive engagements so that together the two groups can repair the social trust in our institutions that has been so terribly tattered. But social trust cannot be achieved without working through the long-standing resentments of those populist masses who perceive themselves as the deplorables of the elite.

There may be five agents involved in the new populism, but the ones who consistently show they are really interested in the good of governance and the common good are the populist masses and the elites of government. Both these agents need to engage one another directly by eliminating social hierarchies. By doing this, I believe the matter of the racism or xenophobia of the populist masses can also be engaged. By being incorporated, the populist masses can recognize better the harm that alienation causes. For indeed, the lament against alienation is the cry of both populist and racial and ethnic minorities.

In the meantime, the rest of us—no matter the group we belong to—need to help foster that engagement.

James F. Keenan, S.J., a moral theologian, is the Canisius Professor at Boston College.

AMERICA'S GUIDE TO RETREATS

Many of our readers are curious about retreats. What does one do on a retreat? Where does one go? What are some good retreat houses? Simply put, a retreat is an extended period of prayer, usually done in silence, and usually at a retreat house, where a team of spiritual directors helps you find God in your prayer. There are also different kinds of retreats. On a directed retreat a person meets daily with a spiritual director to discuss what is happening in prayer. A guided retreat focuses more on one topic (say, women's spirituality) and offers presentations as well as opportunities to meet with a director a few times. Preached retreats consist in listening to presentations and praying on your own, but with less opportunity for direction. And our retreat houses are also good places to connect with trained professional who will help you with regular spiritual direction.



Bellarmine Jesuit Retreat House

420 W. County Line Road, Barrington, IL 60010
 Ph: (847) 381-1261; Email: info@jesuitretreat.org
 Website: www.jesuitretreat.org

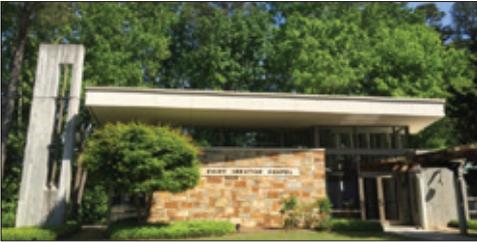
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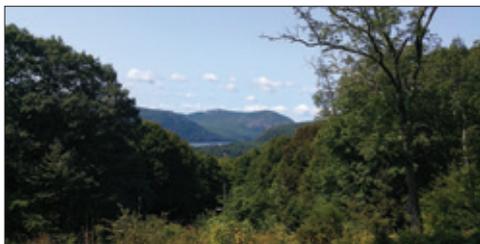
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Securing the Legacy of Vatican II

Why Pope Francis' Latin Mass reforms are necessary

By Blase J. Cupich



On July 16, 2021, Pope Francis issued the motu proprio “Traditionis Custodes,” calling on all Roman Catholics to accept fully that the liturgical books promulgated by St. Paul VI and St. John Paul II are the unique expression of the *lex orandi* (the law of praying) of the Roman Rite.

Why did the pope issue this document? And why now, a half century after these books were published?

In the early 1970s, a movement led by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre arose in Europe, rejecting the teaching and reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Archbishop Lefebvre was later excommunicated by Pope John Paul II. As a means of promoting unity and inviting those associated with this movement to return to the Catholic Church, John Paul II allowed bishops to provide limited celebration of the Mass according to the Missal in use prior to Vatican II for those still attached to the earlier liturgy.

His successor, Pope Benedict XVI, expanded this concession in the motu proprio “Summorum Pontificum” so that any priest could use the earlier liturgical forms without needing the permission of his bishop. The motive of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI, as Pope Francis observes in “Traditionis Custodes,” was “to facilitate the ec-

clesial communion of those Catholics who feel attached to some earlier liturgical forms and not to others.”

Pope Benedict XVI indicated that, in time, it would be important to evaluate his decision by consulting with the bishops of the world. This was done by Pope Francis last year. The consultation revealed that instead of assisting those who remained attached to the earlier forms, the extraordinary concession was being used to promote the former liturgy as a parallel option for celebrating the Eucharist.

As Archbishop Augustine Di Noia, adjunct secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, observed in an interview in June 2021, instead of achieving healing and unity as intended by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, “what we have got now is a movement within the church herself, seemingly endorsed by her leaders, that sows division by undermining the reforms of the Second Vatican Council through the rejection of the most important of them: the reform of the Roman Rite.”

Pope Francis, therefore, has issued new guidelines restoring to the diocesan bishop, as the moderator, promoter and guardian of all liturgical life in his diocese, the responsibility of regulating the extraordinary concession to cele-



brate the liturgy according to its use prior to the reforms of Vatican II. He is to do so in a manner that always testifies to the unity of the Roman Rite, reflected uniquely in the liturgical books promulgated by Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II.

The bishop is to offer pastoral support to his people who have belonged to communities that have been using the pre-conciliar liturgy, but he also must keep in mind his

more fundamental responsibility as a guardian of tradition to re-establish a single and identical prayer that expresses the unity of the church in the Roman Rite reformed by the decrees of Vatican II. In the end, it is this more fundamental service of guardianship and unity that best serves the pastoral needs of the entire local church, and the universal church as well.

The pope's letter is a reminder to bishops that as successors of the apostles, they, with all the bishops in union with and under the pope (*cum Petro et sub Petro*), share responsibility for the whole church. That reminder puts into perspective what is at stake and why bishops must take seriously the Holy Father's letter, as it is an essential teaching document that needs to be fully embraced by all in the church.

Considerations for the Church

First, given that the liturgical reform took place at the behest of the council fathers at Vatican II and in conformity with conciliar teachings, failing to promote a return to a unitary celebratory form in accord with the directives of "Traditionis Custodes" will further call into question the

authority and value of the council as an integral part of Catholic tradition.

For this reason, Pope Francis calls on all Catholics to recognize that Vatican II and its reforms are not only authentic actions of the Holy Spirit but also are in continuity with the tradition of the church. Sadly, there is ample evidence that many of those rejecting the reformed liturgy in earlier and even later years also expressed opposition to the council and its teachings, including those on the nature of the church, the modern world, religious freedom, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue; nor were these objections restricted to the ways those teachings were being interpreted.

We must be vigilant that the concession to use the former liturgy does not become a platform for this division to deepen. The specter and danger of a "parallel church" is a real one. For this reason, any permission to use the earlier liturgical forms ought to include regular catechesis on the teachings of Vatican II, ever keeping in mind that, as Pope Francis said in 2019, "the liturgy is life that forms, not an idea to be learned."

Second, we should remember that the council fathers left it up to the pope to complete the reform of the liturgy, in recognition of the unique role of the successor of Peter. A description of his role is clearly expressed in No. 882 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which quotes from the documents of Vatican II: "The Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church, has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church." Any failure to address resistance to the liturgical reform promulgated by Pope Paul VI, and later by Pope John Paul II, risks undermining church teaching about papal primacy and communion with the bishop of Rome.

Pope Paul VI alluded to the connection between accepting the liturgical reform and papal authority when he noted the following at a general audience at the Vatican in 1965, four years before promulgating the Roman Missal renewed by Vatican II:

It is good that it be perceived as the very authority of the Church to wish, to promote, to ignite this new manner of prayer, thus greatly increasing her spiritual mission [...]; and we must not hesitate to first become disciples then supporters of the school of prayer, which is about to begin.

It is worth noting that Pope Paul VI called on a large international group of bishops, known as the *Consilium*, to assist him, so as to ensure episcopal oversight of the reform



We must be vigilant that the concession to use the former liturgy does not become a platform for this division to deepen.

process “with and under the Pope,” thus ensuring that the directives of the council were carried forward. This was very much in contrast with the Missal of St. Pius V, who gave the work to one cardinal.

Third, the very nature of the church and her mission is at stake. The council fathers described the church as a “pilgrim people,” a term rooted in Scripture, to develop the image of the church previously understood as a perfect society and a world power to be contended with. As a pilgrim people, the church is *semper reformanda*, always open to reform and conversion, which is necessary for her to carry out her mission by reading the signs of the times, as Pope John XXIII urged.

Sixty years ago this past Christmas, that saintly pope convoked Vatican II with his apostolic constitution “*Humanae Salutis*.” Pope John XXIII noted that reading the signs of the times is particularly important, for “immensely serious and broad tasks await the Church.” Chief among them is “bringing the modern world into contact with the life-giving and perennial energies of the Gospel.” That one phrase captures the goal of Vatican II and the reason for its reforms.

Thus, we should not be afraid of reform, for it is a core value of the church and central to her nature. Reform is an expression of fidelity. Reform, properly understood, means embracing a new form while keeping what is immutable in the earlier form and in continuity with the tradition.

Of course, there have been other post-conciliar reforms that were not liturgical, such as the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* and the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In such reforms, the church kept what was essential and left behind what was not. In both cases, reform meant something, adopting a new form and putting aside the earlier one, and so it must be with regard to liturgical reform.

Pope Francis echoed the aspirations of Pope John

XXIII in speaking about the meaning of the council’s reforms in an address to participants in the “68th National Liturgical Week” in Italy in August 2017:

The Second Vatican Council then brought to fruition, as the good fruit from the tree of the Church, the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), ensuring that its lines of general reform responded to real needs and to the concrete hope of renewal: It desired a vital liturgy for a Church wholly enlivened by the mysteries celebrated. It was a matter of expressing in a renewed way the perennial vitality of the Church in prayer, taking care ‘that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, understanding it [i.e., the mystery] well through rites and prayers, they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with full devotion and full collaboration’ (SC, No. 48).

