

America

JULY/AUGUST 2022 **DOUBLE ISSUE**

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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REFLECTIONS**

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A Republic, if You Can Keep It

Queen Elizabeth II reached yet another unprecedented milestone this year when she became the first British monarch to reign for 70 years. The official celebrations of what was dubbed Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee occurred over four days in June and, according to Reuters News, included: 1,400 parading soldiers, 200 horses and 400 musicians; 71 planes, which soared over Buckingham Palace in a flypast salute; 3,500 beacons, which were lit across Britain and the capitals of the Commonwealth of Nations; 2,000 guests at a service of thanksgiving at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London; 22,000 attendees at a "Platinum Party at the Palace"; and more than 15,000 official street parties from Edinburgh to Brighton.

A truly magnificent spectacle for a singular sovereign!

As I watched the pageantry unfold—I reluctantly admit that I tuned in to a good chunk of it—I was filled with a curious feeling of wistful bemusement. It all seemed too much and yet not enough at the same time. Too much in the sense that it seemed like a great extravagance for a single person who is, after all, merely a figurehead. And yet not enough, for that same extravagance seemed to suggest that Elizabeth II is a great deal more than a figurehead: She is the mother of the nation, a unifying role she can perform only because she is a figurehead. The leaders of every major political party in Britain, as well as every living former prime minister, attended the service at Saint Paul's. Who else or what else (short of an enemy attack) could unite a country in this way?

I felt wistful because I seem to remember a time when republics could

do this too—generate great moments of national pride and unity—moments when our partisanship would yield to our patriotism. I think of many a Memorial or Veteran's Day, but above all I think of the values and conventions—now under severe threat—that have long undergirded the constitutional order of our own country. There was a time when such values and conventions would compel even the most partisan among us to act for the greater good or in the national interest. We celebrated such moments, priding ourselves, for example, on every peaceful transfer of power, every triumph of the rule of law over the wayward hearts of human beings.

Such moments matter, for they permit us to maintain a continuous national identity amid the vicissitudes of national life. "There is a serious lesson to be learned in the U.S. from the spectacular celebration Britain has just staged," Gerard Baker recently wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*. "The queen's jubilee, marking the longest reign of any monarch in English history, reminds us of the importance of unifying institutions and symbols for a badly fractured country in perilous times.... [N]ational cohesion requires at least something that commands national legitimacy."

Indeed it does. The present age of polarization has unleashed the most ferocious forces, which seem hell-bent on creating a narrow unity only through cynical division, a factionalizing of our citizenry that is contrary to the letter and the spirit of *e pluri-bus unum*. And yet without this national unity, without a shared sense of national purpose, of a greater good that inspires us to rise above our bas-

er instincts, then this great republic of ours can not have much longer to live, for we will have rid ourselves of one tyrant only to find ourselves in the grip of another a mere two and a half centuries later. "The alternate domination of one faction over another," George Washington said in his farewell address, "sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism...and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty."

King George III was said to have told John Adams, the first U.S. ambassador to Great Britain, that he prayed that the new United States of America would "not suffer unduly for its want of a monarchy." Perhaps, in a way, we have suffered, or we are at least in some way suffering now.

I am not calling for the restoration of an American monarchy. But the restoration of those values that safeguard our national life, as well as the spirit of the American Revolution, is an urgent national necessity. We would do well to remember this July 4 that here in America, in the absence of a monarch, the Constitution is sovereign. Yet as Elizabeth II just showed us, sovereigns reign only as long as they elicit the affection and loyalty of their subjects.

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



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CNS photo/Ruby Thomas, The Record

A eucharistic procession in Louisville, Ky., June 6. On June 19, the Feast of Corpus Christi, processions were held across the country to launch the U.S. bishops' three-year National Eucharistic Revival.

Cover: Pope Pius XII standing before the sedia gestatoria, a portable papal throne carried by 12 footmen, July 19, 1951
Everett Collection Historical/Alamy

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The debate continues on Roe

In the editorial for the June 2022 issue (“Roe v. Wade: an End and a Beginning”), **America’s** editors welcomed the U.S. Supreme Court’s draft decision for *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. If an overturning of *Roe v. Wade* is formally adopted as the court’s opinion, the editors wrote, then this decision would remove some of the animus from national politics by leaving debate about such a sensitive issue in the hands of elected representatives rather than unelected judges. They warned, however, that pro-life advocates ought not to enact laws that attempt to define the personhood of an unborn child; doing so “would be the mirror image of *Roe’s* fundamental error,” exacerbating an already fraught issue. **America’s** readers had much to say in response and often disagreed with the magazine’s position.

Nothing is said here about rape or incest. Or of someone who takes advantage of a mentally challenged person. Or of miscarriages. This ruling will discourage women from seeking prenatal care because they won’t want to make their pregnancy official.

We talk a good game about providing social safety nets. But the very people who use that reasoning are the ones who voted against Obamacare, food programs or even free cell phones so they can access emergency services.

Donna Maurillo

It would be so good if we didn’t try to force women to have children, then abandon them once their children have been born, but instead make it easier for them to afford the costs of having their children and raising them. Experience in more socially progressive countries seems to show that many pregnant women would choose life for their children if they thought they could give those children lives of dignity.

Marilyn Martin

Unfortunately, our society is the victim of unbridled individualism, which since the Enlightenment has gradually replaced a Christian worldview. I am human only in relation to other humans. I do not have individual “rights” that cancel out the fundamental right to life. Until we see a philosophical shift that embraces the Christian concept of the value of the human person as the highest value, women will go on fighting for “my body, my right.”

Teresita Scully

While I do not support abortions, the end result of overturning *Roe v. Wade* is that wealthy people will still get abortions and poor people will not. People without wealth will carry to term or die getting an illegal abortion. I am tired and frustrated at all the “easy” answers and the

platitudes from people on such a complex issue.

Stephen Healy

Human life begins at conception. That is science, not religion. Personhood, however, is more debatable. But following science, once a fetus is viable and therefore able to survive on its own outside the womb, it must be recognized as a human being with rights of its own. Arguing that a woman has the right to terminate the life of a viable, unborn baby at her discretion because it is within her body is a morally repugnant argument.

James Carney

What else does **America** want to leave up to the states: the Americans With Disabilities Act? The Clean Air Act?

Cheryl Ashe

Ending *Roe v. Wade* will not bring true justice until the pro-choice and anti-abortion groups come off their “all or nothing” attitudes and listen to their opponents. Nothing will change until public leaders work to build a consensus on the issue rather than continuing a “my way or the highway” rhetoric.

Glenn Barnette

I continue to pray that we can learn to live in a country where the dignity of everyone is respected and justice is for all (not just for those who have the best attorneys). The last sentence of your article afforded dignity to the unborn but it left out mentioning women’s dignity (only justice was required there). Was that a Freudian slip? You have me wondering what you believe justice to be for women.

Christine Gall

Prayer takes many forms.



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Hopes for a Eucharistic Revival

Did your parish have a eucharistic procession on the feast of Corpus Christi in mid-June? The return of this somewhat neglected practice at various churches was one part of the inauguration of a three-year program initiated by the Catholic bishops of the United States to foster a nationwide eucharistic revival, “a movement of Catholics across the United States, healed, converted, formed, and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist—and sent out in mission ‘for the life of the world.’” While the process will rely heavily on grassroots efforts at the parish and diocesan level for much of its duration, it will culminate in a national Eucharistic Congress planned for 80,000 people in Indianapolis in 2024.

Why begin a eucharistic revival now? One reason is that a number of polls over the past decade have shown that many Catholics do not understand what the church teaches about the Eucharist, including a poll by the Pew Research Center in 2019 that showed only one third of U.S. Catholics believed in transubstantiation. Even if those results may have been skewed by the terms used in the polling questions, they showed that a central doctrine of sacramental theology was widely misunderstood.

Clearly, at some level the church needs to improve its catechesis. And a definite positive in the way the bishops have mapped out how the eucharistic revival will take place—through personal outreach and devotional activities as well as education—is that they are taking seriously the notion that fresh approaches are needed. Criticizing the faithful for ignorance or seeking someone to blame will do far less to bring Catholics to a great-

er understanding of the Eucharist than a straightforward approach that stresses the rich, life-giving theology of the sacrament.

A second reason for a eucharistic revival that every practicing Catholic will recognize is the Covid-19 pandemic, which brought about a sacramental famine across the globe for almost two years. As valuable as “Zoom Masses” and televised liturgies were to many, they by definition cannot deliver the tangible “taste and see” reality of the Eucharist—or of Mass itself.

It is also important to recognize that not everyone came back. Even as most churches reopen, there are some Catholics who feel they cannot safely return to Mass because of health conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to infection. Others who previously practiced have grown comfortable with a Sunday that no longer includes Mass. It will be a tragedy if Catholics who long relied on the Eucharist for nourishment simply stick with new habits. In this sense, the danger we face as a church is not so much hostility toward the church and its sacraments, but apathy. But those who have fallen away will not be brought back by being *corrected*. They might be brought back by being *encouraged*.

There is a third reason, too, and it is perhaps not stressed enough: We need to stop thinking of the Eucharist as a reward, or as food for the elect few. Instead, we need to remind ourselves and the world that, in the words of Pope Francis in “The Joy of the Gospel,” the Eucharist is “not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.” It is not and should not be a political weapon. To quote Francis again, “frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather

than its facilitators.” The eucharistic revival offers a chance to remind ourselves and others why we cherish the Eucharist most—and that without God’s grace we would all be unworthy to receive.

There are many in the church who feel the bishops are making the eucharistic revival too significant a priority when the church faces other pressing problems, including financial ones. In a time of parish and school closures and of stark financial shortfalls in many church ministries, it can be tempting to be cynical about the expenditure and effort that is going into this revival. The U.S. bishops have estimated, in fact, that they will need to raise over \$28 million to fund the concluding four-day congress in Indianapolis. Couldn’t the money be better spent elsewhere?

We have been rehashing that argument since the church was in its infancy: “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor” (Mt 26:9). But there is reason to question whether there is something of the evil spirit lurking behind some of the accusations of misplaced priorities in the bishops’ program. If we cannot or will not give of our resources to increase devotion to the Eucharist, does that suggest that reviving Catholics’ understanding of the central place of the sacrament in our lives is simply not worth the trouble? If the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life,” should it not be a priority in a suffering, struggling church to renew and strengthen our relationship with it?

It will also be important as this process continues that at every step of the way, this revival is a synodal

effort, not just a top-down exercise or a project taken up only by wealthy parishes. Outreach is not just inviting others to come and see; it is also literally going to where they are and understanding that reality too.

As a Jesuit ministry, we at **America** also recognize the strong emphasis in Ignatian spirituality on adoration and reception of the Eucharist, as well as the traditional Jesuit apostolate of promoting devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a practice intimately associated with eucharistic devotion. As our contribution to the eucharistic revival, **America** has committed itself to feature regular reflections on the Eucharist for our readers. In the current issue, Joseph Laramie, S.J., explores the connection between eucharistic devotion and reception of Communion and our desire for friendship with God.

“Our world is hurting,” says the website created by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for the National Eucharistic Revival. “We all need healing, yet many of us are separated from the very source of our strength.” Our church, too, is hurting and in need of healing and hope. Can’t we all seek it in the very gift Jesus gave to the people of God?

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Pro-lifers need to listen compassionately to fears about Roe being overturned

Since the leak in early May of a draft of a majority opinion that indicated the Supreme Court was likely to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, there has been a flood of outrage, grief and concern from people opposed to this outcome. I am a dedicated pro-life advocate, but I nevertheless understand that the pro-life movement is perceived by many as a threat not just to legal abortion but also to democratic norms, to civil rights, and to women's health and economic security.

The focus on overturning *Roe* may have been unavoidable given the pro-choice movement's absolutist rejection of any regulation of abortion as long as *Roe* stands. But that strategy has created distrust among both people who favor legal abortion and those who are uncomfortable with abortion but do not feel represented by the pro-life movement. We in the pro-life movement need to convince our fellow citizens in conscience to protect the lives of the unborn. Such work begins with recognizing why many do not understand our good motives.

Even as I offer a critique about the political strategies that led to this moment, I am fully supportive of overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Foremost, this is because there are incontrovertibly unique unborn human lives being destroyed in abortion, even if there is no fully neutral way to determine when those lives ought to be counted as persons. Those lives deserve legal protection, even as we recognize that good laws toward this end are difficult to frame because of an inevitable tension with women's bodily integrity. The difficulty of writing such good laws does not amount to a constitutional prohibition, either implicit or explicit, on protecting the unborn.

I also support overturning *Roe* because it has deranged our politics by incentivizing recourse to the courts rather than legal compromise, establishing all-or-nothing stakes for every Supreme Court nomination and leading lawmakers to craft bad laws designed to evade judicial review. *Roe* has brought five decades' worth of controversy caused by the unwarranted constitutionalization of a moral issue on which Americans remain deeply divided. Overturning the 1973 decision is the necessary next step on a long and difficult road to a de-escalation of the zero-sum political conflict between pro-lifers and pro-choicers.

With that preamble, here are some reasons why the pro-life movement's political strategy until now has engendered such distrust and fear.

Establishing a Supreme Court majority to overturn Roe depended on the violation of many institutional norms and is part of a pattern of minoritarian governance. When Justice Antonin Scalia died, the Senate majority, led by Mitch McConnell, refused even to hold hearings for Barack Obama's nominee, Merrick Garland, leaving the seat vacant for more than a year until Donald J. Trump became president. Adding insult to injury, the conservative nominations that have shaped the current court have come from two presidents—George W. Bush in his first term and Mr. Trump—who won Electoral College victories while losing the popular vote. Also, because each state has the same number of votes in the Senate, the majorities that confirmed their nominees represented far less than half of the population. While these confirmations are constitutionally valid, they do not represent a mandate for major changes in constitutional interpretation.