The Holy Father went on to note that it is important not to get sidetracked with attempts to rethink the reform or by promoting the so-called reform of the reform. Rather, we must deepen our understanding of the criteria underlying the liturgical reform:

...by rediscovering the reasons for the decisions taken with regard to the liturgical reform, by overcoming unfounded and superficial readings, a partial reception, and practices that disfigure it. It is not a matter of rethinking the reform by reviewing the choices in its regard, but of knowing better the underlying reasons, through historical documentation, as well as of internalizing its inspirational principles and of observing the discipline that governs it.... The direction traced by the Council was in line with the principle of respect for healthy tradition and legitimate progress (cf. SC, No. 23), in the liturgical books promulgated by Blessed Paul VI, well received by the very Bishops who were present at the Council, and now in universal use for almost 50 years in the Roman Rite.

A Call to Full Reform

Pope Francis issued “*Traditionis Custodes*” because he knew what was at stake: the acceptance of Vatican II as an

authentic action of the Holy Spirit in conformity with the tradition of the church, the defense of papal authority, the nature of the church and the meaning of reform. Yet, in addition to appreciating this moment as a reminder to preserve core values of church life, we should also use this opportunity to unite our efforts to bring about the full reform called for by the council.

Indeed, “Traditionis Custodes” is a call to *all* Catholics, and us bishops who serve them, to take seriously our responsibility for implementing the reforms authentically in order to assist the church in her mission “to bring the modern world into contact with the life-giving and perennial energies of the Gospel.”

In his 2020 address marking the 50th anniversary of the Roman Missal, which assisted me as I prepared this article, Archbishop Arthur Roche, now prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, observed:

Fifty years is not a long time in the history of the Church. The reform has happened; it still remains our ecclesial duty to implement that reform with great care and deep respect. The 50th anniversary is a time to renew that ecclesial commission at every level in the church.

He then closed with the wise counsel of Pope Benedict XVI in his letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the publication of “Summorum Pontificum,” and so do I:

The surest guarantee that the Missal of Paul VI can unite parish communities and be loved by them consists in its being celebrated with great reverence in harmony with the liturgical directives. This will bring out the spiritual richness and the theological depth of this Missal.

“Traditionis Custodes” now adds to that guarantee.

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich is the archbishop of Chicago.

when God saves you from an overdose

By Louis Damani Jones

III. Like a hand rubbing my front and back
with a brusque brush,
fingers curled and relaxed, eyes squinting
for any trace of the place from
which I came; your vision,
a soft press scrutinizing
every inch of my surface.

I. I assume I was seen in the way
a postcard is seen,
deep in the bottom
of the very last drawer
at the very last minute,
felt at the depths as a wrist extends;
just at the moment that
your mind has begun to motion
toward the door
on the way to purchase another
after a failure to come upon the sought after.

II. There, a little crumpled
unfolding in your hand,
rested on me an image
like a mirror,
like a last name.

Louis Damani Jones's poetry has been published in the *River Bluff Review* and was the recipient of the William Carlin Slattery Memorial Award in Poetry or Drama. He was a featured poet for the *River Styx Literary Journal's* summer reading series, “Hungry Young Poets,” in 2019.

Rooting Against Good Shepherd

By Abraham M. Nussbaum



What Catholic youth basketball taught me about fatherhood

Being a Catholic father means rooting against Good Shepherd.

And you cannot do so in the quiet chambers of your own heart or behind the closed doors of a confessional. You have to stand in public, so others see you. You have to cup your hands to the sides of your mouth, so your opposition is broadcast. *Stop Good Shepherd!* It gets worse. In the coming weeks, you will need to root against women—Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of Loreto—and men—St. James, St. Peter and St. Vincent de Paul—whom you were trained to revere. You have to root against them all when your children’s school asks you to coach a basketball team in your diocese’s youth league.

And as the pandemic’s social distancing restrictions are eased, they will ask again, so prepare yourself.

Be reconciled to the reality that someone always needs to teach Catholic kids how to tie their shoes, dribble a ball off those shoes and run into a teammate while searching for that errant ball. Your job will be to teach a child, quickly, how it feels to push their body hard and, gradually, how to put their body in the right place on a basketball court. They call that pee-wee basketball, and it begins in third grade. By the season’s end, a nailbiter is a game where one team makes six shots while the other team makes five shots.

With each shot attempt, no matter how poorly coordinated, parents will cheer in the stands for their child to make the shot. Since most are misses instead of makes, the parents quickly pivot to cheering for their child to rebound the misses.

After the game, it’s a fruit juice box with a plastic straw punched into the top. That’s pee-wee.

•••

Kids grow fast. By the end of elementary school, a few will grow into being players. They can tie their shoes. They can run. They can dribble while running. A few have the strength to put the ball in the basket. The best can dribble at speed and lay the ball in the basket. Games start to feature dozens of made shots. The parents in the stands, who have witnessed all this growth, start to cheer, not only for their individual children, but for their teams.

Defeat Christ the King!

Stop Immaculate Conception!

Staunch Most Precious Blood!

When the games are in the city, the chants ring out in

poorly insulated gyms left over from the glory days of the Catholic ghetto, when the goal was to keep a parish’s many children off the streets. These gyms often double as the school’s theater and, for the Christmas Mass, the auxiliary church. A missed shot exits stage right.

When the games are in the suburbs, the chants rise up to the rafters of newfangled gyms, where the goal is to maximize the athletic dreams of the school’s students. These gyms are usually purpose-built for competition, with locker rooms. A missed shot bounces onto a trainer’s table.

Despite their many differences—and it must be admitted that both kinds of schools often recruit more able athletes from outside their insular enclave, whether ethnic or economic, to make more shots—attending games at either can feel like living inside a medieval village. In either setting, you hear parents simultaneously cheer their team and shout heterodox theological statements. The cheers remind you that the way you play basketball is, truly, a theology.

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Basketball was developed in 1891 by James Naismith, who earned his theology degree from Montreal’s Presbyterian College and put it to work as a physical education teacher in Springfield, Mass., at the School for Christian Workers. Naismith endorsed a pseudo-Greek ideal of the balanced man—*body-mind-spirit*—and the game is the lasting legacy of Muscular Christianity. *You win men for the Master through the gym.* Naismith wrote the original 13 rules of the game like he was Moses, but with the cadence of the King James Bible. (Rule 6 begins “A foul is striking at the ball with the fist....”) The resulting manuscript is perhaps the most valuable document this side of the Gutenberg. It is owned by the University of Kansas, where Naismith coached basketball and preached at chapel, establishing the vocational template for the basketball coach. As the game spread it took root in the places where it was taught in homiletic aphorisms, where basketball became theology.

In California, the evangelical John Wooden created the Pyramid of Success, a character-driven pedagogical diagram that encouraged generations of American men to build their faith and patience so they could achieve their personal best. *Make each day your masterpiece.* Wooden read his own Bible daily and acclaimed his faith more important than the many championships he secured. He was the basketball coach for the Guideposts crowd.



Catholic school basketball gave me the chance to be, in some way, a father to the boys on the team.



In North Carolina, the Baptist Dean Smith spoke of the Carolina Way, a communitarian liberal Protestant theology. Smith was the coach for the Sojourners reader. Smith's players had to register at a local house of worship before they saw the school's hardwood cathedral and, once there, had to point to the passer to acknowledge a teammate's assist. They had to *play hard*, *play smart* and most of all, *play together*. Smith preached often that he cared more about how his players played than if they won.

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I tried to remember Smith's guidance when I began coaching our oldest child and his classmates. Teaching them to play hard, smart and together could be mapped onto the cardinal virtues. Playing smart is a way to enact the cardinal virtue of prudence, and when the catechism describes prudence, it quotes Scripture to the effect that "the prudent man looks where he is going," a proverb that becomes the daily prayer of a neophyte basketball coach.

Our practices felt like those of any other team, with shooting drills and layup lines, but the crowd's medieval chants at our games reminded us that we needed something more. My son Eamon and his classmates played for Blessed Sacrament instead of the secular powerhouses of Kansas, UCLA and Carolina. Our home games were preceded by prayers to a large portrait of Our Savior rather than a pledge to Old Glory. So our starting five—Eamon, Max, Paul, Peter, and Jack—slouched at attention beneath a picture of Jesus pointing to the Sacred Heart instead of the passer.

I do not know what the boys prayed for.

I know I prayed for growth spurts, elite effort and

smooth shooting. When I felt guilty for praying for that, I prayed for just player rotations and temperate sideline behavior. I did not want to embarrass the team.

After all, I myself never got the growth, coordination and shot-making of a basketball player. I love the game and have played in pickup leagues throughout my life. But I am capable of only the first of Dean Smith's injunctions—my only gift is the fortitude to *play hard*—and never learned to play smart or together. And yet I was, somehow, supposed to coach the theological game. I shared Smith's focus on process over outcomes, character over wins, and saw it as a way to develop what the catechism called the "habitual and firm disposition to do the good... [which] allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself."

I read coaching books. I secured practice time. I recruited a fellow father to help me out.

And my reward? The boys practiced and developed skills. They could defend, pass and run. They could, at least on occasion, execute the pick and roll, the high screen, the 1-2-2 zone defense, the full-court press. In gyms all across town, some of those medieval village cheers were directed at our team. In our penultimate season, the cheers grew louder. I even added one of my own, cheering defensive steals by yelling "*Jesus loves the good thief!*" from the sidelines. We were good enough to nearly win the Catholic Schools Athletic League. Our near-miss raised hopes and a spot in a higher division, for the boys' final middle-school season. Blessed Sacrament gave me my own key to the gym. I used the key to open the gym even after the school year ended. The boys practiced all summer and their hopes swelled in the summer's heat.

The competition would be more intense in a higher division, but the boys thought they were up to the challenge. Then injuries derailed the final season. The opposing teams' defenses double-teamed our only remaining shooter. Other teams caught a better growth spurt, and we were suddenly undersized. Instead of chasing a championship, we sought to secure the occasional victory. We kept on practicing. I redoubled the Protestant work ethic of practice, but it did not translate in the Catholic games. We suffered blow-outs and received more piteous claps than theological taunts.

And yet, that is when the limit of my theology of basketball became clear. I needed a further fortitude, something beyond playing, practicing and coaching hard. I had to accept that our team had peaked in seventh grade. None of our boys could play well enough to displace any members from my fantasy All-Star All-Time Catholic School

starting five—John Stockton, Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Bill Russell, Kareem Abdul Jabbar—nor were they pious enough to replace that team’s chaplain, Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt. None of our boys would play for Naismith; they were not especially muscular. None of our boys would play for Wooden; they had made no masterpieces from their basketball days. None of our boys would play for Smith; they had not learned to play smart enough.

Our boys would, in fact, switch sports in high school, heading off to cross-country or football or baseball. Or they would simply hang up their athletic careers entirely.

But not before they left me in tears.

“The spiritual path that Joseph traces for us is not one that explains, but accepts.” That’s no basketball coach. That is Pope Francis, from “Patris Corde,” his apostolic letter on St. Joseph. Francis reminds me that although Joseph accepted something far greater than I ever did, I could join Joseph in being left without explanations. How did all of the efforts that had borne buckets a year ago result in so many losses in our final year? Could I pray to accept that?

Probably, but I cried instead. Watching our boys try to *Stop Annunciation!*, I marveled at their effort, their growth and their inability to sink shots. They had all played their last game of organized basketball. They would play pickup, like the rest of us. They would no longer have a coach who set the schedule. They would organize games themselves, keep their own score, call their own fouls. They would form their own informal league, founded on friendship and love of the game. They would not need a father to coach. They would not need me. I cried so hard, harder than I had in years, that I felt ashamed. The tears seemed unceasing and unnecessary. It was just middle school basketball, right? I had volunteered to coach because no other parent was available. Why the messy tears?

“Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person.” That is Francis, too. Catholic school basketball gave me the chance to be, in some way, a father to the boys on the team. Our loss meant that that time, and that role for me in their lives, was over.

Francis pressed his theme. “Every child is the bearer of a unique mystery that can only be brought to light with the help of a father who respects that child’s freedom. A father who realizes that he is most a father and educator at the point when he becomes ‘useless,’ when he sees that his child has become independent and can walk the paths

of life unaccompanied. When he becomes like Joseph, who always knew that his child was not his own but had merely been entrusted to his care.”

In that final season, I became useless as a coach. Three nights a week of practicing, and still the shots did not fall. But that is not the kind of uselessness Francis means. Francis meant that they still needed the Father, but not this father.

So I cried unceasing tears because I sensed that our time together had ceased, that something was irrevocably over, that my work was done. I had coached like a father and was now, like Joseph, useless. As the time expired on our final game, it was the opposing team’s cheers—*Beat Blessed Sacrament!*—that had come to pass.

Abraham M. Nussbaum is a physician and writer in Denver who is currently coaching the girls’ varsity and fourth grade teams at Blessed Sacrament.

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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 de Gaulle 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

The Gift of Burnout

By Jonathan Malesic

How quitting my job allowed me to flourish



I knew something was wrong when I could not get myself out of bed to go to my dream job as a theology professor. I had spent seven years in graduate school and had beaten the grim odds in the academic job market to land the position. In Frederick Buechner's terms, being a professor was where my great longing met students' great need for knowledge. I simply *was* the job.

And I hated it. Not at first. For the first several years, it felt like challenging but rewarding work. In class, I gestured wildly as I diagrammed theological concepts on the board. I spent hours cutting and pasting snippets of the Gospels for an exercise in textual criticism. I felt personally validated when I published a paper, won a grant or earned the prize of tenure.

But over time, the effort felt less and less rewarding. My students seemed mostly indifferent. They told me I took the class too seriously; after all, it was a pointless requirement, irrelevant in the "real world." When I turned

my effort to improving the college's curriculum and culture, I was frustrated by administrative obstacles. I felt my work did not matter.

After 11 years, I ran out of ideas for how to make this job, which looked perfect from the outside, more bearable. So I quit.

I later realized that I was undergoing occupational burnout. Burnout happens when a worker is chronically stretched between that person's ideals for work and the reality of the job. It is more than ordinary tiredness. My exhaustion never went away with rest. In fact, I took a semester of unpaid leave but returned as wiped out as before. Any hopes I had for my career went up in smoke.

And yet part of me is glad it happened. My misery got me out of a job that was no longer right for me. It destroyed the idols I had made of academic status and tenure. And it pushed me into a new career as a writer and instilled in me a more modest sense for what a career ought to mean in a per-

son's life. I would not wish the pain I endured on anyone, but in a way, burnout was a saving grace.

The Dark Night

Psychologists formulated the concept of burnout in the mid-1970s after researching the complaints of overburdened social workers, attorneys for the impoverished and free-clinic staff. But the term had already been floating around for more than a decade. One prominent early account was Graham Greene's 1960 novel, *A Burnt-Out Case*, a study in how exhaustion and despair can open the door to spiritual growth.

The novel focuses on a famous European architect named Querry, who quits his cutting-edge designs and a string of lovers in order to volunteer at a leprosy hospital in Congo. When a doctor asks why Querry came to the place, he says, "I am one of the mutilated." His soul is as ravaged as the limbs of the leprosy victims.

The doctor's reply offers a clue that something positive may lie on the far side of suffering: "Perhaps your mutilations haven't gone far enough yet. When a man comes here too late, the disease has to burn itself out." Whatever caused his misery was still with him.

Querry thinks the underlying disease is the professional vocation that had previously meant so much to him. Now he complains that ordinary churchgoers ruined his ecclesiastical designs,

"clutter[ing] them up with their cheap plaster saints." I recognize these feelings of resentment.

As Querry settles into the work of the leprosarium, a priest suggests that he has "been given the grace of aridity," alluding to the "dark night" described by the 16th-century mystic St. John of the Cross. The dark night is a stage in contemplation that purges the person of imperfections and impediments to spiritual progress.

The dark night is like an extended desert sojourn. It deprives a person of the senses and sweats out everything that distracts from the soul's highest end. "These aridities," St. John writes, "make people walk with purity in the love of God. No longer are they moved to act by the delight and satisfaction they find in a work, as they perhaps were when they derived this from their deeds, but by the desire to please God." Querry, though he had long since given up on faith, shows great compassion to the patients. He even begins to design humble new structures for the hospital.

A False Ideal

Burned-out cases reflect the conflicted role of self-emptying, or *kenosis*, in Christian life. St. Paul writes that Christ "emptied himself" in becoming human, then obediently submitted to death on the cross (2 Phil 2:7-8). This idea provides a theological justification for the moral ideal of self-sacrificial love.

Applied to our work lives, *kenosis* meshes all too neatly with the American ideal of "selfless" devotion to labor. Many workers, like front-line nurses and delivery drivers during the pandemic, were asked to sacrifice their well-being to the demands of their jobs. Americans expect good workers to "give 100 percent" to their work. This is a false ideal; we should not have to empty ourselves for the company or college.

But as I learned, we are often better off when we empty our pride and devotion to labor, even when these emotions constitute much of who we believe ourselves to be, because they can be obstacles to our spiritual well-being. As the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner wrote in *The Need and the Blessing of Prayer*, "Whatever can be taken from you is not God." My job, including whatever sense of vocation I brought to it, was good, but it was not an ultimate good. It wasn't going to fix my problems or save my soul. I could lose it and still flourish. In fact, losing it was the only way I could.

People can persist in unfulfilling, even damaging work for years. Some people have little choice. I was lucky that I could quit and rely on my wife to be the main breadwinner. I fear what might have happened if that had not been possible, if my burnout had just kept smoldering. What untreated disease of body, mind or spirit would have mutilated me, had I never burned all the way out?

I would not say that my life now is a model of either spiritual wholeness or even proper work-life balance. I am still susceptible to anxiety over status and recognition: What is the rank of my book's sales? What are the reviewers saying? How many new Twitter followers do I have? But because I freelance and teach part-time, no single job asks everything of me. After running on empty, I am now at least partly fulfilled.

Jonathan Malesic is the author of *The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives. He lives in Dallas.*
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Photo courtesy of Canisius High School

‘For the Church and for God’

By John W. Donohue

From the archives, memories of a ‘teacher’s teacher’ at Canisius High School

During the autumn of 1944, Canisius High School, a Jesuit school in Buffalo, N.Y., was breaking in a group of new teachers and also shifting its first-year boys to a new and improbable location. The first business was usual enough. Every fall, along with new lay teachers, several young Jesuits joined the faculty for what was called their regency—a few years of teaching before the theological studies that lead to ordination. There were four of those beginners that year, and I was one of them.

But starting classes at that new location was not routine; it was more like flying an airliner without instruments or much fuel. A few months before, the school, which had been housed for decades in a four-story, red-brick building on Washington Street in downtown Buffalo, had bought at a bargain price an immense layout in what was then a neighborhood of handsome private residences on Delaware Avenue. This building, popularly known as the Consistory,

had been the local Masonic center—a gray stone mansion to which had been appended an auditorium that was big enough for occasional grand opera and auto shows and had bowling alleys and a swimming pool in its basement.

What the Consistory naturally didn’t have were school facilities. All that summer, Lorenzo K. Reed, S.J., Canisius’ exemplary principal, directed an improvisation that converted the mansion’s quarters into temporary classrooms and its second-floor ballroom into a chapel, after William G. Vogelsang, the Jesuit brother who was the school’s chief engineer, had painted over a frieze of sportive cupids. In a booming wartime economy, students were plentiful, but instructional supplies were not. Father Reed made chalkboards by coating Beaverboard with a compound advertised as “blackboard paint,” and he cut yards of sheet metal to make book trays for some 300 tablet-arm chairs needed for the nine sections of incoming freshmen.