Commitment to Mr. Trump has telegraphed disdain for democratic norms and lack of concern for women's dignity. From the revelation of Mr. Trump's disgusting comments about women shortly before the 2016 election to his advancement of the "Big Lie" that the 2020 election was stolen, it has seemed that much of the pro-life movement will tolerate any behavior from him.

The commitment to overturning Roe has enabled the conservative legal movement to pursue a much broader agenda, including attacks on civil rights. In addition to *Roe*, the justices appointed by Republican presidents have taken aim at other longstanding precedents. The Roberts court has found much of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional, only barely upheld the Affordable Care Act, rejected a number of campaign finance reform laws, invalidated many gun control measures and struck down many forms of federal regulatory authority. There are fears that rejecting *Roe*'s reasoning about a right to privacy will imperil other precedents regarding access to contraception, L.G.B.T. civil rights and same-sex marriage. The draft opinion attempts to distinguish abortion from these other cases, but many do not trust that these other precedents are secure.

Laws designed to get around the protections in place under Roe have been disingenuously explained or appear vindictive. The Mississippi law under review in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* case, for which the draft opinion was leaked, is a direct challenge to *Roe* in that it restricts abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. However, a number of other laws that try to get around *Roe* have al-

A demonstrator near the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington on June 7.



ready been enacted. Some impose requirements on abortion clinics that are ostensibly to protect patient safety but are widely understood to make the clinics too difficult or expensive to operate. (The Supreme Court struck down such a law in 2016 but would presumably let them stand if Roe is reversed.) Most recently, a Texas law set up a bounty-based private enforcement mechanism in order to avoid a preliminary injunction against the law. The law incentivizes private actors by offering a financial reward to report abortion providers or anyone who “aids or abets” an abortion—it does at least exempt the pregnant woman herself—and imposes the burden and cost of defense on anyone so accused.

Laws limiting abortion sometimes threaten medically necessary care, such as for ectopic pregnancies or miscarriages. Depending on how laws banning or restricting abortion are framed, they can sometimes apply over-broadly to medical care that is necessary for life-threatening situations in pregnancy, and not only to elective abortions. Because of liability fears where medical exceptions are not clearly established, these laws can have a chilling effect on the willingness of doctors and hospitals to provide necessary emergency care in these situations. While the vast majority of pro-lifers recognize these situations as morally distinct from abortion, legislators have often been uninformed and careless about dealing with these exceptions. There have also been situations where women have been investigated and prosecuted following miscarriages. Even if laws are carefully written to avoid such outcomes, further legal restrictions on abortion

could increase the risk of overzealous prosecution.

The pro-life movement’s political allies have gutted safety net programs that make it easier for women to carry pregnancies to term. Any number of policies, such as guaranteed parental leave or child tax credits, would go a long way toward reducing economic insecurity as an incentive for abortion. But often these measures have met with intense Republican opposition. While many in the pro-life movement provide charitable support to crisis pregnancy centers and similar resources, a patchwork of private options cannot replace reliable policies of economic security for parents and children.

•••

Some pro-choice readers, seeing the catalog of problems listed above, may feel confirmed in their assumption that the pro-life movement is untrustworthy and dangerous. Some pro-life readers may have a ready explanation for why many of the issues noted above are reasonable responses to other excesses from the pro-choice side.

But I am not making a “both sides are terrible” argument here. Rather, I am asking what is necessary and pos-

sible so that we can move forward in a world where Roe v. Wade no longer shapes the entire landscape of political discussion about abortion.

Roe itself was a tragic failure, costing millions of unborn lives and causing decades of political rancor. As a consequence of this failure, our country has not been able to guarantee women a better choice than abortion, even as it has accepted the lie that autonomy and freedom can be guaranteed only by the option to destroy an innocent life.

If we are finally able to turn the page in our struggle over abortion, all people of good will—but most especially those in the pro-life movement who have finally won in court—will need to listen to others’ convictions and concerns. For the pro-life movement, that starts with understanding what people on the other side are afraid of and how we have contributed to that fear. We will not quickly convince others to change their minds, but we can at least try to move past fear and hope for a better future together.

Sam Sawyer, S.J., is a senior editor and the director of digital strategy at America Media. Twitter: @SSawyerSJ.

A photograph showing a woman in a red shawl holding a young boy in a striped shirt, with another child nearby, in a dry, rural setting. The background consists of tall, dry stalks of crops, possibly corn, under a clear blue sky. The ground is dry and dusty.

Conflict, Covid and climate change threaten to create an unprecedented global hunger crisis

By Kevin Clarke

Surveying conditions across East Africa, Shaun Ferris does not like what he sees. Continuing drought and erratic temperatures and rainfall are disrupting the sowing and harvesting strategies of the region's farmers. Some are turning for the first time to irrigation methods that will add new pressure to withering ecosystems.

Covid and conflict have had a devastating impact across East Africa and the Sahel region, he said. Unemployment and hunger are rising together. The tourist industry has been hard hit; hotels and restaurants have closed. Working people have been returning to home villages that have been devastated by four years of drought.

Mr. Ferris, speaking from Nairobi, Kenya, is the director of agriculture and livelihoods for Catholic Relief Services. Inflation is making food too expensive for the poor, and it is putting agriculture inputs—fuel, seed, fertilizer—out of reach for farmers, he said. They may sow much less or not at all this season.

Americans may be shocked by the price increases they have experienced in recent months that amount to an annual inflation rate of over 8 percent. But in Sudan, he said, consumers have been contending with annual inflation that has ranged between 220 percent and more than 300 percent. Other developing nations in Africa have endured

rates between 15 percent and 66 percent.

Mr. Ferris is coordinating the agency's regional response to an emerging hunger crisis that threatens 15 million people across East Africa, including two million children who are near starvation.

In some pastoralist communities, he reported, herders have lost 70 percent of their livestock to the heat and the evaporation of watering holes. In all of these regions, he said, "you have very culturally traditional livestock herders. They don't grow any crops; they just live on milk and sales of meat. And if they lose their 'crop,' their livestock, that's it."

He was already worried about hunger before the Russian war on Ukraine threw global energy and food markets into even greater upheaval. Everything he is seeing now suggests that hunger will become an even greater threat soon.

A global pandemic, supply chain breakdowns, drought driven by climate change, inflation spikes and now a war on the European continent between two nations that normally perform the role of global breadbasket: If an evil genius were trying to stir together geopolitical calamities sure to end in a hunger disaster, he could hardly do better.

According to the World Food Program, 276 million people worldwide were already facing acute hunger at the

A mother helps her malnourished son stand after he collapsed near their hut in the village of Lomoputh in northern Kenya on May 12.

start of 2022. That number is expected to rise by 47 million if the conflict in Ukraine continues, with the steepest increases in sub-Saharan Africa.

Bill O’Keefe, Catholic Relief Services’ executive vice president for mission and mobilization, agreed that the current convergence of crises is breathtaking. At the same time, he said, the looming hunger crisis does not come as a complete shock.

Long before Vladimir Putin’s war on Ukraine, small conflicts—what Pope Francis has described as a “piecemeal” third world war—have been displacing people and disrupting growing seasons and food markets around the world. “Covid, climate change and conflict are force multipliers of hunger and poverty, and that’s what we’re seeing,” Mr. O’Keefe said.

War in Ukraine has “sped up” the potential hunger disaster, “but the basic underlying drivers of this situation have been in place for years,” Mr. O’Keefe said.

As Pope Francis has frequently pointed out, Covid is exposing all the weaknesses and contradictions of the global market in finance, goods and commodities, as well as “our system’s failure to meet [the] needs” of the world’s most vulnerable people.

That grim assessment is not meant to diminish the immediate cascading impacts deriving from the drama in Ukraine. According to the United Nations, Ukraine and Russia together produce 30 percent of the world’s wheat, 20 percent of the world’s corn and up to 80 percent of the world’s sunflower seed oil. Developing nations in Asia, Africa and Central America have become especially reliant on commodity imports from Ukraine and Russia.

The direct losses to the global market because of the war create secondary effects, Mr. O’Keefe said. Even states that do not import from Ukraine or Russia will have to pay more for the food commodities that are available. That will mean price spikes across markets for farmers, herders and, finally, consumers.

“The people at the bottom are going to find it much more difficult to buy food,” said Mr. O’Keefe. A “tertiary impact” will land on relief and development agencies like C.R.S., “trying to stretch dollars to meet needs.”

“In Madagascar, for example, for our food assistance program, the prices of food that we have to buy are up 200

to 300 percent,” Mr. O’Keefe said. That could mean half rations for the world’s already hungry people, as “fewer people can be assisted for the same amount of money.”

How bad could hunger get? Mr. O’Keefe rattles off some alarming figures. In Afghanistan, after years of conflict, drought and now financial collapse and political instability, seven to 10 million people are threatened by hunger and another 10 million are food insecure. In a third year of drought in the Horn of Africa, with “coping mechanisms” worn out and family and farm assets being sold for survival, another “20 million plus” will need assistance. Millions more around the world will be facing hunger in a matter of months.

The good news, according to Mr. O’Keefe, is that the Biden administration has taken precautionary action, attaching \$5 billion in global humanitarian aid to its latest supplemental \$40 billion package for Ukraine.

But Mr. O’Keefe worries that European powers will be too distracted by Russia’s war on Ukraine to attend properly to crisis overflow from other parts of the world, and especially that European leaders may become reluctant to commit to new spending while their own economic and food security remain in flux because of the war. Sweden provided evidence that such concerns were warranted. It announced in April that it would divert 20 percent of its foreign aid budget to an emergency program to resettle more than 76,000 Ukrainian refugees.

“In other words, Sweden will become the biggest recipient of its own development aid,” Carl Björkman, an analyst at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, told Devex, an independent news organization that covers international relief issues.

Proactive efforts over the next growing and harvest seasons will be critical to avoid a worst-case hunger catastrophe. But ultimately Mr. O’Keefe and other church actors in humanitarian aid hope to break out of recurring cycles of panic and neglect, a pattern typified, he said, by the U.S. response to Covid-19—vigorous masking and vaccination campaigns embraced and abandoned as numbers and political resistance fluctuated. In the end, the overall effort allowed the illness to become endemic.

“We just learned in the last couple of weeks that the number of people who have died around the world is not five million, but 15 million, and the number of people in our own country is over a million.” But despite those numbers, “the appetite for continuing to fight this globally so that there aren’t more variants and that people overseas have the same protections that we have here” has diminished dramatically.

AP Photo/Brian Inganga

“It’s the same with climate change,” Mr. O’Keefe said. “The country has not fully grappled with the seriousness of the problem because we just can’t seem to keep our eye on these bigger, long-term trends long enough to make progress on them.”

That could be a fruitful role for U.S. Catholic voters and taxpayers, he suggested—demanding patience and persistence from politicians on complex and challenging global threats.

By way of example he noted that the \$5 billion proposed for humanitarian assistance was approved just a few weeks after \$5 billion had been quietly stripped from America’s international Covid-19 response.

“That’s a problem,” Mr. O’Keefe said. “We have to be able to do two things at once—respond to humanitarian needs and also continue to vaccinate people around the world and lay the groundwork for the...lessening of the impact of Covid.”

Covid, climate change, hunger and conflict—the various crises interrelate, he said; they cannot be addressed in isolation.

“The challenge, really for all Americans but for Catholics in particular, is not to follow the media in its movement from crisis to crisis,” Mr. O’Keefe said. “We have to keep our eye on the prize even as we meet short-term needs.”

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

ROBERT W. McELROY OF SAN DIEGO ONLY NORTH AMERICAN AMONG NEW CROP OF CARDINALS

Bishop Robert W. McElroy of the Diocese of San Diego was the only North American among 21 churchmen from 16 countries chosen by Pope Francis to be elevated to the cardinalate in a consistory on Aug. 27 in Rome. Sixteen of the cardinals-designate are under the age of 80 and eligible to vote in a conclave to elect a new pope.

Cardinal-designate McElroy told reporters on May 31 that he believed the pope selected him because he wanted a cardinal on the U.S. West Coast and because of his support for the pope’s pastoral and ecclesial priorities. “Pope Francis has a series of initiatives that he’s trying to bring to the life of the church,” he said, “and I have tried to take those initiatives and plant them here.”

The cardinals-designate include three senior members of the Roman

Curia: Cardinal-designate Arthur Roche of England, head of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments; Cardinal-designate Lazarus You Heung-sik of South Korea, head of the Congregation for the Clergy; and Cardinal-designate Fernando Vérgez Alzaga of Spain, head of the office in charge of Vatican City State operations.

Cardinal-designate Giorgio Marengo, apostolic prefect of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, will be the youngest cleric with a red hat. He celebrated his 48th birthday in June. Mongolia, which has a Catholic population of 1,359, will now have its first cardinal, as will Singapore with Cardinal-designate William Goh Seng Chye, and Paraguay with Cardinal-designate Adalberto Martínez Flores of Asunción.