On a September morning when volunteers were carting those chairs from the foyer to the makeshift classrooms, I met for the first time Thomas J. Jones, the senior member of the lay faculty. From him I was to learn more about the practice of teaching than from any book or course in education. It was no accident that Tom Jones marvelously embodied the tradition of Jesuit secondary education and the workable principles of pedagogy that can be discovered beneath the rind of the 16th-century Jesuit handbook for school organization, the *Ratio Studiorum*, or *Plan of Studies*. He was himself the convinced and conscious product of that tradition at a time when it was still lively.

At Canisius High School, from which he graduated in 1919, and then at Canisius College on Main Street a few miles away, from which he graduated in 1923, he had been shaped by two teachers whose work dovetailed and amounted to a powerful one-two academic punch. At the high school, the German-born Frederick J. Bunse, S.J. (1863-1935), taught Latin and Greek grammar to generations of Buffalo Catholic youth. At the college, Francis X. Sindele, S.J. (1865-1936), taught a stiff course in classical rhetoric to some of the young men who had mastered the rudiments with Father Bunse. Tom Jones must have been one of the best students of those legendary teachers. He certainly became their influential professional heir.

In that autumn of 1944, Tom was 45 years old and had been teaching at Canisius since 1926. He was then a strong and solidly built man above middle height. Although his ancestry was Irish, he had an olive complexion that was the legacy of a childhood attack of jaundice. In his own school days, he had been a spectacular first baseman for whom a career as a professional ballplayer would have been a possibility if his mother had not disapproved. He still moved decisively, if a bit heavily. He had been serious as a student, and now he was serious as a teacher. He once recalled that in his first week as a Canisius boy he so feared being late that he ran to class one morning and dropped his new pocket watch on the way. The truth is that he was a worrier both by temperament and by vocation—as many good teachers are. An irrepressible Jesuit regent, who had a repertoire of one-line imitations of Canisius' leading personalities, used to do Tom Jones by assuming an air of exaggerated sobriety and asking: "Father, how do you present the ablative absolute?"

Of course, Tom could appreciate the off-beat recollections of former students—for instance, the story James Joyce would have relished of a pungent sermon during one of the annual retreats. Opposite the old school on Washington Street, there was a dusty building given over to manufacture of a long-forgotten nostrum called Dr. Pierce's Pills.

Between classes, the unregenerate among the seniors in the top-floor rooms used to make for the windows to watch the young women working in the loft across the way. The old German Jesuit who was retreat master one year underscored the consequences of this scandalous behavior. He pounded on the chapel floor and called out: "Canisius boy in hell, come up out of hell." When the summons had presumably been answered, there was further inquiry: "Canisius boy in hell, why are you in hell?" Through the stern medium, the unseen wretch replied: "Oh, that pill factory! Oh, those Pierce girls!"

Anecdotes of this sprightly sort could draw a rueful smile from Tom, but his expression in repose was usually pensive. In his classes, however, he had no time for repose or even for sitting down. If lessons don't keep teenage boys busy, they may provide action by hanging their textbooks out the window. At Canisius in 1944, first-year students had eight periods of Latin a week, and in Tom Jones's sections all were involved all the time.

A perceptive commentator has said that the *Ratio Studiorum* contains only a single theoretical principle: Variety is good because satiety is bad. For beginners in Latin, Tom Jones had a dazzling variety of drills and exercises. Declensions and conjugations were run through in roaring unison or tossed to and fro antiphonally. Phrases to be completed or translated were batted out and hurled back. There were daily quizzes and ongoing competitions that matched individuals of equal ability with one another. There were no discipline problems in these classes because there was no room for them.

The art of some great teachers is so much a function of their personality that it cannot be easily shared. But Tom Jones did not operate instinctively, nor was he the outgoing, "boys' man" type. His skills had been developed by reflection and practice. He prepared lesson plans every night and knew just how he got his effects. And because he was a true Christian, he had none of that careerism that sees colleagues as rivals. Although he offered no unsolicited advice, he seemed truly glad to share his knowledge, techniques and materials with anyone interested.

He might, for example, explain his strategy of four carefully graduated tests a month—one every Friday. The first was on new vocabulary; the next, on the grammatical inflections taught since the last such test; the third called for putting these recent acquisitions together by translating English sentences into Latin. The fourth test, which Tom fondly imagined to be playful relaxation, required translating a Latin passage at sight.

"It isn't Latin or Greek I'm teaching," Tom once told

his son Edward, “but how to think.” Indeed, he could see 14-year-olds exercising their power to perceive relationships when they had to translate a tricky phrase like “to the good sailor” and make the adjective agree with the sailor’s gender rather than with his position in the first declension, where most nouns are feminine.

For Tom Jones teaching was literally a vocation. His son remembers his father’s exact words: The work was done “for the church and for God.” It certainly could not have been done for money, because in the United States teachers have never been well paid. In 1925, Tom married Emily Wick of Fort Erie, and together they raised a daughter and two sons. For many years, Mrs. Jones worked as a secretary, and during the summer vacations, Tom picked up other jobs.

He continued to teach at Canisius until his retirement in 1964. By that time, the building on Washington Street had been torn down, and a new classroom wing accommodated the whole school on Delaware Avenue. Emily Jones suffered a disabling stroke in 1966, and Tom cared for her until her death in 1972. She died, he wrote to a friend, “gently and quietly as she had lived.”

He lived on by himself—reading, taking long walks, watching television and keeping track of the 19 charities to which he sent part of his modest income. Five years ago, his infirmities obliged him to move to a nursing home. He was 88 when he died there last month during the first hour of Nov. 13. That was the feast day of St. Stanislas Kostka, who when he died as a Jesuit novice was 18, or about the age of a high school senior today.

Toward the end, great age had sadly diminished Tom Jones, but I had no direct knowledge of that. Although we exchanged Christmas cards and occasional notes, I never saw him again after I left Buffalo in June 1947. I remember him, therefore, as he was at the height of his powers, and one image stands for all the rest. At 4 o’clock on a winter afternoon, there is snow on the ground and the threat of more snow in the dark air. The school building is empty, but in the teachers’ room Tom Jones is still correcting that day’s quizzes. The results are good, and he looks up for a moment to ask with unselfconscious earnestness: “Isn’t it a privilege to teach these boys?”

John W. Donohue, S.J., served as an associate editor of *America* from 1972 until 2007. This article originally appeared in the magazine on Dec. 26, 1987, under the title “A Teacher’s Teacher.”

JESUIT SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

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.

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A portrait of Jimmy McGovern, a middle-aged man with a grey beard and glasses, wearing a light blue striped button-down shirt. He is smiling and has his arms crossed. The background is dark.

Jimmy McGovern Finds His Stories in the Streets

By Jim McDermott

Jimmy McGovern has created decades of groundbreaking TV, including the detective show “Cracker,” with Robbie Coltrane, and the Catholic parish drama “Broken,” with Sean Bean.

When the British TV writer Jimmy McGovern was 10 years old, his teacher at the all-boys school he attended offered a contest: The boy who wrote the best composition on “What’s It Like in Your House in the Morning?” would win *The Weetabix Wonder Book of Birds*. “I think it had a picture of a cormorant on the front,” McGovern recalls now. “It looked fantastic.” He had to have it.

In planning his essay, McGovern started by considering his competition. Given that Weetabix was a cereal, his hunch was that most of his classmates would write about breakfast. So instead he wrote about his father getting ready for work.

“I watched him shave, heard the razor, [saw] the scum that formed as he shook it in a glass of water. I watched him do his carryout, the bits of food and tea he’d take into work in his bag. I watched him pour milk into a medicine bottle and ram a cork in,” he wrote. “He’d put a spoonful of sugar on a piece of a newspaper and then he’d add tea leaves and that would all go all grey, and then he’d wrap that up in a ball and put it in his bag. Then he lit the fire [in our house] and [I saw] the sinews on his hands.”

McGovern would go on not only to win the contest but to create decades of groundbreaking TV like the detective show “Cracker,” with Robbie Coltrane; the Catholic parish drama “Broken,” with Sean Bean; and most recently the prison miniseries “Time,” also with Bean. While his stories have ranged in topic from the 1972 Bloody Sun-

day massacre and the 17th-century Gunpowder Plot to the lives of people on a single street in the modern-day English city of Manchester, his work shares a fascination with the Catholicism in which he was raised and a very Catholic instinct to look where no one else will and see in the tiny details of people’s lives, from the sinews of their hands to the scrape of a razor, a humanity that others might overlook or ignore.

Poverty, Jesuits and Stories

Four years after World War II ended, James Stanley McGovern was born, the fifth of nine children of his parents William and Jane. They lived in a four-bedroom, two-story house in Liverpool, and always close to the edge. “Nobody worked harder than my dad, but we were always skint,” he tells me, using British slang for having little money, in an interview over Zoom in August.

As a port and shipbuilding city, Liverpool had been bombed relentlessly during the war. In May 1941 alone, 870 tons of explosives and 112,000 firebombs fell on the community. Even into the 1960s, many of the bombed-out houses simply stood there, waiting to be knocked down. And nearly everyone was poor. “I remember kids with no shoes on their feet right through the ’50s,” McGovern recollects.

McGovern’s community did have one thing in great numbers, though: Jesuit priests. In the mid-19th century, St. Francis Xavier Church had been built to accom-

modate the large numbers of Irish fleeing the Potato Famine. A hundred years later, “the city was filled with Irish,” says McGovern. “And there seemed to be priests everywhere. They used to come to the house, and we were supposed to give them a few pence.”

At age 11, McGovern was admitted into the Jesuits’ prestigious secondary school St. Francis Xavier’s College, which had moved some years prior out of the city proper to what McGovern describes as “the leafy suburbs of Woolton.” It was McGovern’s first experience of life away from where he lived, and his first experience with Jesuit education. “It was terrible,” he recalls. “The teaching was substandard.” The Jesuits did not seem to appreciate the world their students came from, either. “You didn’t get many working-class Jesuits then,” he explains. “I don’t think they understood poverty.”

They also held in their company a sexually abusive priest. “He was a pedophile, and everyone knew he was.”