AFTER THE CONSISTORY



83

CREATED BY POPE FRANCIS



38

CREATED BY POPE BENEDICT XVI



11

CREATED BY ST. JOHN PAUL II

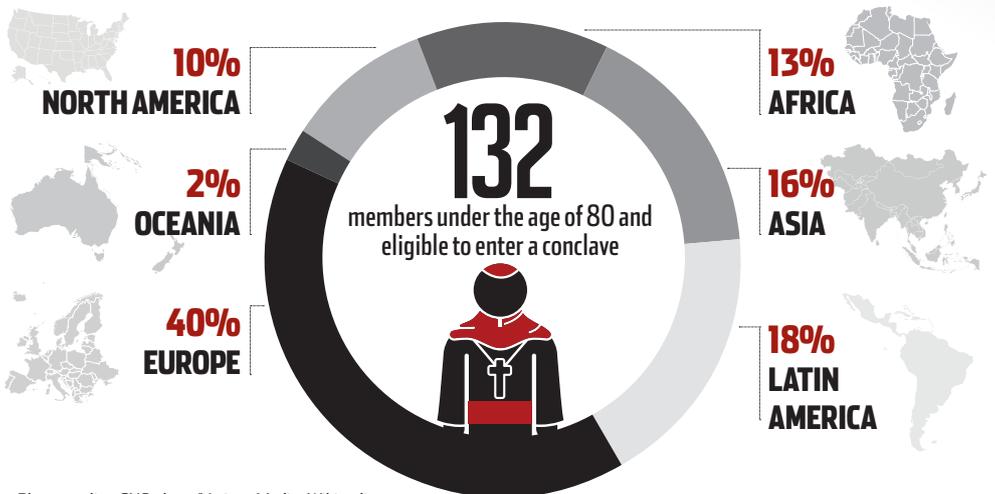


Photo credits: CNS photo/Vatican Media, Wikipedia
 Source: Catholic News Service

Two years after George Floyd's murder, California bishops confront the 'collective sin of racism'

The killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis provoked a national conversation about racism that continues two years after his death. In the aftermath of Mr. Floyd's murder, the bishops of California and Black Catholic leaders there formed an African-American Anti-Racism Task Force to address the "collective sin of racism."

The purpose of the task force is "to listen to one another, to engage in frank dialogue, and to take action to identify and dismantle instances of racism in our homes, in our parishes, in our schools and in the communities we serve," according to a statement from the California Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in California.

As part of the initiative, every diocese in California has designated a point person to work with the state task force, giving feedback and sharing best practices on how to address racism in parishes, schools and religious formation programs. The task force is also researching anti-racism programs at the state's Catholic universities, seminaries, schools and diaconate formation programs.

As an auxiliary bishop in the Diocese of San Diego—he was appointed in June to head the Diocese of Phoenix—the Most Rev. John Dolan headed up the effort. He hopes the initiative will keep "communication alive in every facet of our California Catholic enterprise. In our seminars, high schools and grade schools, are we making sure that we are talking about anti-racism?"

"If we don't keep that dialogue alive, then there's going to be a vacuum," Bishop Dolan said. "And we've seen the result of that. Someone will be happy to fill that vacuum with hatred, fear and anxiety."

Anderson F. Shaw, director of the African American Catholic Center for Evangelization, has taken part in the anti-racism initiative both at the state level with the conference and in his local diocese, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. "I think you could say without a doubt that there's a lot more awareness of the issue of racism because of the [visibility of the treatment] that George Floyd received," he said. "That was a shock to a lot of folks."

In the past, Mr. Shaw said, many church leaders have



Remembering George Floyd outside Cup Foods in Minneapolis in March 2021

Chris photo/Octavio Jones, Reuters

been quick to issue statements but slow to enact new policies. But now he describes himself as "cautiously optimistic" that bishops are seeking guidance and ready to listen.

The process must go beyond statements and involve the chancery, schools and other diocesan institutions to address racism on both local and broader, systemic levels. "It's not only to address the issue of racism at the parish level, for example, but also to look at the systemic racism that occurs many times within the offices and the hiring practices of people in the archdiocese," Mr. Shaw said. "So all of that is in play."

The number of African American young adults leaving the church is another issue Mr. Shaw would like archdiocesan leaders to address. "Young adults don't see themselves in the liturgy. They don't see themselves in the different ministries that go on," he said.

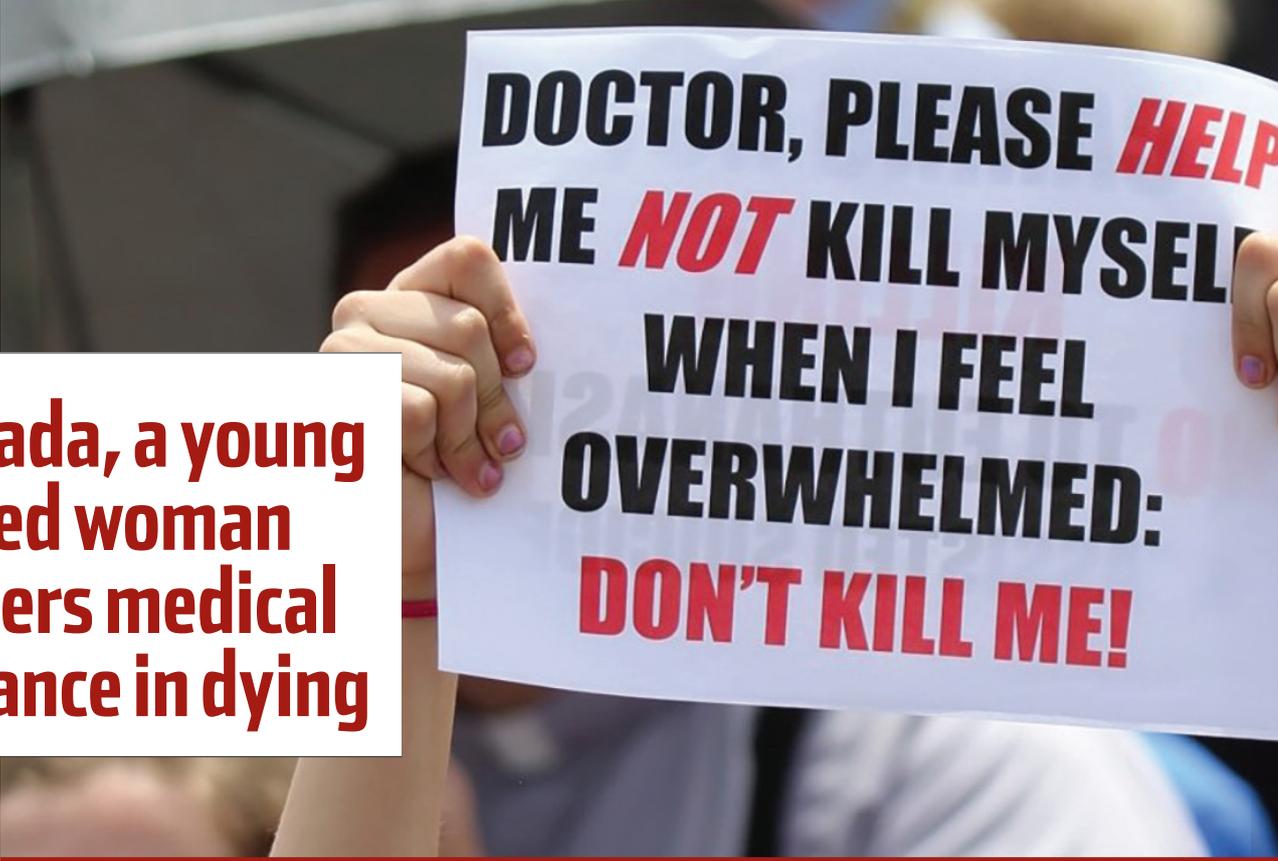
Archdiocese leaders could help mediate, he said, helping young adults become ushers, lectors and eucharistic ministers. "That is where I think we'll make a big difference," he said.

"In terms of the issue of people experiencing individual racism on a daily basis at their parishes, there needs to be constant engagement of people on both sides," Mr. Shaw said, noting the ongoing, long-term challenge of addressing racism passed down through families.

On a structural level, though, he believes meaningful change can happen in the near future.

"I think we're in an environment now where, if everybody gets serious about it, something can happen," Mr. Shaw said. "I believe that if the archbishop and his leaders are really serious about that, those changes can be made."

J.D. Long-García, *senior editor*.
Twitter: @jdlonggarcia.



In Canada, a young disabled woman considers medical assistance in dying

After years struggling to find an apartment adapted to relieve symptoms of her acute environmental hypersensitivity, a 31-year-old Toronto woman applied for and received preliminary approval for medical assistance in dying. Although that process continues, the young woman told supporters in May that an unexpected showing of generosity from a social media campaign has persuaded her that she may yet be able to find a long-term housing solution and she remains hopeful that there may be other options to reduce her suffering.

The young woman, identified to the media only as Denise to protect her privacy, has an inherited condition called Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which causes various spinal disorders, like craniocervical instability, that can produce headaches, memory issues and an inability to concentrate. Due to this rare underlying condition, Denise uses a wheelchair.

She has developed 16 other diagnosed disabilities and illnesses, including multiple chemical sensitivities. Her environmental hypersensitivity means that she can experience dramatic allergic reactions when exposed to very low levels of chemicals like those found in laundry detergents, air fresheners or cigarette smoke.

She reports that her symptoms improved dramatically after she was recently rehoused in a hotel with good air circulation and limited exposure to smoke and chemicals from laundry detergents and air sanitizers. “I’m not in survival mode anymore,” she said. “I’m not gasping for air; I

don’t have to wear a mask to sleep; and I see a reduction in migraines and other symptoms.”

Her hotel stay is being funded through a GoFundMe campaign, “Save a Life With Safe Housing,” launched by Well Earth Collaborative, a group that supports patients like Denise.

After applying for Medical Assistance in Dying in 2021, Denise quickly received preliminary approval. “I chose MAiD because I’m stuck living in abject poverty,” she said. She explained that she had been feeling emotionally and physically exhausted, as well as increasingly hopeless about finding relief for her suffering. Denise told Canadian media that applying to government authorities for assistance with dying proved far easier than dealing with the housing bureaucracy.

Denise’s case is not the first of its kind in Canada. In February, a 51-year-old Canadian woman identified only as Sophia, who also had multiple chemical sensitivities, went through with her decision to die with government assistance. Sophia’s and Denise’s experiences could open up the door for many more MAiD applications of this kind, David Fancy warned. Mr. Fancy is a drama professor at Brock University who helped organize the GoFundMe campaign for Denise. “There are dozens of other people who have said they could take their own lives in the same way,” he said.

“I think this case is really the tip of the iceberg [that reveals] an incredible failure of social services,” Bishop Noël



CNS photo/Art Babych

A rally against medical assistance in dying on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Ontario, in October 2020



Back row: Ricardo da Silva, S.J.; Sam Sawyer, S.J.; Robert Collins, S.J.; front row: Jim McDermott, S.J.; Joe Hoover, S.J.

GOODNEWS: Sam Sawyer to be America's 15th editor in chief

America Media will have a new leader beginning on Dec. 1. Sam Sawyer, S.J., will take the helm of the 113-year-old magazine and digital publishing ministry following the editor in chief, Matt Malone, S.J.

Father Sawyer, a native of Scranton, Pa., and a graduate of Boston College and Loyola University Chicago, joined **America's** staff in 2015. He is currently a senior editor and director of digital strategy. He oversaw the redesign of the America Media website and helped lead the transition to a digital subscription-based model for **America** content.

"Sam has elevated the access to and quality of our content through his leadership throughout our digital transformation," said Susan Braddock, the chair of America Media's board of directors. "We look forward to continuing this momentum with Sam in his new expanded role."

Father Sawyer entered the Jesuits in 2004 and was ordained a priest in 2014. He served as an associate pastor at Holy Trinity Church in Washington, D.C., and currently assists the pastoral team at St. Francis Xavier Church in New York City. In 2012, Father Sawyer co-founded *The Jesuit Post*.

Father Sawyer takes charge at a difficult moment for Catholic journalism. Several diocesan newspapers have ceased publication in recent years, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops recently announced it would close the U.S. operations of Catholic News Service. At the same time, decreased religiosity in the United States, especially among younger people, has presented demographic challenges to the church.

"**America's** contributions to a charitable, informed and faithful conversation at the intersection of the church and the world are more important than ever," Father Sawyer said. "I am honored and humbled to help lead **America** forward alongside colleagues I admire."

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

Simard, spokesperson on ethical issues for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, said.

"We are moving toward an easy solution instead of [finding] the means to support a person and helping her to have better living conditions. This is a social and economic issue, but it shows that our society is trivializing death.

"We're still in the process of making euthanasia more and more accessible," he said, "and I find that incredibly dangerous."

Medically assisted dying has been legal in Canada since 2016, and justifications for its use have been expanding. Beginning in 2023, Canada could become one of the few countries in the world that allows patients with severe mental health problems to appeal for MAiD.

Denise hopes her story will shed light on the lack of services in Canada for people with spinal disorders and multiple chemical sensitivities. "I wish for myself and others that there were safe places built with environmental counseling," she said. "I hope we can help others to never be in this situation."

Miriane Demers-Lemay is a Canadian freelance contributor. Twitter: @MirianeDL.

Accompanying—and learning from—family life is a lesson from ‘Amoris Laetitia’

According to Lisa Sowle Cahill, a professor of moral theology at Boston College, one theme that stood out at a Vatican conference on moral theology and “Amoris Laetitia” in May was “the gap between received church teaching and the experiences of families.”

Church teaching in past decades, she said, includes “very rigid and static ideals that are missing some of the good things that are going on in the lives of married couples and families.” Speaking from her decades-long experience of married life, she said family life can involve struggle, pain and disappointment, “but in and through all of that there’s still survival, there’s love, there are family bonds, and I think that is the original standpoint of ‘Amoris Laetitia.’”

She noted that “what the church in the past tended to look at was irregularity or sin or what is not acceptable.” “Amoris Laetitia,” in contrast, “is about authentic faithfulness, courage, perseverance, real fidelity and authenticity that is still present in families.” At the conference, which was held at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Dr. Cahill focused on the discrepancy between teaching and experience.

Dr. Cahill was “really struck” by what Pope Francis said during a plane ride home from Georgia in October 2016 about the importance of accompanying transgender people. She believes his “remarks can be applied more widely.”

The pope emphasized that “not every case is the same, but we have to accompany, we have to discern, we have to integrate, we have to learn, and that is what Jesus would do today.”

“I think that attitude—‘What would Jesus do?’—is the hallmark of ‘Amoris Laetitia,’” Dr. Cahill said.