“I have huge respect for the faith,” says McGovern, who notes he was a “pious kid” until about 13. “But this was how that school was.”

From the time he was young, McGovern enjoyed writing. In his 20s, now married and with three children, someone gave him a break, a chance to work as a staff writer on a Liverpool soap opera called “Brookside.” In six years he would write or co-write 40 episodes.

His breakthrough as a storyteller would happen in the 1990s.

In his writing process McGovern is ferocious in his desire to undermine easy answers. 💧

In 1993 he created “Cracker,” an ITV series about an alcoholic, adulterous, gambling-addicted forensic psychologist that the pop culture website Den of Geek has called a “beautiful and brutal cocktail of gruesome entertainment, savage social commentary and unflinching truth.” It would go on to become a massive success not just in the United Kingdom but around the world.

Those same years would see him write two equally important films. “Priest” (1994) is about a young gay Catholic priest confronting the complex realities of life in a Catholic parish; “Hillsborough” (1996) is a dramatic retelling of the 1989 Hillsborough Stadium disaster that saw 97 soccer fans crushed to death and 766 others injured after the police sent attendees through the wrong gate. In the wake of that tragedy, police systematically lied about what happened, saying the attendees in that section had all been drunk, some of the survivors so much so they had urinated on corpses—stories that ran in national papers and played into stereotypes about Liverpudlians and the working class.

The two films are radically different in style. “Priest” is a drama with some comedic moments, “Hillsborough” a muted, documentary-style project in which the audience quietly follows the victims and their families through the chaos of the day and the court case that followed. Yet what these two films share is a passion for the stories no one else is telling.

“Priest” is one of the very first attempts to tell stories about gay clergy, which it does in a way that forgoes the sensational in favor of a realistic depiction of the challenges of parish life. And in “Hillsborough” McGovern stood up for the people of Liverpool, who had been so poorly treated by the media. He interviewed many families who had lost loved ones, and in the end the film won three British Academy Television Awards (known as BAFTAs), including for best single drama.

The success of “Hillsborough” also challenged McGovern to go further in his writing. “The country sang the praises of that TV program. I won a BAFTA, the program won BAFTAs,” he explains. “But the families of the dead were never invited. That got to me.”

A few years later, when McGovern began work on the story of the Liverpool dockers’ 850-day work strike from 1995 to 1998, he turned to the dockers not simply as sources but as co-writers. “We would all work together and we would all write together,” he says. It has remained his practice on other programs to collaborate with people without professional writing experience but who have stories to tell. “It’s absolutely wonderful to think somebody’s going to walk into the room who’s never written before, you’re going to work with them on a TV program and they’re going to have their name on that,” he tells me.

But he downplays any sense of altruism in his process. “I find it so lonely

to be in your room and having to write. If you’ve got somebody else there, it’s far better.”

Shedding Light in Dark Places

In an interview with McGovern for *The Independent* in 1997, the journalist Jasper Rees talks about the screenwriter’s commitment to “the black stuff” of life, the darkness under the surface. In the pilot of “Cracker,” for example, McGovern’s protagonist, Fitz Fitzgerald, tells a roomful of psychology students that studying Freud or Jung is worthless. The real thing to do is to “go and lock yourself in a room for a couple of days, and study what is here,” he says, slapping his chest. “The things that you really feel, not all that crap that you’re supposed to feel.” Truth is found, he says, “in shedding a little light on dark recesses of your soul.”

What is most striking in McGovern’s body of work is the humanity he discovers precisely in the midst of his characters’ darkness. The woman who runs the local gambling parlor that is destroying lives in “Broken” ends up being a Catholic who comes to the parish priest for confession; the cop responsible for the death of a young Black man turns out to have been harassed into being tougher by all her male colleagues. The prisoners in “Time” almost all wrestle with the truth of what they have done.

This passion to find the deeper well of humanity in characters others might write off as villainous is evident in talking to McGovern. Without prompting he tells me of recent discoveries that paint the officer responsible for the Hillsborough tragedy in a far more sympathetic light. He even has compassion for the convict running the prison’s criminal activity in

“Time,” noting that the man is trapped in the system he has created. “When the white man turns tyrant in the east,” he says, quoting George Orwell’s famous story “Shooting an Elephant,” “it’s his own freedom he destroys.”

In his writing process, too, McGovern is ferocious in his desire to undermine easy answers. “You do no service to anybody if you do not write the truth,” he says. Working with other writers, he insists on going over the text again and again until, as he explained in a Q&A for the BAFTA and British Film Institute’s Screenwriters Lecture Series, it seems like “surely we found this story in the street.” Where the tendency in the media today is to highlight the screenwriter as a singular voice and personality, McGovern wants to erase any trace of himself. “The story is paramount,” he told Rees. “You’ve got to tell that story, and you tell that story in the most simple, economical way possible, and you do not show off. I know writers who show off in the telling of the story, and it’s bollocks.”

Imagining a Blessed Church

McGovern isn’t a believer, and hasn’t been for a long time, “not since I was a teenager.” It’s a surprising revelation, as his stories frequently involve people praying or participating in Catholic sacraments in a way that is not only accurate (itself a rarity) but deeply moving. In the 2020 film “Anthony,” which tells the true story of a Black teenager murdered by white racists in a Liverpool park, there is a moment when the title character’s mother asks a nurse to stay and pray with her. The nurse is uncertain about what she intends. “I’ll tell God about him,” Mrs. Walker says; “You ask him to protect him.”

She begins to tell stories of An-

thony, with the care worker offering a simple refrain, “Protect him, O Lord,” in between. And though you would think this has to be Mrs. Walker’s moment, as she is the one suffering, McGovern plants the focus more and more on the care worker, until it is less a scene about Anthony and more a vignette showing the profound impact of prayer on a person’s life.

McGovern’s work regularly offers spiritual experiences like this—moments of prayer, forgiveness, reconciliation, even the Eucharist. They are the kinds of moments I would show to people who want to deepen their own faith, or to parishes looking for fresh ideas around the ways they offer the sacraments. McGovern seemed a bit bemused when I told him this. “Fun- nily enough,” McGovern told me, “I probably wouldn’t have described some of those scenes as prayer. But I’m an old-fashioned Catholic. Prayer to me is ‘Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee...’”

As he has gotten older, McGovern has wondered about the possibility of experiencing God in his life once again. “I’ve been open to returning,” he tells me. “You know, the closer you get to death, the more likelihood you might rediscover faith. But that hasn’t happened.”

In the months since we spoke, I have spent a lot of time struggling with this part of our conversation. How can it be that a man whose work has been so profoundly spiritual for me and many others has not himself been afforded any experience of God? More than once I have wanted to reach out to him, not as a journalist, but as a priest to suggest that maybe God is in fact right there with him, just not in the form he has been taught to see. Certainly in my own life God has often

been in the wildflowers I can sometimes overlook along the side of the road rather than in the churches.

Then I wonder: Who am I trying to reassure here, him or myself? As much as I resent the Book of Job for its notion of God and Satan presenting us as chess pieces in some little game of their own, maybe its brutal conclusion is right: At some point God is simply not to be understood.

McGovern’s favorite poet is the Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins, who lived for a time in the parish where McGovern would later grow up. “The Windhover,” McGovern told the Independent, is “the best 14 lines ever written.”

In that poem, Hopkins admires “this morning’s minion,” a “dapple-dawn-drawn falcon” flying in the sky. In his classic style, Hopkins describes deeply the physical qualities of the bird, “the brute beauty and valour and act” of its flight, “the fire that breaks from thee.”

At the end, he compares flight to the labor of life. “No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion/ Shine”—that is, it is the slow, endless work that makes the fresh plowed soil glow.

It is an apt description of the work McGovern himself has done and the quiet moments of revelation it has offered. I may want that for him, too. But I am pretty sure if McGovern were editing this article, he would tell me to cut that thought out. My desires as the writer are unimportant. There is a story here to tell.

Jim McDermott, S.J., is an associate editor of *America*.



The Inner Lives of Sisters

Nuns, Claire Luchette writes in her debut novel, “were the opposite of invisible, but still difficult for people to see.”

Two new novels, one a demonstration of continuing virtuosity by a much-lauded writer in mid-career, the other a smoldering, graceful debut, explore the lives of women religious. Both reveal the inner lives of sisters: women who, as Claire Luchette writes in *Agatha of Little Neon*, “were the opposite of invisible, but still difficult for people to see.”

Lauren Groff, a three-time National Book Award finalist, sets her novel, *Matrix*, in the 12th century, weaving historical details inspired by the mystical poet Marie de France (who some scholars think might have been Marie, Abbess of Shaftesbury, the half-sister of the English king Henry II) with the output of her formidable imagination to create an indelible fictional character.

Claire Luchette, whom the National Book Foundation just honored with its “5 Under 35” designation, sets her book in the contemporary church. A cash-strapped parish in upstate

New York must send a group of four sisters packing to Woonsocket, R.I., to run a halfway house while the church is roiled by continued revelations of abuse by priests. Luchette’s protagonist, Sister Agatha, is quieter and more obedient than Groff’s Abbess Marie, but no less memorable. These two novels demonstrate their authors’ keen perceptions of human nature and their rare ability to portray a variety of expressions of faith.

“She rides out of the forest alone. Seventeen years old, in the cold March drizzle, Marie who comes from France,” Groff begins *Matrix*. In 1158, Marie is sent from the court of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, who rules as the queen of England after marrying King Henry II. At court in Westminster, “Marie appalled everyone with her ravenousness, her rawness, her gauche, bigboned body.” Eleanor decides the “bastardess” Marie is too unlovely to marry off, so instead sends her to become the prioress of a royal

abbey gripped by poverty and illness in the midst of England’s Dark Ages.