“There’s a broadening of perspective and a widening of the conversation that includes not only marriage and family in the traditional sense but more openness to L.G.B.T.Q. individuals and their families and recognition that they too are already part of the church,” Dr. Cahill continued. “It’s not that the church must reach out; they are here.”

Dr. Cahill said there has “sometimes been the assumption...that all these families are very oppressed by the



Pope Francis greets newly married couples during his general audience in St. Peter's Square in September 2015.

teachings of the church, and they are in pain and they want greater room.” But, she said, “what you see in many countries...is an alienation of the younger generations. They are not really in pain because they are disregarding what the church has to say.”

She said this is “so unfortunate.” Although young people sometimes adopt new values that “are an improvement,” Dr. Cahill said, “sometimes [these values] don’t offer much in terms of a moral and value framework with which to encounter the cultures that they live in.” She cited the so-called hook-up culture and “the very free-ranging sexual ethos” on many U.S. college campuses as one example of a negative development.

Dr. Cahill emphasized, however, that “this doesn’t mean that we need to go back to pre-Vatican II Catholic sexual teaching, or even to Vatican II-era moral teaching. Rather, what we need today is a sensible and Christian perspective on relationships that is viable in the world in which we live.”

She notes that people “often say, ‘Pope Francis needs to change the rules to what the reality is.’” But, she said, “he’s the pope of a global church, and I think he’s very aware that the debate in the family synod clearly demonstrated that not every change he might be willing to make would be acceptable in the societies that the African cardinals come from, or indeed some of the other cardinals.”

The pope has a “daunting task,” she said, “making a huge move forward without tipping the boat. He’s got to be a leader for the whole church, and without being paternalistic, he has to try to keep the family together.”

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



Photo by Matthieu de La Roche Foucauld

Just miles from the frontline, the church carries on in Odesa

Archpriest Maximian Pogorelovskiy inside Holy Martyrs Adrian and Natalia Church

The city of Odesa in southwestern Ukraine is only a dozen miles or so from the front line where Russian and Ukrainian armies have been trading artillery fire since the Russian invasion began in February. Despite the warring armies so close by, in Odesa life goes on. Parks are filled with families walking with their children and shops are open though barricaded. When an air raid siren sounds, only a few people actually run for the shelters.

But Russian missile strikes have claimed civilian lives in Odesa, and the fear of an indiscriminate attack is ever present. Odesans turn to their faith to deal with anxiety and sadness, but even church ground is not completely safe from this war.

On May 2, the Holy Iveron monastery compound was struck by a rocket, and a teenage boy was killed and his sister wounded. The church itself was partially damaged. Scores of religious sites have been damaged or destroyed across Ukraine since the beginning of the war. Twelve priests have been killed so far.

“Russia claims to be an Orthodox country, but the Saturday before Easter they refused to sign [an Easter truce], proposed by Ukraine. This is not Christian behavior,” said Archpriest Maximian Pogorelovskiy, a spokesperson for the Orthodox Diocese of Odesa.

Father Pogorelovskiy often comments on social network sites to denounce the war. He said he was unconcerned about possible retaliation should Russian forces eventually succeed in seizing Odesa.

“What must happen will happen,” he said.

Faced with the upheaval of the war, the Orthodox Church has been transforming itself into an emergency resource for the people, offering church buildings as bomb shelters and sponsoring humanitarian assistance. “The

church of Odesa shares the pain of its inhabitants,” said Father Pogorelovskiy. “The church is not a building; it is people.

“We have organized distributions of bread and water, for example, in Mykolaiv,” Father Pogorelovskiy said. It is an extra duty that comes easily to him. In addition to his clerical duties, Father Pogorelovskiy supplements his family income—he and his wife have two children—by working as a baker.

Mykolaiv is a two-hour drive east from Odesa; it has been without running water for over

three weeks because of Russian shelling. Church members offer accommodation and food when they can to people fleeing the fighting. “But above all, we pray,” Father Pogorelovskiy said. “We pray a lot.”

At the Cathedral of the Assumption in the city center, priests have been running a 24-hour prayer service. Some believers come in to watch silently; others follow the priests in prayer. “The priests come from all the churches around the city, and usually stay for several hours before a relay arrives,” a merchant selling candles at the entrance of the church explained. “They pray for peace,” she said. “They pray [with an icon of] the Mother of God, Mary, called *Kasperovskaya* here.” Miraculous powers have been attributed to the icon. “She saved Odesa several times, including during World War II, so we turn to her,” Father Pogorelovskiy said.

Benches have been removed from all the churches in the country; the Divine Liturgy is celebrated standing up in case a rapid evacuation to a shelter is required. The faithful have been coming more often to church these days, according to Father Pogorelovskiy.

Staying focused on prayer “when you hear bombs is very difficult,” he said. But the church has become a place of refuge for the population, especially when air raid sirens begin sounding.

Many residents, fearing that Odesa may eventually share the same fate as Mariupol or other cities targeted by the Russians, have already fled. But Father Pogorelovskiy is determined to stay and share the city’s fate.

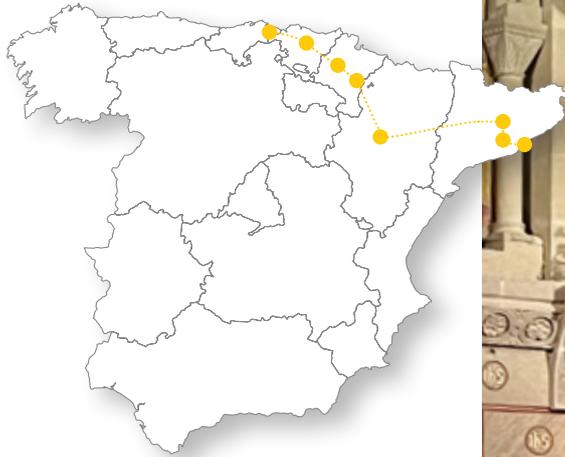
“We priests,” he said, “none of us want to leave our city.”

Clotilde Bigot is a freelance journalist based in Beirut, Lebanon. Twitter: @Clo_Bigot.

INSIDE AMERICA

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

America Media is more than a media resource. We also bring our community of subscribers, listeners and viewers spiritual and educational experiences via exclusive events and leading life-changing pilgrimages.



AMERICA'S IGNATIAN SPAIN PILGRIMAGE APRIL 24-MAY 2, 2022

This spring, 41 pilgrims joined us on the pilgrimage to Spain to celebrate the Ignatian Year. In partnership with Boston College High School and Xavier High School, we journeyed through and prayed at formative places in the life of St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier.



Matt Malone, S.J., celebrates Mass with Patrick Nolan, S.J., right, and Deacon Joe Persinger at the home of St. Francis Xavier in Javier.



Tom and Barbara McKiernan

Highlights included a trip to Loyola to visit Ignatius' home, where he was brought to convalesce after the battle at Pamplona; Javier (Xavier), the castle that was home to Francis Xavier; the lofty Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, where Ignatius dedicated his life to God before the image of the Black Madonna; and Manresa, where Ignatius had his greatest religious epiphany and where he spent about a year writing the Spiritual Exercises.

In addition to viewing the sites, pilgrims had time for personal reflection, meditation and prayer on this deeply spiritual journey. We also enjoyed the architectural wonders of the great city of Barcelona and the delicious Spanish food and drinks! Thank you to all of our pilgrims for joining us.

If you are interested in learning more about America Media's Travel Program, please contact Heather Trotta, V.P. for Advancement, at htrotta@americamedia.org.



In the good company of like-minded pilgrims, we followed the life and conversion of St. Ignatius Loyola across the beautiful Spanish countryside, as he searched for meaning, eventually founding the Society of Jesus. We experienced amazing sights, history and spiritual awareness along the way.”

Tom and Barbara Kiernan



Tim Reidy, Matt Malone, S.J., Grace Cotter Regan and Heather Trotta



Joe and Gayle Corcoran, Jen Anderson, Grace Cotter Regan and Patrick Nolan, S.J., from BC High School

NEW: AMERICA'S DAILY SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

As a subscriber, you may remember the daily Scripture reflections you received in your email inbox during the past few seasons of Advent and Lent. These reflections, written by **America** staff members and contributors, provided inspiration for these holy seasons and allowed you to get to know our staff and writers better.

Starting this summer, these reflections won't be limited to Advent and Lent. **Instead, we'll deliver them to you, our loyal subscribers, year-round!** You're all set if your print subscription is already linked to your website account. You should start receiving these reflections in your inbox in July.

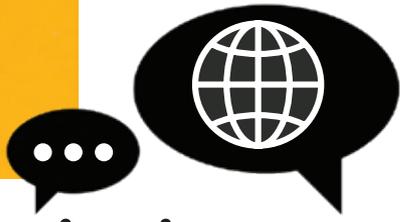
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We look forward to reading and reflecting on Scripture with you year-round!





KEEP LEARNING



Pope Francis gives us a model for continuing the synod process. Let's follow it.

By Robert W. McElroy

Can synodality become a deeper element of Catholic life in the United States? Our current process may prove this to be so. One of the central sentiments expressed in our diocesan synodal consultations has been that the people of God have at times not been meaningfully heard and responded to in the institutional life of the church, and they fear that the synodal process might be another in a series of moments when hopes are raised only to be frustrated. But the current synod process offers a glimpse of a church yet to come. Hundreds of thousands of Catholics have engaged with the church on their joys, their sorrows and their hopes for what the church can be today and tomorrow.

Across the United States, dioceses, parishes and religious communities have undertaken intensive processes of consultation and dialogue in order to help prepare for the global synod on synodality that will take place in Rome in October 2023. Soon, each local church will forward to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops a formal report on their consultation, which will contribute to the work of the global church.

The breadth of consultation within dioceses across our nation provides real hope that synodality will become a deeper element of Catholic life in the United States. But there is a structural dilemma embedded in the consultation process that threatens to undermine the path-

way to deeper synodality. Ironically, the very success that ecclesial communities in our country have had in beginning the process of synodal consultation magnifies this dilemma.

The process of consultation that we have initiated has given participants a glimpse of what sustained synodality might mean. Some dioceses have already fashioned a process to continue the building of synodality in the coming months. But once the reports to Washington have been sent, there will be a strong and natural institutional tendency in most dioceses to let the process of synodality at local levels go dormant until after the pope's apostolic exhortation on the universal synod is released in 2024. Understandably, many will want to wait until the deliberations of the universal church are completed before taking action.

Embracing such a pathway will frustrate our people and stunt movement toward transformation. A two-year period of suspense in the development of synodality in our local churches, particularly regarding the parish- and diocesan-level questions that the consultation process has already yielded, will deeply reinforce these fears.

Fortunately, the theology and practice of synodality that have already emerged from the Second Vatican Council and the writings and actions of Pope Francis provide an architecture for us

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Cardinal Mario Grech, center, secretary general of the Synod of Bishops, and other Vatican officials lead an online listening session with 30 people who have disabilities on May 19.

Every Christian community must ask itself how it can sustain and support its members in their efforts to bring the Gospel into the world.

to continue substantive synodal formation during the next two years. This architecture consists of three elements: the see-judge-act methodology that lies at the heart of the synodal process, the characteristics of a synodal church that Pope Francis has articulated, and the overwhelming imperative for constant and effective evangelization that has been a hallmark of the pontificates of St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict and Pope Francis.

See-Judge-Act

In the years following the First World War, Joseph Cardijn became a worker priest in Brussels, seeking to organize working men and women in pursuit of justice. While doing so, he came to understand that true work on behalf of justice and solidarity required a process of genuinely coming to know the real world situations that workers confronted, of judging these realities in the light of the Gospel and then of choosing to act concretely to transform the world they faced. “See-judge-act,” the dynamic of engagement that Cardijn brought to the world, became an electrifying construct for confronting injustice—revealing its contradictions to Catholic faith and generating bold and sustained action.

St. John XXIII brought this penetrating insight and framework to the world in his encyclical “*Mater et Magistra*.” The church of Latin America adopted this framework as a primary method of engaging with the realities of human life and the renewal of the church. And the *encuentro* process that deeply enriched the church in the United States during the last decade placed “see-judge-act” at its very center. An understanding of the three steps of this basic framework in the context of our current synodal moment

in the United States is helpful in appreciating its potential for advancing synodal formation during the next two years.

1. See clearly. One of the most striking elements of “*Laudato Si*” was its clear and bold analysis of the empirical realities that threaten the earth, which is our common home. Seeing the situation clearly is the foundation for the whole of the encyclical. In pursuing the synodal renewal of our church, we must engage comprehensively in just such a process of analysis, observation, listening and illumination. We must be attentive to “the signs of the times,” those conditions that structure our world and the possibilities for renewal. Prominent among these are the church’s sinful legacy of sexual abuse as well as secularism, the denial of religious freedom, the destruction of the earth, racism, abortion, and social and economic inequalities. We should seek to delineate the world and our church as they truly are, without pretense or obfuscation, paying particular attention to the transcendent elements of human existence.

Central to the church’s capacity to see clearly is the humanization of truth. Pope Francis underscored this in his words to participants at the second world meeting of popular movements in Bolivia in 2015:

When we look into the eyes of the suffering, when we see the faces of the endangered *campesino*, the poor laborer, the downtrodden native, the homeless family, the persecuted migrant, the unemployed young person, the exploited child... We have seen and heard not a cold statistic but the pain of a suffering humanity, our own pain, our own flesh. This is something quite different from abstract theorizing or eloquent indignation.

The synodal process that we have begun has invited a search for such a humanized and transcendent truth. We have initiated an effort to consult with women and men to see the challenges and the joys of faith, hope and justice through their eyes, to truly see without limits or boundaries, and so to renew our church and our world. It is important to sustain and enlarge this process of listening, observation and illumination by deepening our quest to discover the ecclesial and societal reality that can provide a foundation for genuine renewal.

2. Judge by the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The process of seeing humanized truth within the transcendent life of the



church leads us inextricably toward a second stage: judging by the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ how we are called to transform those realities. This is a process of profound discernment and dialogue that seeks to uncover the challenge that our faith brings to renewing the church and world. It is not the work of individuals but of communities—local, regional and universal. And it has begun.

During the next two years, the church in the United States can deepen this process of judgment by focusing on important and addressable pastoral issues that have emerged in the initial consultation process. A practice of discernment and implementation centered upon such issues will embed a synodal culture more deeply in our faith communities and speak to the reality that synodality cannot be a sporadic process.

One of the questions that has arisen during the synodal consultations that have taken place is: What are the limits to the topics and conclusions that the synodal process can legitimately engage with during this process of judgment?

It is essential for us all to understand that Catholic doctrine and discipline reflect a deep and abiding heritage and claim in the life of the church. Moreover, many major questions that have arisen in our synodal consultations in

the United States touch upon issues that must be addressed in union with the global church and the See of Peter. This is especially true since regional differences of culture, history and perspective create differences within the church that must be reconciled in a common faith.

Yet our synodal process should not automatically reject certain topics or positions for dialogue and deliberation merely because they are questions of long-held discipline in the life of the church or reformable Catholic doctrine. The last three synodal processes testify to this reality. The synod on marriage and family life examined Catholic teachings and practice regarding divorce and remarriage. The synodal process for young adults pointed repeatedly to the alienation that the church's stances on L.G.B.T. issues and the role of women generate among young people. And the Amazon synod saw in the church of the Amazon's devotion to the sacramental life of the church a call to allow greater ordination of married men and the ordination of women as deacons.

The willingness of the church in the United States to listen deeply to our people in their views on these and other questions that are being raised in the synodal dialogues points to vital ecclesial questions: Do we genuinely regard

Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez of Philadelphia joins college students, other young adults and ministry leaders during a synodal listening session at La Salle University on April 4.

KEEP TALKING



CNS photo/Sarah Webb, CatholicPhilly.com

the community of the faithful as a font of Catholic teaching? Do we see the lived reality of Catholic laymen and laywomen as a prism that can help to reinvigorate Catholic doctrine and discipline so that they can contribute more fully to the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

The deposit of faith is not an inert and abstract body of teaching that forms a straitjacket for Christian faith and practice. It is the invitation to experience an encounter with the paschal mystery that formed our church at its birth and continues to form it today in authentic continuity. If we genuinely listen to the voices of our people with openness in these days, we can reinforce that invitation even as we forge greater unity in the church.

3. Act on behalf of justice. Having seen bluntly and penetratingly the realities that confront us in the church and the world, and having discerned where the call of the Gospel is leading us to transformation, synodality demands sustained and unrelenting action to achieve the change that discernment has made clear for us. Transformative action needs to be visionary, strategic, realistic and rooted in the varying levels of life in the church and in society. In addition, a process of enduring synodality in the life of the church must be sustainable so that it becomes deeply rooted in the hearts and souls of the people of God and in the evangelizing outreach of the church to the world.

This is the reason that Pope Francis has constantly stressed the long-term nature and goals of this synodal process. It is not rooted in specific outcomes, no matter

how important. It seeks nothing less than a recasting of the culture of the church that will endure for generations. For this reason, the Holy Father has insisted, the synodal reflection and action that we are undertaking throughout the world must be thought of as a process of conversion. Such a conversion is the prerequisite for sustained and Gospel-oriented action in this historic moment.

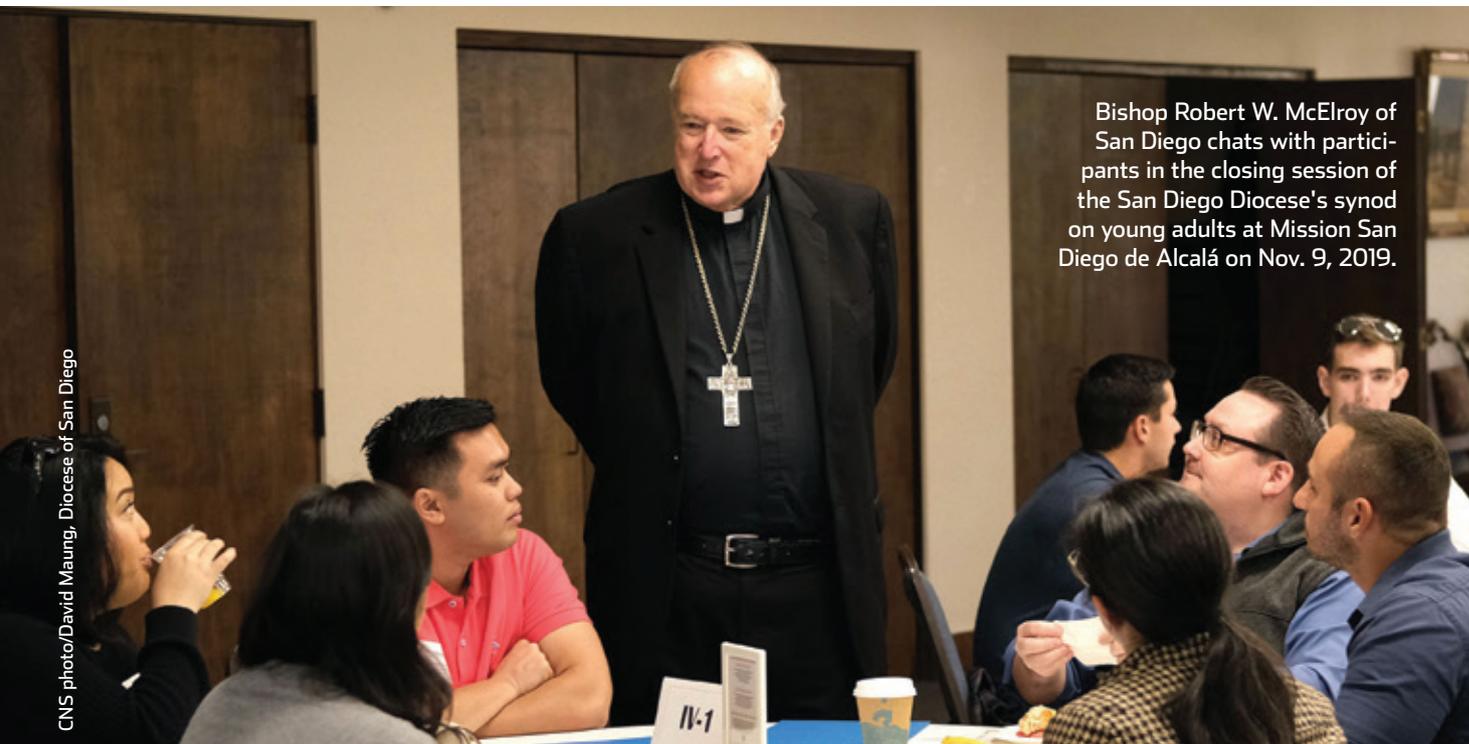
It is this ongoing process of conversion that will be undermined if, after having undertaken the first steps of synodality, we effectively accept a two-year hiatus from synodal renewal. We have initiated the process of seeing the humanized and transcendent truth that characterizes the reality of our church and our world. We have asked our people in the synodal consultations to offer their judgment in the light of faith about how we should move toward reform and renewal. We have brought to people a glimpse of what synodal dialogue can mean.

This glimpse can become a much deeper reality during the coming two years if we undertake to apply the process of “see-judge-act” in order to build upon the foundation that has been laid.

The Marks of a Synodal Church

If the “see-judge-act” framework provides a process for our moving forward in the next two years, the central elements that Pope Francis has articulated as marks of synodality provide the guideposts for our journey. These seven elements should be at the forefront of our deliberations:





Bishop Robert W. McElroy of San Diego chats with participants in the closing session of the San Diego Diocese's synod on young adults at Mission San Diego de Alcalá on Nov. 9, 2019.

1. Synodality points to the reality that the whole of the people of God are journeying together in the life of the church and in synodal action. This means that we cannot operate from a mindset of complacency or one that accentuates the differences among the baptized.

2. Synodality demands a constant stance of discernment, of seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the life of the community. It is all too easy for us in ecclesial life, at all levels, to become focused on the perspectives that we bring to dialogue and decision making instead of first pausing our own perspectives, interests and alignments and listening to the small whispering sound that Elijah recognized as the voice of God calling to him.

3. Synodality is continually rooted in listening to the word of God and joyfully celebrating the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of the Christian life. These elements are both constitutive realities that form the church and provide vital nourishment for the community as a whole.

4. Synodality demands a profound stance of authentic listening from every believer who seeks to participate in and contribute to the life of the church. Listening is the respect we owe to others in recognition of their equal dignity. Listening flows from a recognition that we have so much to learn. Listening lies at the heart of true encounter with the other disciples we meet in the life of the church. Correspondingly, synodality demands that Catholics speak out honestly and forthrightly in our ecclesial lives, so that the voices of the people of God can be authentically heard.

5. A synodal church is a humble and honest church. It acknowledges and seeks to atone for the wounds it has brought to others, particularly the sexual abuse of young people by priests. A synodal church genuinely seeks to discern its woundedness and embraces reform. Its holiness is exemplified by its humility, not by denial or the protection of its reputation.

6. A synodal church is a discerning church, not a parliamentary one. It must empower the voices of all, but its search for God's will cannot be reduced to building majorities or forming coalitions. It is essential to recognize that synodality is more concerned with nurturing a culture within the life of the church rather than specific policy outcomes. It recognizes the important hierarchical dimensions of our ecclesial life and tradition and also finds its foundation in the equal dignity of all of the baptized.

7. Finally, synodality demands a participative, inclusive and co-responsible church. If missionary discipleship is to become a reality, it must be rooted in an ecclesiology and pastoral culture that genuinely promotes these concepts in practice. Church structures that stifle full-bodied participation by Catholics in every facet of the life of the parish, diocese or universal church must be re-examined and reformed. Practices that effectively exclude individuals or groups from feeling welcome in the church must be rejected.

An Outward-Looking Church

If the marks of synodality that Pope Francis has outlined



We should seek to delineate the world and our church as they truly are, without pretense or obfuscation, paying particular attention to the transcendent elements of human existence.

provide a clear road map for synodal formation during the next two years, the imperative of evangelization provides a commanding reason for moving forward. The whole of synodality is oriented toward evangelization.

As the preparatory document chartering the synodal process states:

The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centred on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world.

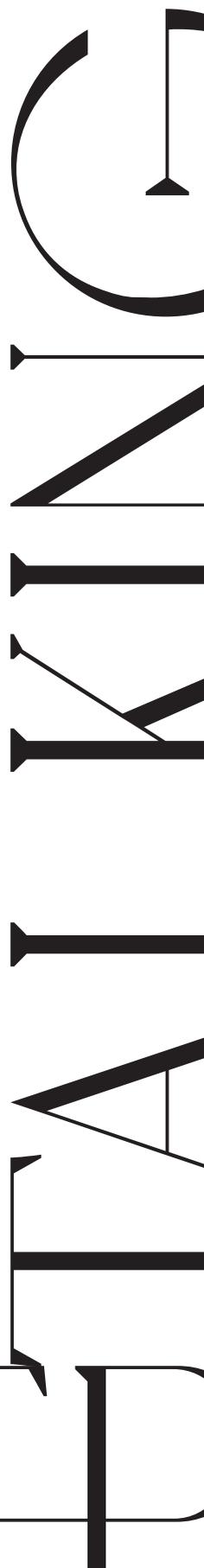
The notion of missionary discipleship constitutes the heart of synodality. Every disciple must ask how she can bring the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to her family life, her life in the workplace and participation in society. And every Christian community must ask itself how it can sustain and support its members in their efforts to bring the Gospel into the world.

The most penetrating and sustained sadness that men and women in countless synodal dialogues have pointed to is the reality that young people have drifted away from the church in a seemingly unstoppable way. And the greatest hope that emerges from these same dialogues is that the church will find a way to bring our young people home. This is a profound imperative of evangelization that cannot wait two more years to be addressed.

Synodal formation provides a pathway for renewing the internal life of the church and going to the peripheries of our world to proclaim the Gospel. We must effectively bring the message of salvation that comes in the person of Jesus Christ to those who have not heard the Gospel, and, just as important, to those who have heard the message but have not found it engaging.

Synodality is a process of conversion that requires nurturing and constancy. We have invited our people to this deep life of renewal. They have responded by sharing their deepest loves and hardships in the life of the church, and they have pointed to specific areas for change in parochial and diocesan life. By deeply continuing synodal formation during the next two years, we can build synodality, reform important elements of our ecclesial life and be stronger witnesses to a participatory vision of the church. We can also embody the “healthy decentralization” that synodality envisions. By adopting such a pathway, we will sustain the synodal impulse in our nation so that the fruits of the universal synod will enrich and build upon an already growing reality of synodal life.

Bishop Robert W. McElroy is the bishop of San Diego. He holds degrees in history and political science from Harvard and Stanford universities as well as a licentiate in sacred theology from the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, Calif., and a doctorate in moral theology from the Gregorian University in Rome. On May 29, Pope Francis announced that Bishop McElroy will be made a cardinal of the church on Aug. 27.