Marie feels wretched as she arrives at the “glum damp abbey,” stinging from her exile from court and from Eleanor, whom she loves. Marie has no vocation, and Groff writes that “her faith had been twisted very early in her childhood; it would slowly grow ever more bent into its own geometry until it was its own angular, majestic thing.” Groff shows how the sisterhood at this abbey is formed from a mix of unwedtable royals stashed away for propriety, widows and young women called by God (or who were at least seeking to avoid the typical life of marriage and early death during childbearing years, a fate that awaited a third of all medieval women).

At first Marie fantasizes about escaping to become “a wildwoman or a lady brigand or a hermit in a hollowed trunk of a tree,” but she is a natural leader. At the abbey, Marie takes over the correspondence, sets about ex-

Agatha of Little Neon

By Claire Luchette
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
271p \$26

Matrix

By Lauren Groff
Riverhead Books
257p \$28

tracting funds from delinquent renters on the abbey's lands and assigns people jobs according to their skills, even down to one mentally ill but artistically gifted sister who takes on the task of decorating the abbey and the manuscripts it produces, once Marie establishes a scriptorium.

Marie begins to have visions of the Virgin Mary, who instructs her on how to fortify the abbey. It evolves into a prosperous sort of feminine utopia—a place of learning, prayer, industry and health—once Marie has banished all men from the grounds. Marie never follows church law exactly; she finds no prohibition in the Bible, for example, against “bodily release” among women that “has nothing to do with copulation,” and eventually her aversion to men becomes so intense that she scandalizes many by saying Mass herself. But Groff makes it clear that Marie's ability to gain power within the constrictions medieval society placed on women allows the other sisters' goodness to flourish. “With their heads bent over their books like this, their words palely shining,” Groff writes, Marie “understands that the abbey is a beehive, all her good bees working together in humility and devotion.”

Groff's language is powerful, precise and frequently glorious as she details Marie's rise in stature. Marie analyzes and responds to shifting dynamics among the sisters and among the church hierarchy and royal relations, and in the end her work elevates others as much as it empowers her.

In the case of Claire Luchette's *Agatha of Little Neon*, the protagonist, Sister Agatha, evinces a great deal more humility, chastity and obedience

than Marie but displays a similar power of conviction and an abhorrence of the violations committed by the church's men.

Sister Agatha found solace in the Catholic Church when her mother died when she was 11. Luchette joins her story at a turning point in 2005, when 81-year-old Mother Roberta—Agatha's beloved, perpetually busy superior—begins to ail. Agatha and her sisters run a daycare center in their parish, but they are undercut by the arrival of a competing Montessori program and a dwindling number of parishioners. With little revenue to sustain their community and scandal and legal fees draining the Buffalo Diocese, Mother Roberta is set to retire. Agatha and the three other sisters are transferred to a halfway house in Woonsocket, R.I., painted “the color of Mountain Dew,” known as Little Neon.

Luchette writes with clarity, restraint and gentle humor. There is a confidence to her pacing and an evident love for her characters. Although Sister Agatha narrates the book, she reveals herself slowly. She isn't a showy type with unbridled appetites like Groff's Abbess Marie. “As a girl,” Agatha explains, “as soon as I knew what prayer was for, I prayed for likeness. ‘Dear God,’ I said, every night. ‘Make me unexceptional.’” Agatha mostly listens when others talk, and characteristically, she received no clarion vocational call. Her nudge toward becoming a sister came when she encountered two nuns in the convenience store where she worked the night shift as a teenager. “There was no invitation. There was only that night in the gas station; it was late, and I was



lonely, and I understood, watching the two nuns, that you could live your whole life alone if you weren't careful. You might never find a decent place to hide from yourself.”

At Little Neon, where the sisters live with recovering addicts, Agatha begins to settle into the rhythms of their life. But soon the parish priest declares that he needs one of them to assume the position of geometry teacher at the local high school. The sisters put Agatha forward because she's the “smartest,” even though she is so quiet that one sister thinks, “Those kids will eat her alive.” Despite being terrified to put herself out into the world in front of a classroom, Agatha does as she is asked. While working at the school and hanging out with the residents of Little Neon, Agatha



Lauren Groff's language is powerful, precise and frequently glorious.

evolves in her perspectives as the insistent drumbeat of revelations of sexual abuse of children by priests plays in the background.

When Agatha's awareness of this injustice grows, spurred by the discovery of mistreatment of a beloved Little Neon resident by a bishop, it emerges from inside her like a lioness's roar: "They had not imagined consequences, these priests, these men who could baptize and anoint and transubstantiate, men who could stand at the pulpit and speak of temptation, then, warped by a sense of impunity, do what they wanted in the world, including rape in the middle of the day, then sit on the other side of the confession box and listen to people list their sins." Sister Agatha is not powerful like Groff's Abbess Marie, but she seizes what power she can and uses it to full effect.

Matrix and *Agatha of Little Neon* differ in their historical settings, the temperaments of their protagonists and their prose style, but they both center on women perceiving the ways of the world with absolute clarity, realizing the extent of their power and deciding to use it for the good of others, no matter how many people that decision upsets.

Jenny Shank's new story collection, *Mixed Company*, won the George Garrett Prize. She teaches in the Mile High MFA program at Regis University in Denver.

Making a Home in a Time of Alienation

We shop for a place to live the way we shop for cars. We would like a place with good schools, easy access to nature and good restaurants. We might want a place where there are people like us, where we don't have to deal with annoying politics unlike our own.

When we think about making a home only in these terms, we risk turning home into a commodity, a consumer good, and the result is that we treat the places we live the way consumers do, and not as members of a community.

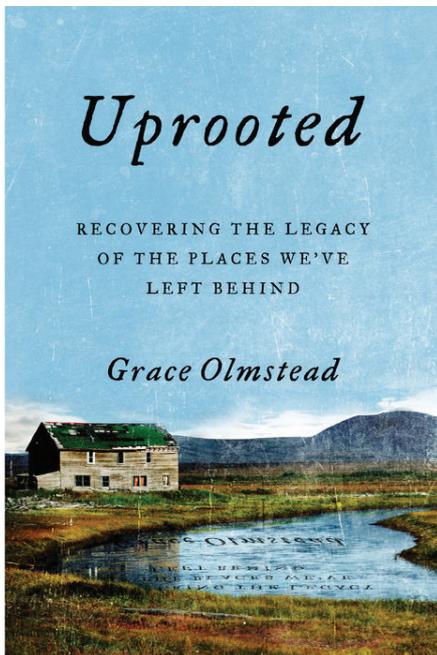
In her new book, *Uprooted*, Grace Olmstead investigates the social and personal costs of this pattern, which has so many people leaving where they grew up and going to a handful of major cities and their suburbs. For individuals, the result is often alienation. For the places they leave behind, it is often stagnation or decay. Olmstead does an admirable job interrogating those costs, and the book serves as one of the best introductions I have read to the problems that face the rural United States right now.

At the same time, it is a substantive analysis, of the type familiar to readers of Wendell Berry, of the cultural trends that lie beneath these problems. These are challenges that involve all of us, rural and urban, in both material and spiritual ways.

Olmstead herself is one of those people who left home. She comes from the small town of Emmett, Ida., but has lived for the past decade or so in the vicinity of Washington, D.C. The book is born out of the tension between her own desire for roots and the fact that she has uprooted herself from the place that made her. It is an exercise in discernment that asks what many of us who have moved to big cities have asked: Should I go back?

In answering her central question, Olmstead makes an effort to look at her hometown from every angle. Beginning with history, she displays the honesty that is typical of her exploration. In her telling, the origin story of Emmett is a tale of hardworking immigrants with a pioneer spirit, but it is also a story of the exploitation of Chinese laborers, the exclusion of free Blacks and violence against American Indians. It would be easy to take one portion of this narrative and call it the whole story, but Olmstead insists on the whole picture and looks for the good in the midst of brokenness.

This is seen in the life of Grandpa Dad, Olmstead's great-grandfather and a presiding spirit in the book. He is not a perfect character. He is a bit stubborn and too self-reliant, but he stood against destructive and "deliberate choices to maximize profit, rather than embrace limits, to prioritize 'progress' over rootedness." It is precisely this ruthless pursuit of prof-



Uprooted

Recovering the Legacy of the Places We've Left Behind

By Grace Olmstead

Sentinel

272p \$27

it, Olmstead argues, that has depleted the soils, sullied the waterways and deprived small towns of their community life.

Olmstead deftly explains the forces of globalization and consolidation that accounts for these changes. Farms have grown more industrial in order to serve global commodity markets; manufacturing has moved overseas; and the knowledge economy has aggregated in a small number of cities. What is left in the rest of the country is the population of those who do the backbreaking labor to bring cheap consumer goods to the city, those without the means to leave, and those with the grit, heart and dedication to stay. The pattern has become one of exploitation, where rural areas serve

the city by delivering essential goods but are often left out of the full benefit of that economic output.

In contrasting the attitude of exploitation with the attitude of responsibility, Olmstead makes use of the writer Wallace Stegner's distinction between "boomers" and "stickers." Stickers are those who give themselves deeply to a place; boomers are those who take what they can from a place and leave. Olmstead's great-grandfather was the "consummate sticker," whose habits were so reliable he had "worn tracks in the farmhouse's green carpet." Notably, he lived in a time when it was easier to pick up stakes and move than it is now; his life was a conscious choice to stand against exploitation and to embrace the mindset of a caretaker.

Grandpa Dad stands as a solution to our own alienation and to the struggles that face so many of our towns: rootedness. But to be rooted does not mean to have one's family stay in a place forever; rather it is, as Olmstead writes, to be "members" of one another's lives, to be "responsible and accountable" for our neighbors. This is something that comes only with time and commitment, something that grows organically through shared life, shared labor and shared suffering. The economic and cultural trends of the last 100 years, however, have made this kind of life harder than ever.

"The American Dream is, in essence, about economic and class transience," Olmstead writes, and often enough this has meant a geographic transience required by the search for better material welfare. That is not all bad, unless it means never putting down roots and instead making the acquisition of money the highest value.