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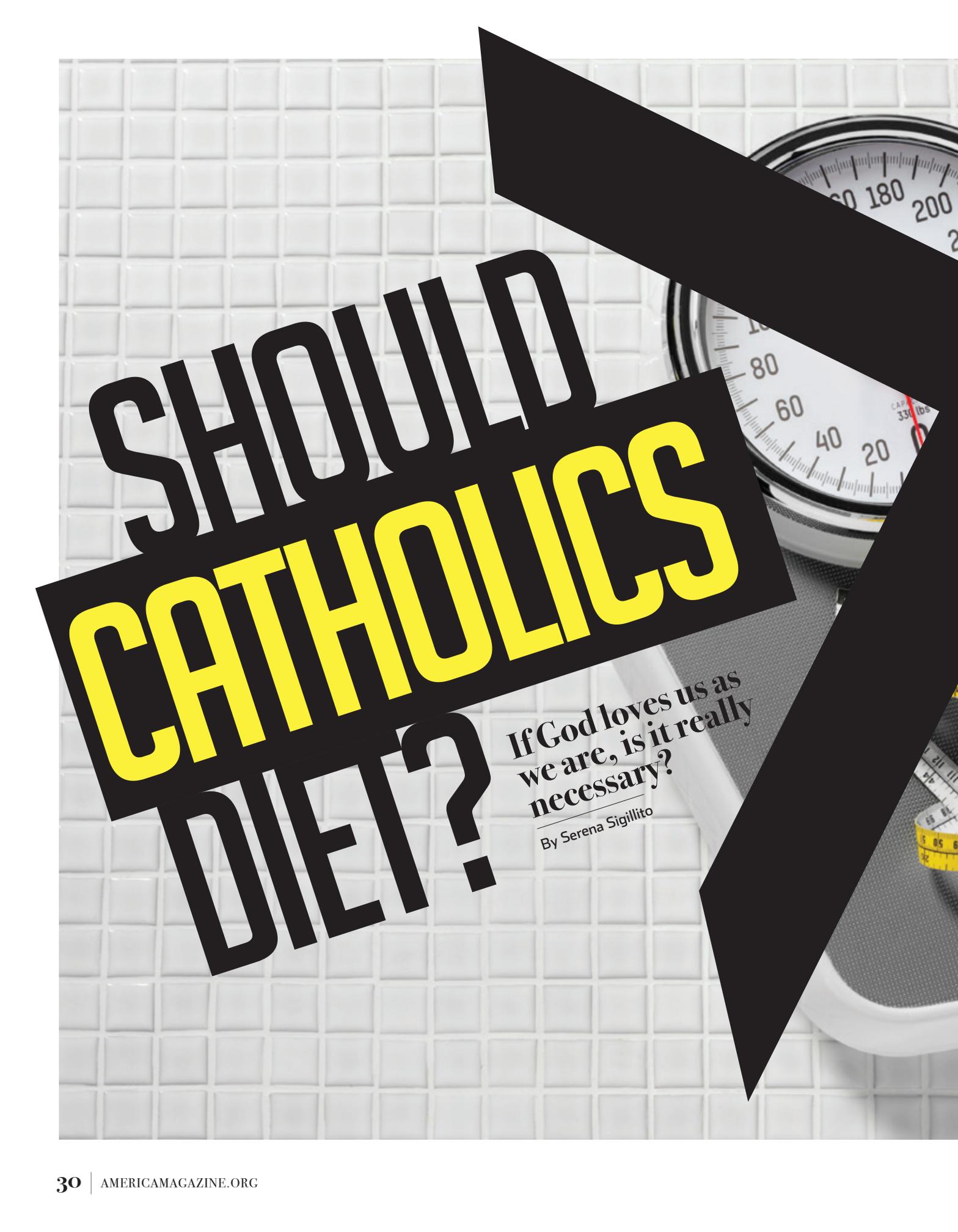


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A kitchen scale with a dial and a measuring tape on a white tiled surface. The scale is white with a grey dial and a yellow measuring tape. The dial has markings for 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100, 120, 140, 160, 180, and 200. The measuring tape is yellow with black markings. The background is a white tiled wall.

SHOULD CATHOLICS DIET?

*If God loves us as
we are, is it really
necessary?*

By Serena Sigillito



I first noticed it a couple of years ago. More and more often, the women on my Facebook feed—many of whom I had connected with through private Catholic women’s groups—were posting side-by-side “before and after” photos showcasing their dramatic weight loss. In the captions, they all credited a certain multilevel marketing company with giving them back their hope, joy and freedom. They said they had the energy to play with their kids again; they had the confidence to don form-fitting dresses and enjoy date nights with their husbands again; some even quit their day jobs to spend their days as “health coaches,” spreading the good news of an 800-calorie diet, one packet of dehydrated food at a time.

I am no stranger to diets. Historically, Weight Watchers (now known simply as WW) has been my preferred approach; it helped me shed unwanted pounds in high school and after the birth of each of my daughters. But as I got more into fitness after baby number two, I started to get frustrated that WW could not quite get me back to the weight I had been in college. I generally had healthy eating habits, but I felt like I needed a little jump start—something temporary that would help me get to that coveted “goal weight.” So I succumbed. Against my better judgment, I reached out to one of the women posting slender “after” photos and ordered a box of overpriced diet food, which promised to put my body into “a gentle, fat-burning state.”

My coach was a Catholic woman I had known online for several years. Kind and attentive, she emphasized that this program was “not a diet” but a lifestyle change, one that required a lasting mindset shift. One of the core principles she emphasized was the need to break my emotional ties to food. Instead, she told me, I should think of it only as “fuel” for my body. When I told her that I planned to eat the food I was serving at my daughter’s fourth birthday party, she gently pushed back, encouraging me “to get to the bottom of this.” “Why is it,” she asked me, “that we’ve come to a point in the way we interact with people that we feel that it’s a necessity to include food and drinks when spending time with the people that we love? Would we tell those people, ‘You’re not enjoyable unless I have this food or drink?’”

This question was a wake-up call for me—just not in the way she meant it to be.

For goodness’ sake, Jesus had food at his gatherings. He still does. The human desire to eat and drink together is not



some sinful modern weakness. It is an essential part of our humanity, with deep sacramental meaning. From Christ's very first miracle at the wedding feast at Cana to the eucharistic meal shared by Catholics all over the world—which the church tells us is the source and summit of the Christian life—food and drink have always played a major role in Christ's ministry to us. They are how he communicates his love for us. And they are how we communicate our love for one another, too, from the daily grind of making dinner for our families to the instinctive response to bring casseroles in times of crisis.

The language of “fuel,” too, seemed wrong to me. No matter what Descartes might say, my body is not a mere machine to be bent to my will. Exerting the will power necessary to ignore your growling stomach and stick to a restrictive diet can feel freeing, even oddly empowering. But it also creates an adversarial relationship. It risks making your body into your enemy, an unruly and rebellious beast that must be controlled, rather than an essential aspect of your individual personhood through which you experience God's love, made incarnate in the physical world. If taken too far, it runs the risk of deepening the division between your soul and body rather than helping you achieve wholeness and integration.

So I dropped the diet. I started searching for an alternative way of thinking about food—one that would align with Catholic anthropology. From Facebook groups and Instagram influencers to science-focused podcasts, peer-reviewed nutrition research and lengthy books on the psychology and physiology of intuitive eating, I dove deep into the multi-faceted and diverse world of the anti-diet

movement. Some of what I found there vindicated my reservations about intensely restrictive diets. But other aspects gave me pause. The declaration that our food choices have no moral weight, for example, seems to contradict the church's natural-law-based ethics. And the claim that all food restriction is psychologically unhealthy is difficult to square with a faith tradition that calls us to fast as a means of growing closer to God.

In the end, I found that all the latest science and psychology falls short if it is not paired with an accurate understanding of why our bodies matter and how our choices gradually shape who we become. Strange as it may sound, if you really want to be healthy, understanding virtue ethics is the place to start.

The Godmothers of Intuitive Eating

I am far from alone in my sense that there is something deeply wrong with the diet industry. In recent years, the anti-diet movement has exploded, with countless social media influencers, podcasts (“Food Psych,” “Maintenance Phase”) and books (*Anti-Diet*, *Health at Every Size*) laying out the scientific, psychological and philosophical arguments against diets.

In 1995, two dietitians, Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, published a book that introduced the concept of *Intuitive Eating*, which they called “a revolutionary anti-diet approach.” They define intuitive eating as “a self-care eating framework, which integrates instinct, emotion, and rational thought.” In their view, diets are harmful because they make what should be an internal process an external one, setting up a cycle in which dieters eventually rebel



The human desire to eat and drink together is not some sinful modern weakness.

against restrictions, binge-eat and gain back the weight they lost. This psychological phenomenon is exacerbated by the body's natural response to perceived famine situations: slowing down the metabolism and increasing appetite and food storage in an effort to protect itself.

Tribole and Resch lay out 10 principles that help recovering dieters “cultivate attunement to the physical sensations that arise from within your body to get both your biological and psychological needs met” and to remove “the obstacles and disruptors to attunement, which usually come from the mind in the form of rules, beliefs, and thoughts.” The idea is that by getting rid of punitive food rules and convincing yourself that all food is available to you if and when you want it, you can gradually rid yourself of the out-of-control urge to overeat. Although it is not uncommon for this process to lead to weight loss, Tribole and Resch emphasize that “the Also savpursuit of intentional weight loss is a failed paradigm, which creates health problems: including weight stigma, weight cycling, and eating disorders.” To become an intuitive eater, they insist, one must let go of the pursuit of weight loss and simply listen to one's body.

Intuitive eating has exploded in popularity, spawning countless spin-offs that vary in their likeness to Tribole and Resch's approach. They are nearly unanimous, however, in their rejection of attempts to lose weight. In fact, in most anti-diet spaces, any talk of “IWL” (intentional weight loss) is either heavily policed, requiring a trigger or content warning, or banned altogether. In such forums, people—mainly women—find emotional support for their struggles with body image and commis-

erate about the challenges they face when shopping for clothes, flying, seeking medical care and merely existing in a world made for smaller people.

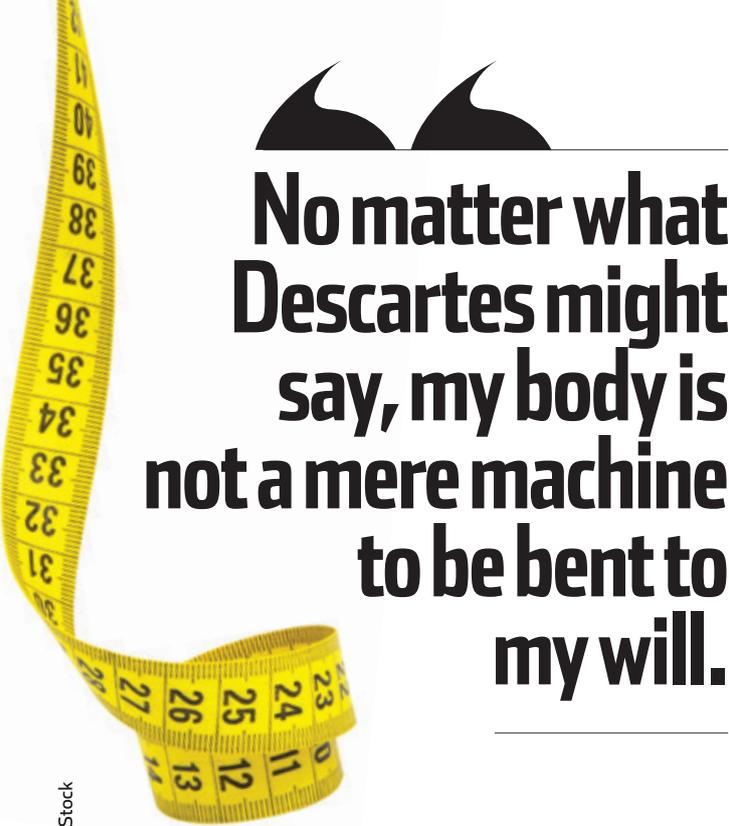
All Bodies Are Good Bodies

One of the most thought-provoking figures in this community is Amanda Martinez Beck, who describes herself as a “fat activist.” She's also a faithful Catholic and the author of two books: *Lovely: How I Learned to Embrace the Body God Gave Me* and *More of You: The Fat Girl's Field Guide to the Modern World*. Ms. Beck draws on Catholic teaching to argue movingly that “all bodies are good bodies”—even fat ones. She beautifully describes the ways that our unique stories are written into our bodies, made incarnate in the union of our bodies and souls. She also pushes back against our culture's equation of thinness with moral goodness, reclaiming the word “fat” as a neutral descriptor of body size.

Building on Tribole and Beck's contention that “health is not a moral imperative,” Ms. Beck adds a theological justification to the rather counterintuitive argument that health should *not* be the goal for our bodies. In *Lovely*, she writes:

When we define the goodness of our body as its fitness, ability, size, strength, or absence of illness, we demonstrate that we don't understand the purpose for which God created each human being. We were not created to be useful. We were not created merely to do things for God and for other people. We were created for a relationship with God, and any person—regardless of the state of their body—can have a relationship with God. That is what makes a body good: the capacity for relationship with God and with others. Therein lies its dignity.

This line of thought flies in the face of the ideology of radical autonomy that dominates our culture, and it contradicts the materialistic and objectifying messages that reduce human bodies to consumer goods. It is dangerously easy to start assessing your own worth based on your appearance, succumbing to feelings of guilt, failure and shame if you do not live up to your weight loss and exercise goals. But Beck is right: “If we can change our mind-set toward the body from one of whipping it into submission to one of rejoicing in its eternal goal of relationship with God, we can find joy and peace.” Furthermore, concern for health—particularly the health of others—often serves as a smokescreen for an aesthetic or moral aversion to fatness.



No matter what Descartes might say, my body is not a mere machine to be bent to my will.

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Still, something about Beck's explanation of the *telos*—a Greek word denoting a thing's ultimate purpose—of the human body as relationship nagged at me. It certainly seems right to say that our purpose *as human beings* is relationship with God; as the Baltimore Catechism taught me, God made us “to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in heaven.” But is that really the *telos* of the *body*, as such? If we can accept that God loves us as we are, that we are worthy of love at any size, is it wrong to *also* desire to be thinner and to take steps to reach that goal?

Health, Natural Law and Personal Discernment

In the natural-law-based reasoning that undergirds the church's teaching in other areas, such as bioethics or sexual morality, we begin by identifying the purpose and function of various parts of the body. Intentionally thwarting that purpose—say, by mutilating or amputating a properly functioning body part—is morally wrong. Think of the reproductive organs, for example, whose biological purpose is procreation and whose spiritual purpose is unification with one's spouse. Intentionally thwarting either one of those purposes undermines our flourishing and happiness as human beings. Like all sins, such actions make it harder for us to love and let ourselves be loved by God.

In the context of eating, the biological purpose is clear: to provide the nutrients and energy that our bodies need to function well. On a spiritual level, eating, like sex, has a relational aspect. That is why it has played such a promi-

nent role in all human societies and in the liturgy of the Catholic faith. Even when we eat alone, we can affirm the innate goodness of our created bodies, thanking God for them and nourishing them gratefully and lovingly. But rather than focusing solely on relationship, as Beck does, perhaps it makes more sense to think about a hierarchy of goods or purposes that we aim at, with relationship with God being the most important as the overarching goal of our lives. If our pursuit of the legitimate goal of health becomes disordered, whether through obsessive fixation or through neglect, it could prevent us from pursuing our ultimate purpose.

To see if I was on the right track here, I reached out to Catholic University of America philosophy professor Melissa Moschella. She told me:

...because the body is not just something that we walk around in but is actually essential and intrinsic to our overall identity, the body has dignity, and the good of the person *qua* bodily—namely, health—is a genuine good that is worthy of pursuit for its own sake.

Now, that doesn't mean that health always has to be our number one priority. Most of the moral life on a day-to-day basis is actually about figuring out a reasonable priority among competing goods.... What are the goods that I dedicate most of my time and energy to? In a way, that's what vocational discernment is all about.

Although it affirms the reality of objective human goods, this natural-law-based framework places an enormous emphasis on individual discernment. A mom at home with small children probably cannot spend as much time exercising as a young man who is training to join the Marines. Of course, discernment extends beyond the core question of vocation, and it demands self-awareness. Those with a history of disordered eating, for example, should steer clear of any eating plan that will reactivate those harmful thought processes and behaviors, thereby undermining both physical and mental health.

Of course, saying that health is an objective good does not tell us how to define or measure it. As those who promote *Health at Every Size* point out, there are serious problems with assuming that reductive measures like the body mass index provide an accurate and comprehensive representation of a person's health. Behaviors like regular exercise are often a better gauge and a more helpful goal to aim for than a particular size or weight. Even so, it is hard to deny that severe obesity is correlated with many negative

health outcomes (as is extremely low body weight, though that is far less stigmatized in our culture). The causes of obesity are complex and multifaceted, going far beyond “calories in, calories out.” For some people, losing weight may be difficult or even impossible, no matter how strong their will power is. It is factually and morally wrong to look at someone who is fat and presume to judge their character, health or habits.

Still, when making choices about what goods to pursue in our own lives, as far as our vocations and circumstances allow, it is prudent to do what we can to cultivate habits that will lead to improvements in biomarkers like blood pressure, cholesterol, muscle mass and—yes—weight. For those who do not struggle with disordered eating, a reasonable, moderate diet plan—one focused on gradually shifting patterns of eating rather than imposing strict rules that demonize certain foods—may be a helpful tool in reaching this goal.

Fat Liberation, Social Justice and Fasting

Moving beyond the individual question of how to eat, those who champion the cause of “fat liberation” see our culture’s obsession with thinness as a social justice issue. They raise awareness of the fact that people with larger bodies face widespread discrimination. Sadly, this is true even within the medical establishment, where serious health problems are often ignored or waved away with a blanket prescription to lose weight. Fat liberationists generally embrace the framework of intersectionality, arguing that the experiences of fat people must be understood through the lens of power structures, privilege and oppression.

In her more recent work, Amanda Martinez Beck has moved toward this more structural approach, combining it with a Hebraic-influenced emphasis on the communal nature of worship and of salvation. In some ways, this is very much in line with the church’s teaching on the reality of “structures of sin.” But, as in discussions over other fraught issues involving unjust social structures, such as our country’s history of racism, it can be hard to find the right balance between the individual and the collective. It is easy to overemphasize free will and autonomy, ignoring social preconditions and their effects on one’s actions. By contrast, fat liberation, like other movements that emphasize intersectionality, can tend to lean too far in the other direction, overemphasizing the social causes and overlooking the power of the individual.

Consider fasting. Dieting and fasting have very different motivations, but they often involve very similar behaviors. When I spoke with her, I asked Ms. Beck how she reconciles church teaching on fasting with her gener-

al wariness of food restriction. She answered by referencing Isaiah 58, where the prophet asks, “What is the Lord’s chosen fast?” She emphasized that in Catholic teaching the purpose of fasting is to create space for almsgiving and feeding the hungry. “Can we see fasting as a corporate practice rather than an individual practice, for the purposes of feeding the poor?” she asked.

In other words, Beck sees the potential positive impact of fasting from food not as something personal and internal, such as growth in the virtue of temperance, but as something societal, such as bringing our attention to the needs of those in our community who face food insecurity. However, Beck actually thinks fasting from food isn’t a good idea for most people today. “This is where I come in conflict with a lot of church history,” she admits, “because I don’t think fasting from food in our culture is actually God’s chosen fast.” She said that “because diet culture is so prominent, it’s almost impossible” to fast without “having a secondary or primary motive of changing one’s body.”

This last point is certainly worth considering as we make choices about whether to integrate fasting into our spiritual practices. Still, Beck is arguing for a fundamentally different understanding of fasting than the church has traditionally taught. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, wrote that “fasting is useful as atoning for and preventing sin, and as raising the mind to spiritual things. And everyone is bound by the natural dictate of reason to practice fasting as far as it is necessary for these purposes.” In other words, the purpose of fasting is not meant to be purely social but also—perhaps primarily—interior. And although the specific details of required fasts (on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, for example) are positive laws promulgated by the church, to which there can be exceptions, Aquinas argued that it is actually a universal demand of the natural law that we all must fast in some form.

In general, fasting can be a powerful means of breaking disordered attachments for the sake of reordering our appetites to be in accord with reason, allowing us to be more fully open to God’s will and more able to receive His love. Periodically subjecting our appetites to external restraints can help free us from habits that undermine our own happiness and holiness. But fasting is a practice that requires a great deal of personal discernment, and perhaps even guidance from a spiritual director. As Dr. Moschella told me:

What is helpful for a particular person, in terms of growth in self-mastery, will very much depend on the situation. So, for a person...[who is] prone to an eating disorder, emphasis on fasting with regard to food and drink might not be helpful. It

might actually be counterproductive, because it could contribute to an obsessive fixation on food, which reflects an unhealthy attitude to the body or an unreasonable desire to have total control over the body or over certain aspects of life.

So that person may need to exercise self-denial in other ways. Their goal should be to develop a healthier, less conflictual relationship towards food—which, after all, is good! And so the question here is moderation.

Habits and Virtues

In assessing our eating habits, we shouldn't hate our bodies and try to shrink them with rigid, punitive food rules. Nor should we unthinkingly internalize the imperative to be as thin as possible in the name of health. We should seek moderation in our food consumption, assessing the broad patterns of our eating habits and attempting to make choices—most of the time, and insofar as our particular circumstances allow it—that will help our bodies to be healthy. In other words, we should seek virtue.

Some dieticians, medical professionals and health coaches take this approach, encouraging their clients to integrate small changes—taking a walk every day, or adding more fruits and vegetables to their meals—rather than embracing a radically new way of eating. They argue that it is possible to break the yo-yo dieting cycle, reject food restrictions and disordered thinking, and learn to become more in tune with your body while also seeking to lose weight, albeit very slowly. As in the pursuit of virtue, the key seems to be to focus on behaviors and habits, giving yourself grace and seeking progress, not perfection.

On a societal level, fat liberationists are right that we need to push back against the diet industry and our culture's widespread obsession with thinness. It is important to fight systemic bias against larger people and reject the conflation of health with moral superiority. The fact that “clean eating,” “self-care” and “wellness” are much more readily accessible to those with financial privilege—and that multilevel marketing schemes often prey on vulnerable women—only makes this more true. On the other hand, ignoring the needs of our bodies doesn't reflect care for God's creation either. We need to do our best to build habits that are conducive to our physical, mental and spiritual health, while also aligning with our own unique set of circumstances and vocations.

For me, that meant letting go of the unrealistic desire to weigh as much as I did a decade ago, when I was child-free, rarely exercised and therefore had much less muscle



If you really want to be healthy, understanding virtue ethics is the place to start.

mass. I decided to give myself some grace as I juggled two children, a job, and major life changes like buying our family's first house and making a home in a new city. Perhaps thanks to all the extra takeout, I ended up gaining some weight during this time. On the other hand, I prioritized getting regular exercise and good sleep even during a busy and stressful season, because those things gave me energy and improved my mood. My BMI might not show it, but I still think those were the right choices for me at the time.

Now I'm pregnant with baby number three. As the number on the scale continues to go up, I'm focusing on nourishing my body, drawing on the insights of intuitive eating to banish the inner “diet police” and paying attention to what foods make me feel satisfied and energized. After this baby comes, I may make a conscious effort to shift my eating in ways that will lead to weight loss, but I may not. Either way, I'm going to do my best to pay attention to what God is calling me to do in each season, keeping in mind that in order to pursue holistic health—body and soul—we need to seek the kind of virtue that lets us love and be loved by God.

Serena Sigillito is editor at large of Public Discourse, the journal of the Witherspoon Institute. She recently completed a Robert Novak Journalism Fellowship program on work and motherhood and writes often on topics relating to sex, gender and embodiment.

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"Pope Pius VIII in St. Peter's
on the Sedia Gestatoria," by
Horace Vernet





PAPAL

How did popes become so powerful—and can
Pope Francis reverse the trend?

UPGRADES

By John W. O'Malley

In 2000, Thomas Reese, S.J., then the editor in chief of **America**, asked me to write an article on how the church differed between the first millennium and the second. I found the assignment easy because one difference stood out like no other: a new centrality of the popes in the church of the second millennium. In that millennium, the popes came to wield an authority and play a role incomparably greater than in the first.

I called this phenomenon the papalization of the church. I apologized for the neologism, but I felt then, and still feel now, that it so neatly hit the nail on the head that its novelty was justified. The church in the West became the papal church, and Catholics became papists. The development signified a more exclusively top-down and hierarchical mode of church, in contrast to the more synodal and collegial earlier mode. It went unchallenged until recent times, most notably by the Second Vatican Council and Pope Francis.

The causes of the papalization process were multiple, complex and inextricably entangled with the general development of Western social, political and cultural history. Even such seemingly unrelated phenomena as the invention of radio, television and jet travel played a role.

Nonetheless, some of the most important and symptomatic steps in the process were the results of direct actions taken by the popes themselves.

The popes were in fact the single most important agents in the papalization process. I describe their actions as self-conferred upgrades. Three such papal actions in that regard are the most obvious and the most symptomatic of the great change underway: the claim to have the power to depose secular rulers, the claim to be vicar of Christ and the claim to possess infallible teaching authority.

The Authority to Depose Rulers

Early in the history of the church, popes argued that their authority was greater than that of secular rulers because it was a spiritual authority. The spiritual was in principle superior to the temporal. Yet no matter how often popes or bishops might invoke that principle as justification for a superior authority, it usually did not carry the day, in part because kings and emperors also argued that their authority was spiritual.

In any case, the matter lay unresolved until the tumultuous pontificate of Pope Gregory VII (r. 1073-85) and the great conflict known as the Investiture Controversy. That conflict was almost the inevitable outcome of a feature of an intimately related phenomenon known as the Gregorian Reform, which had originated earlier in the mid-11th century with a small group of Italian clerics intent on ensuring worthy candidates for the episcopacy. To achieve that goal, the reform tried to restrict the



Pope Francis has tried to carry forward the council's teaching by stressing the legitimacy of 'consulting the faithful in matters of doctrine.'

authority of secular rulers to choose prelates.

Pope Gregory took that aspect of the reform to its ultimate limits by twice deposing Emperor Henry IV of the Holy Roman Empire; these actions ended in bitter conflicts that finally drove the pope into exile from Rome and led to the worst sack of the city in its history. Despite the pope's defeat, his successors subscribed to the claim and began deposing kings and emperors. These measures reached a climax in 1570 with the deposition of Queen Elizabeth I of England by Pope Pius V (r. 1566-72), an action that badly backfired. As almost a corollary to the right to depose rulers, popes also claimed the right to adjudicate political disputes among rulers.

Gregory had based his claim on a sprawling ideology that he articulated in a document known as the "Dictatus Papae" ("Memorandum About the Pope"), composed in 1075. Although never promulgated, it revealed a mindset that, while it presumed to be based on tradition, was a radical departure from it. Here are three of its 27 headings: "That the pope may be judged by no one"; "That the pope is the only one whose feet may be kissed by princes"; and, most important, "The pope has the authority to depose emperors." Although Gregory tried to find precedents for that last claim, he was unconvincing. His action against Emperor Henry IV constituted a major self-conferred papal upgrade and gave subsequent popes an increased sense of the deference owed them in the church.

Vicar of Christ

Pope Gregory VII consistently, almost obsessively, referred to himself as the vicar of Peter; in that regard, he was in line with the mainline tradition that originated with Pope Leo I (r. 440-61). Gregory saw himself invested with all the authority Christ had conferred upon the prince of the Apostles. But in so doing, he imbued Peter with an authority new in its force and in its far-reaching scope, a force and scope few of his contemporaries accepted. Yet even with Gregory's extreme interpretation, it never occurred to him to take the momentous step of referring to himself as vicar of Christ.