That side of the American Dream may indeed be a dangerous one.

But in all the criticism of American greed, it can sometimes be forgotten that there is another, equally American way of living that embraces limits and responsibility over the chase for wealth. I felt myself wishing that Olmstead had identified this more strongly as authentically American.

In the end, Olmstead seems to conclude that she really ought to return to Idaho, to plant herself among her family and give herself to the place that gave itself to her. To do this takes, she rightly notes, not mere nostalgia, but a "conscious choice of love, made to a people and place that are messy, complicated, broken and precious."

There is not one right answer for everyone; there can be good reasons to move and settle somewhere new. The truth is, even those of us who stay in one place may not really be rooted. Rootedness is not just about being somewhere for a long time, it is about entering into a deep relationship with (and taking responsibility for) the land, the history and the people that make a place what it is. To be truly at home requires loving and giving ourselves to a place for its own sake.

This book invites us to join its author in discerning our own spirit: whether we are boomers or stickers. At the same time, it offers a path to making home in a time of alienation.

Nathan Beacom is a writer in Nebraska. His writing has been featured in *Civil Eats*, *Plough Quarterly* and *The New Atlantis*.

The Black soldiers of World War I were part of a ‘silenced history.’

Soul Brothers

Although the peoples of Africa had little direct involvement with the causes of the First World War, European colonial powers conscripted nearly two million soldiers from Africa and sent them to the front lines. France alone sent about 450,000 troops from West Africa and North Africa to fight against the Germans. About half of these men came from Senegal.

Their experience provides much of the background for David Diop’s disturbing second novel, *At Night All Blood Is Black*. The novel won the 2021 Booker International Prize, considered to be the most prestigious award for fiction in translation. Lucy Hughes-Hallett, chair of the judges, noted the terrifying power of this story of warfare, love and madness.

Born in Paris to an African father and a French mother, Diop was raised in Senegal and grew up to become a university professor. He teaches French and African literature and is known for his study of prejudice and its negative impact on both Black and white lives. Diop’s first book, *1889, l’Attraction Universelle*, was also a work of historical fiction. Describing the experiences of 11 members of a Senegalese delegation to the 1889 Ex-

position Universelle in Paris, the novel was inspired by 19th-century “human zoos,” in which Black people were exhibited behind bars with monkeys as objects of curiosity.

In an interview, Diop said that the Black soldiers of World War I were part of a “silenced history.” Their mistreatment was underreported because their marginalization refuted the French narrative that colonization was humane.

Diop considers the effects of colonization to be horrific, not humane, and says as much in his second novel, translated from the French by Anna Moschovakis, an editor, poet and translator. Moschovakis’s English translation reads like a prose poem. Adding authenticity to the narrative, Moschovakis keeps several Wolof (Senegalese) words.

The book first came out in French in 2018, the year Europe commemorated the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. As part of the ceremony, the presidents of France and Mali introduced a monument to the “Black Army”—West African soldiers from France’s former colonies. Diop’s story follows two of those soldiers, Alfa Ndiaye and his stepbrother Mademba Diop, showing what can happen when people treated like savages become savage in a brutal, self-fulfilling prophecy.

The narrative centers on the fil-



At Night All Blood Is Black

By David Diop; translated from the French by Anna Moschovakis Farrar, Straus and Giroux 160p \$25

ial love between the two Senegalese riflemen, who were close childhood friends and joined the French army because they hoped to become French citizens at the war’s end.

In addition to the relationship between Alfa and Mademba and their experiences before and during the war, the novel covers Alfa’s childhood closeness to his elderly father and beautiful young mother, his father’s fourth wife. Alfa was adopted by Mademba’s family after his mother disappeared—probably captured by slave traders. After that, he and Mademba became more than brothers. When the two fought together in the war, Alfa says he “glued” himself to Mademba, “so the bullet that hurt him would hurt me.... God’s truth, on attack days,

we were elbow to elbow, shoulder to shoulder.” But only Mademba was hit.

Alfa gradually reveals that the mortally wounded Mademba begged Alfa to slit his throat to avoid the shame of dying with his intestines spilled on the ground. He asked Alfa three times to kill him and put an end to his misery. But Alfa believed killing—even mercy killing—was wrong. To kill Mademba would be to play God or the devil, Alfa says. Moreover, it would go against the inner voices of his family, his Wolof people, the Koran and his ancestors. So he refuses Mademba three times.

The allusion to Jesus asking Peter three times if he loved him (Jn 21:15–17) gives the book biblical overtones. The reference also gives the reader a glimpse into Alfa’s spiritual nature. Alfa repeatedly wonders how he can love his soul brother and not kill him when he is suffering so much. Yet how could he kill his beloved brother when killing is wrong? How could he give up any hope that Mademba might survive?

The novel is structured as an interior monologue, and Alfa’s continual questioning of himself and his motives is reminiscent of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy. The arc of the novel, which proceeds from the perspective of someone who witnesses evil and becomes lost in the evil of his surroundings, evokes “Hamlet” even further.

As he becomes increasingly mad, Alfa believes that he is an instrument of God’s punishment and is meant to avenge Mademba’s death by cutting off the hands of seven blue-eyed German soldiers. (That number, representing completeness in Genesis, offers another biblical allusion.) At first his fellow soldiers consider Alfa a hero, but they soon come to fear him;

and he is sent to a psychiatric hospital, where doctors attempt to cure him. There he commits the ultimate crime.

Although the English title is more graphic and alludes to the racial aspects of the book, I prefer the original French title, *Frère d’âme*, or “Soul Brother,” which is more reflective of the ethical core of this narrative as well as its notion of brotherhood among the Senegalese riflemen who served in World War I.

The original cover shows a Black soldier standing, as if for inspection. The cover of the English version shows a bloody severed hand; and while it is eye-catching, it misses the spiritual component of the novel, which is about the absence of God in wartime and the effect this has on humanity. “God is lagging,” Alfa says. In Alfa’s view, God cannot keep up with the bad actions of people and uses war as a way to punish entire generations.

Ultimately, Diop delves into the way war destroys not just the body, but also the soul. As this unnerving book ends, Alfa seems to have turned into a *dëmm*, the “devourer of souls” that everyone, including himself, fears.

Diane Scharper is the author of several books, including *Reading Lips and Other Ways to Overcome a Disability*. She teaches memoir and poetry for the Johns Hopkins University Osher Program.

Family, Trauma and Survival

With her debut novel *The Seed Keeper*, the Dakhóta writer Diane Wilson claims her place among a growing Native literary movement in the United States that includes Louise

Erdrich, Tommy Orange, David Treuer and Robin Wall Kimmerer, whose *Braiding Sweetgrass* remains a best-seller several years after its publication. Shattering the attempts of white settler culture to portray the original people of this land as a relic of a history long gone, Native authors are engaging not only an Indigenous past, but a present and future. In *The Seed Keeper*, Wilson has woven together a story of the land we share that Native and non-Native alike will want to listen to.

Wilson’s book is an immersive, affecting account of family and history, trauma and survival, seeds and gardening, stories and healing. Four richly drawn Indigenous women offer first-person narratives, giving these stories intimacy and power. When we first meet 40-year old Rosalie Iron Wing, the central character, it is 2002 and she is getting ready to leave the farm where she has spent the last two decades, fresh from the loss of her white husband and ready for a new start. She is in Minnesota, the place that her Dakhóta people call *Mní Sota Makhóche*, named for water so clear one could see the clouds reflected in it.

Gradually we learn of Rosalie’s upbringing. Raised by a Dakhóta father who taught her the traditional ways of their people, she came to understand the land around her as at once “our grocery store, as well as my classroom and play area.” Rosalie’s idyll is upended at age 12 when her father suddenly dies. Instead of being given to the Indigenous relatives who wanted her, she is placed with a white family (the actual fate of upwards of 50 percent of Indigenous children in the United States until the 1978 passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act).

At 18, desperate to escape her



Diane Wilson offers a feast of insights into Dakhóta and other Native cultures.

cruel foster parents, Rosalie marries a man whose German descendants had settled the land in the 19th century. “An Indian farmer,” she notes bitterly as she drives from her farm, referring to U.S. assimilationist Indian policy, “the government’s dream come true.” Twenty-two years later, Rosalie is a widow seeking to renew her connection with her ancestral home, to once again find her roots after years of displacement.

In her new surroundings Rosalie discovers a frozen and haunted landscape. “The war changed everything,” she muses. Throughout *The Seed Keeper*, the Dakhóta War of 1862 against U.S. settlers looms like a specter, still affecting both the Dakhóta people and the white settlers of the land. In the war’s aftermath, 38 Dakhóta warriors were executed in Mankato, the largest mass hanging in U.S. history. Seventeen hundred women, children and elders were marched at gunpoint to Fort Snelling; from there, those who were still alive were forcibly removed to South Dakota. “He said forgetting was easy,” Rosalie says of her father. “It’s the remembering that wears you down.”

There is much here that is worth grappling with, especially for white Christians. Perhaps nothing is as significant as the impact of Indian boarding schools, a century-long practice in the United States and Canada of

forced separation of Native children from their communities. “The schools harmed a lot of families,” a Dakhóta elder remarks. “Some are still trying to find their children. Or to bring their bodies back home.” Recent revelations of hundreds of unmarked burial sites at church-run residential schools demonstrate just how timely this aspect of the narrative remains.

The novel does not dwell only on the tragic, however. Wilson takes care to plant the story in the larger context of what some refer to as an “Indigenous resurgence,” a widespread reclamation of the right and responsibility of Indians to practice traditional ways after centuries of suppression. Several years ago, on a march to honor those who had been exiled from Minnesota, Wilson heard the story of Dakhóta women who had sewn seeds into their skirts to ensure survival in their place of exile. It was then that Wilson knew she had to write this novel. The power of seeds to heal—the soil, family connections, our own spirits—becomes both a literal and metaphorical thread throughout the novel.

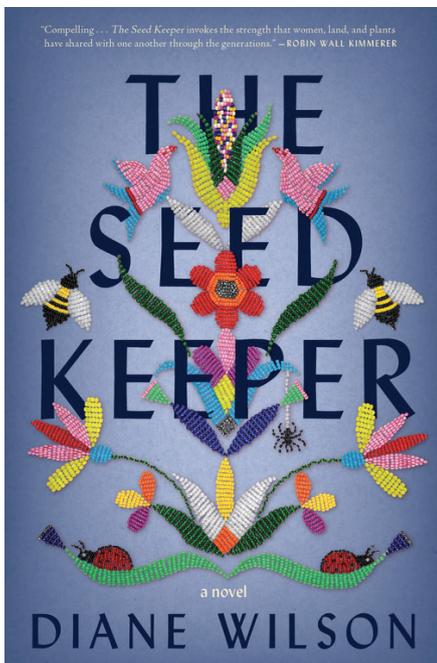
The Seed Keeper is a paean to the land, informed by Wilson’s knowledge of and love for the Earth. In its elegant simplicity, Wilson’s writing evokes that of the great agrarian writer Wendell Berry; her prose is at its lyrical best in her observations of the natural

world. The flames in the woodstove are “bright ribbons of warmth.” The snow is falling “in desperate haste... as if the snow’s burden had been too much for the clouds to carry.” The rain “came in a rush, as if bloated with a thousand farmers’ prayers.”

As with Berry, it is not difficult to discern Wilson’s views on the issues she presents. Some readers may even find Wilson didactic, as at times she nears merely cataloguing injustices. When a Monsanto-like corporation peddling genetically modified seeds divides Iron Wing’s small-town farm community (and her family), for example, the narrative bogs down. Nevertheless, this turn in the story presents a startling juxtaposition with the way her own people see seeds: as relatives worthy of respect.

According to the Indigenous view Wilson beautifully presents, the world is sacred and animate. Rocks are grandfathers. Water is considered the first medicine. “Plants have their own way of talking,” a Dakhóta elder remarks matter-of-factly. Even the book’s circular approach to time—which begins and ends in 2002, moving backward and forward across 140 years—suggests the Native way of understanding.

For non-Native readers, Wilson offers a feast of insights into Dakhóta



The Seed Keeper

By Diane Wilson
Milkweed Editions
392p \$16

and other Native cultures. We learn of the profound links between tobacco and prayer, how winter is the time for storytelling and that dreams are often crucially important.

At bottom, this is a spiritual book. The stories of trauma and resilience, of our elemental bond with creation, inevitably lead to the fundamental questions of how we are to live. At the close of the book, a Dakhóta elder is faced with an important question. His answer is simple and necessary: “We pray.”

Eric and Brenna Cussen Anglada are members of St. Isidore Catholic Worker Farm on the ancestral homeland of the Ho-Chunk, Meskwaki and Sauk nations in southwest Wisconsin.

Because my hands are small compared to God’s

By Jane Zwart

it is easier to trust God with worlds than with sons

whose hands fit in mine. I mean to reduce the divine
as I would a fraction: dividing life and afterlife

by life, but instead I raise the voice that asks
What comes before infinity, everything or nothing?

to the power of an answer God does not give
because my hands are small compared to God’s.

Jane Zwart teaches English at Calvin University. Her poems have previously appeared in Poetry, North American Review, TriQuarterly and other journals.

'The Word' moves online

From the editors: Since 1943, "The Word" column has been found near the end of print issues of *America*. Especially after the Second Vatican Council, in response to the call for Catholics to "gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself" (*Verbum*, No. 25), the column has been focused specifically on the next Sunday's Scriptural readings.

To better fit our current monthly issue frequency in print, we will publish the full version of "The Word" digitally on *America's* website, to which print subscribers have full access. This page in the print issue will continue to point readers to the full columns online.

Sacred Reading

Excerpted from "The Word" from January 23, 2022: The beginning of the Gospel comes from Luke 1, and the evangelist shares that he is using source materials and weaving together traditions to offer an account of the "events that have been fulfilled among us." The second part of today's Gospel is from Luke 4, and it describes Jesus praying and reflecting on prophetic traditions.

Jesus teaches in a synagogue, reading portions of Isaiah 58 and 61. Drawing on prophecies from over 500 years earlier, Jesus reads them in light of his life and ministry. The Isaiah prophecies describe the divine spir-

it coming upon someone, and Jesus draws inspiration and meaning from this prophecy, interpreting it as referring to himself, also filled with the power of the Spirit.

•••

In today's Gospel, we witness Jesus reading Scripture, relating it to his own experience and context, and using it to proclaim his purpose in the world, highlighting his commitment to ministering to those who are often marginalized in society. As we pray with this text, we can draw inspiration from how Jesus prays with Scripture and connects it to his life and work.

Stay up to date
with 'The Word'
all month long.

Each of these
columns can be
found online.

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD (C), JAN. 2, 2022

What is your star today? What holds your gaze and leads you closer to Christ?

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD (C), JAN. 9, 2022

Jesus is our model, so his baptism establishes a pattern for our own Christian life and mission.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JAN. 16, 2022

Through miracles, Jesus not only helped people in need, but he revealed himself to the world and gained followers.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JAN. 23, 2022

In today's Gospel, we witness Jesus reading Scripture, relating it to his own experience and context, and using it to proclaim his purpose in the world.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JAN. 30, 2022

God anticipates that Jeremiah would face rejection, so during his call and commission, God encourages the prophet as well.



Meet the Author

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

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Plan Now for Your Final Days

Your children will be grateful

By Valerie Schultz



If you're anything like me, you are involved in the lives of your children and grandchildren, and you'd do anything for them. Here is a way to show how much you really love them: Do the paperwork.

I am talking about the legal paperwork of a mature life: A will or a trust. A durable power of attorney. An advanced health directive. You can go online or hire a lawyer, but you need to get these documents done. When you're gone, your children will thank you.

I can be smug because my husband and I have recently completed the above job. But I should hang my head in shame that we hadn't taken care of this before. What if we had both died while our kids were still minors?

For Catholics, arranging the funeral of a parent is a holy task: Our parents brought us into the church through baptism, and we see to it that they are on their way home to God. Having buried both of my parents, I also know how helpful it is to be certain of your parents' last wishes. Which is to say, I know how unhelpful it is not to know what they want, not to have ever had the difficult but vital conversations about dying and death.

In my case, my mother outlived my father, but she abdicated her responsibility for his funeral—her philosophy of life being that if you never made a decision, you couldn't be blamed for things not working out well. So my siblings and I did what we

thought best. We chose the cemetery. We chose cremation. We chose the readings for my dad's, and later my mom's, funeral Mass. We tried to honor our parents without really knowing if we were.

We also had thought that they had signed advanced health directives, but when my father became gravely ill, we couldn't find the documents. My sister and I were certain that he did not want any extraordinary measures taken to prolong his life artificially, but my mother accused us of trying to kill off our dad. After he died, I found the leather satchel with the paperwork, and his last wishes were as we thought.

"Well," my mother said triumphantly, "at least you see that I want everything done to save me! Don't pull my plug!"

I showed her where she needed to make some updates because the document she had signed years ago stipulated that nothing extraordinary be done on her behalf. Over the next seven years, my mother slowly succumbed to Parkinson's disease, but on her own time, with all possible medical intervention. She never changed her directive legally, but thanks to that one outburst, we knew what she wanted.

No one likes to think about one's own death, but we can be sure that the event will not be prevented by our inattention. No one likes to think that in the absence of any instructions, our children will not be their best

selves. But we have all heard stories. We all know the power of money to divide a family.

Once we are gone, of course, we cannot control the narrative. The best we can do is leave a blueprint to be followed. My aunt and uncle, God rest them, had planned for everything surrounding their deaths, from prepaid burial arrangements to the musical requests for their funerals—endearing guitar Mass throwbacks to the '70s, which indicated to me that they had stipulated these instructions long before they died. The serenity on my cousins' tear-streaked faces made me realize that I owed my children the same active, helpful love that my aunt and uncle had modeled for me.

Death is a taboo in our society—I am always amazed by the number of people I know who have never been to a funeral—but we need to talk about it with our loved ones. We can hide from it and sanitize it and ignore it, but our death will have to be dealt with by somebody. With a bit of forethought, we can love our children one last time from the grave. Where there is literally a will, there's a way.

*Valerie Schultz is a freelance writer, a columnist for *The Bakersfield Californian* and the author of *Overdue: A Dewey Decimal System of Grace*. She and her husband, Randy, have four children and two grandchildren.*



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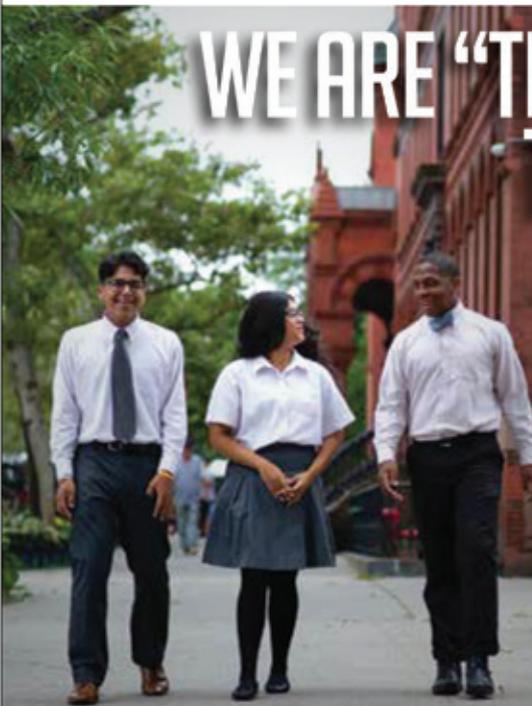
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