Although the title Vicar of Christ appears in the tradition in the early centuries, it was not common, nor was it firmly affixed to any specific office in the church. It sometimes referred to bishops and on occasion even to the bishop of Rome, yet it gained no prominence. This is true even though the Roman synod of 495 called Pope Gelasius (r. 492-96) Vicar of Christ. The term simply did not catch on.

In the 12th century, theologians and canonists brought the term into a certain restricted prominence, but they did not consistently attach it to the papal office. That changed dramatically with Pope Innocent III (r. 1198-1216), who claimed the title for himself. He must be given credit for this major upgrade. Beginning with him, the title came into currency and became standard. The move from vicar of Peter to vicar of Christ was not simply new window dressing for the papal office, but a major enhancement of its dignity. It seemed to imbue the papacy almost with divinity. Pope Innocent conferred this upgrade upon himself and, as an almost inevitable consequence, upon his successors for the centuries to come.

Infallible Teacher of Doctrine

As Catholics know, the First Vatican Council (1869-70) defined that the pope was infallible when under certain conditions he taught that a teaching was of divine and apostolic origin and thus an essential element in the deposit of faith. Some Catholics inside and outside the council challenged the definition, but to no avail. "Pastor Aeternus," the council's decree on papal primacy and infallibility, carried the day.

Rarely do we hear much about Pope Pius IX's (r. 1846-78) role in the matter; indeed, when the council opened he seemed rather indifferent to the possibility of a definition of infallibility. As pressure within the council mounted in favor of one, he began to promote it, sometimes open-

ly, sometimes covertly, but ever more unrelentingly. He gave every encouragement to the prelates pressing for the definition and did just the opposite for those opposing it. Nonetheless, we cannot on that score lay credit for the passage of the definition exclusively at his door. Others in the council were powerfully at work in that regard.

Yet another action by Pius allows us to see infallibility as a papal self-conferred upgrade. In 1864, well before the council opened, Pius, in the apostolic constitution “*Ineffabilis Deus*,” infallibly defined as a divinely revealed dogma that the Blessed Virgin Mary was immaculately conceived. No pope had ever before defined a dogma. In this way, the pope anticipated the council’s definition by six years. It can be argued, therefore, that in “*Pastor Aeternus*” the council confirmed the authority the pope had already claimed for himself.

It is true that beginning in 1849, Pius consulted the bishops of the world about defining the Immaculate Conception, but nowhere in “*Ineffabilis Deus*” is there any mention of such a consultation or any suggestion that the pope’s action was in any way influenced by it. According to “*Ineffabilis Deus*,” the definition was a papal action pure and simple, with the consultation seemingly irrelevant. Six years later, “*Pastor Aeternus*” left no doubt on the matter when it pointedly specified that papal infallibility had no dependency on “the consent of the church.” Pius himself was the author of that clarifying clause and was responsible for its insertion in the decree. Critics of the expression claimed that it severed the head of the church from the body, as if the faith of the church at large were irrelevant.

The dogma of infallibility did not come hurtling out of nowhere. The peculiar political conditions in Europe in the 19th century after the French Revolution gave rise to the powerful ultramontane movement, in which papal infallibility consistently lurked beneath the surface as an important plank in its program; but there was a long-standing doctrinal tradition that arguably supported it. As early as the patristic era, the axiom that “the Roman church does not err” had taken hold, especially in the West. The axiom meant that the Roman church, through the person of its bishop, could be counted on to come down on the orthodox side in major disputes over doctrine.

The inerrancy of the Roman church differed, however, from papal infallibility in a subtle but crucial way. Inerrancy rested on the principle that the pope acted as judge, as the final court of appeal in disputed doctrinal questions. He was thus a witness to the faith of the church but not a pro-

active and seemingly independent teacher of it.

The difference between judge and teacher had radical implications. By the early years of the 20th century, the offices of the Roman Curia began issuing instructions at a newly regular pace. Moreover, popes themselves began issuing encyclicals and similar documents with much greater frequency than before and attributing to them ever greater authority. Theologians in turn began more explicitly and frequently basing their arguments on papal documents rather than on a wider range of authoritative sources.

Hierarchy Over Collegiality

This papal self-conferred upgrade was the culmination of the papalization of the church, which reached its most robust form in the first half of the 20th century. By then it had sidelined and almost obliterated the synodal and collegial aspect of the church’s structure in favor of the hierarchical, top-down aspect. This development was not simply an interesting historical fact but a force that deeply affected how we think and behave as Catholics.

Just after the middle of the last century came Vatican II. In its deliberations and decrees, the council consistently and sometimes valiantly tried to redress the balance between the authority of the center and the periphery by empowering the latter. It did so in several ways, most notably by teaching the collegial relationship between the college of bishops and the bishop of Rome and its description of the church as “the people of God.”

In our own day, Pope Francis has tried to carry forward the council’s teaching by stressing the legitimacy of “consulting the faithful in matters of doctrine.” He has given this principle practical force in the synodal process he has set in motion. The process is essentially collegial and, as Francis specifies it, radically rooted in the teaching that the church is the whole people of God.

Francis has meanwhile changed the curia’s style from authoritarian to collegial. Curial officials now ask bishops how they can help them rather than telling them what to do. The change implicitly empowers the periphery. In his recent and remarkable apostolic constitution on the reform of the curia, “*Praedicate Evangelium*” (“Preach the Gospel”), Francis gives institutional form to this and similar changes—signs he seeks to reverse the papalization trajectory of recent history.

John W. O’Malley, S.J., is university professor emeritus in the theology department at Georgetown University.

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— Jim McDermott, S.J., *associate editor*



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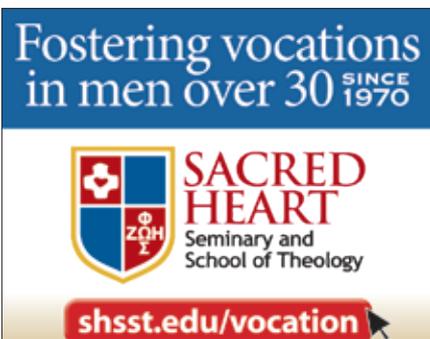
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'Behold the Heart That Loves You'

By Joe Laramie

"Saint Ignatius Loyola," by Juan Martinez Montanes

CNS photo/Nancy Wiechec





Communion with Jesus, St. Ignatius and the Sacred Heart

What is the Eucharist? Who may and may not receive the Eucharist? And under what circumstances? These important questions for Catholics in the United States have been in the news quite a bit over the past year for reasons both political and pastoral. Regardless of where one stands on these questions, their presence in our conversations offers an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the Eucharist through a traditional Jesuit devotion: the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

We can speak of the Eucharist in many ways: the new Passover, sacrifice, meal, real presence, Communion. All of these are true descriptions and are attested in Scripture, Catholic tradition and the writings of recent popes. Contemporary debates about the Eucharist among Catholics are often rooted in disagreements about which aspects of the Eucharist ought to be emphasized or de-emphasized in our contemporary culture. The writings of St. Ignatius Loyola and the traditional Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart highlight a specific aspect of the Eucharist: friendship.

The Sacred Heart

The Sacred Heart devotion is rooted in the visions of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, who lived in France in the 1600s. In her visions, Jesus offers his heart to her, telling her, “Behold the heart that has so loved humanity.” She recounted this vision in her journal: “Then He seemed to take my very heart from me and place it there in His heart. In return He gave me back part of His flaming heart.” Jesus also invited the faithful to receive Communion more often—especially on the first

Friday of each month (a day honoring the Sacred Heart)—and to participate in regular adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

St. Margaret Mary's spiritual director was a young Jesuit priest, Claude Colombière, also a saint. Through his appearances to St. Margaret Mary, Jesus called upon Father Colombière to be an apostle of the Sacred Heart by proclaiming the message of Jesus given in these visions. He energetically did so and encouraged his Jesuit brothers to do likewise.

The cultural enemy of this devotion was French Jansenism, sometimes called Catholic Calvinism. Eventually deemed a heresy, Jansenism was a cold, strict interpretation of Catholicism in which the faithful were discouraged from receiving Communion. In the Sacred Heart, Jesus offers a warm and personal rebuttal to this harsh interpretation of the Catholic faith. Against the harshness of Jansenism, Jesus calls the faithful to come to the Eucharist *more* frequently, not less. This is the ultimate heart-to-heart friendship, which involves a mystical exchange of hearts.

Modern secular culture offers strange parallels to strict Jansenism: the sense that God is distant from our experience and a sense of chilly isolation in daily life. But devotion to the Sacred Heart brings the same message today as in the 1600s: Behold the heart that loves you.

Since the late 1600s, the Catholic Church has uniquely entrusted the Jesuits with promoting the devotion to the Sacred Heart. This mission was widely known and appreciated for hundreds of years, though many Jesuits and laypeople are less familiar with it today. The simple message—that Jesus loves us, and he wants us to offer our hearts to him—is not a new revelation. We see countless examples of the love of Jesus in the Gospels. When I speak about the Sacred Heart, especially to young adults, they are intrigued by this devotion. In a complex, divided world and church, the simplicity of this image speaks a clear truth we all need to hear: Jesus loves us.

The image of the heart as a symbol of love is a central motif in many cultures, including our own, particularly in music and literature. How many times every December have we heard the lyrics, “Last Christmas, I gave you my heart”? We also all know phrases like “My achy, breaky heart” and “You gotta have heart.” If you like a post on social media, often you click on a little heart.

In the Bible and in Christian tradition, we see a more robust understanding of the heart. God promised to write his law “upon their hearts” (Jer 31:33); God says, “I will re-

move the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ez 36:26). Dramatically, we see the heart of Jesus pierced after his death as he hangs upon the cross; out flows blood and water (Jn 19:34). Many Christian writers see here an image of the sacraments of the church, flowing from the body of Christ. Water symbolizes baptism, and blood is the Eucharist. In the Bible the heart is the symbolic core of the human person. It is there that we may speak to God and hear God's word in prayer. I am called not just to follow the outward commands of religion, but to “give my whole heart” to the Lord (Prv 23:26).

Jesuits and the Sacred Heart

Many church historians show how the Jesuit order was uniquely situated to receive and promote this devotion. Because of the Society's global network and missionary character, the devotion was quickly and consistently spread around Europe and beyond. We also can see how St. Ignatius had spiritually laid the groundwork for this devotion in his Spiritual Exercises. In them the retreatant engages in friendly conversations with Jesus called colloquies. We see Jesus offering himself to us in the incarnation and the Eucharist, and then retreatants are invited to offer themselves to Jesus in the “Suscipe” prayer: “Take, Lord, receive all my liberty....”

Further, Ignatius encourages us to pray for the grace to share in the emotions of Jesus during different meditations: to share in his sorrows in the passion and in his joy in the resurrection. The Sacred Heart likewise draws in our emotions—particularly joy, sorrow and compassion. Ignatius' advice also predates by 150 years Jesus' core message to Margaret Mary: more frequent Communion. For example, in a letter to the town of Azpeitia in Spain, Ignatius encourages Communion monthly, weekly or even daily. Frequent Communion was uncommon and even controversial in the time of Ignatius. Early Jesuits intuitively felt an internal resonance among the Sacred Heart devotion, the Eucharist and Ignatian prayer. And so they promoted all three with gusto.

Current discussions around receiving the Eucharist are centered on the nature of the sacrament: “What is the Eucharist?” More fundamentally, let us ask, “Who is Jesus?” He is described in many ways in the Gospels: as good shepherd, king, Messiah, the Christ, son of Mary and son of God. He is all of these, of course. In the writings of St. Ignatius, we see one of these roles highlighted above others, especially in the Fourth Week of the Exercises: Jesus as friend.

Ignatius was familiar with the Gospel passages in which Jesus tells his disciples, “I no longer call you servants, I call you friends” (Jn 15:15). At many points in the Exercises, Ignatius encourages retreatants to engage in a colloquy with Jesus “as one friend speaks to another” (No. 54). In the Fourth Week, Ignatius shows how the risen Christ consoles his disciples as “friends console one another” (No. 224). More intimately, Ignatius uses the image of “lover and beloved” to describe the relationship between God and the retreatant: Lovers engage in mutual sharing of gifts and of themselves (No. 231). In response to God’s offer to us in the incarnation and Eucharist, we similarly offer our whole selves to God in the “Suscipe” prayer.

Deepening the relationship between Christ and the Christian involves a mutual gift of self. God loved us first (1 Jn 4:19). I first receive Jesus, and then I offer myself to him. Ignatius writes, “I will ponder with deep affection what God our Lord has done for me...[and] to give me even his very self.” I humbly respond by offering to God “all my possessions, and myself along with them” (No. 234). This is clearly an unequal gift! The God of the universe gives me himself, and then I offer myself—meager and sinful.

The Sacred Heart image offers us a visual, visceral sense of this offering; Jesus offers me his heart, and I offer him mine. It is a personal, mutual offering between friends, warm and loving. It involves mutual vulnerability. My heart is dear to me; if my physical heart is damaged, then my life is in danger. Symbolically, my heart is the center of my personhood, hopes and dreams.

Some scholars also see the Sacred Heart as a gift especially important for Jesuits themselves. With their lengthy education and commitment to scholarship and justice, some Jesuits can tend toward a cool intellectualism in their work and prayer. The Sacred Heart centers all our labors in the life of Jesus, inflaming us with his passion and love.

The “Suscipe” prayer is a kind of mirror of the eucharistic prayer. On Holy Thursday Jesus said, “Take this all of you.... This is my body given up for you.” Now, I receive him in joyful gratitude, and I respond, “Take, Lord, and receive, all.”

Ignatius says in the *Spiritual Exercises* that Jesus “instituted the most holy sacrifice of the Eucharist as the greatest sign of his love” (No. 289). The Eucharist is God’s loving gift of himself to us. Further, the Eucharist strengthens us to love God and others by giving ourselves in love. The Sacred Heart is a powerful image of Jesus’ burning love for the Father and for me. In the Eucharist, Christ draws us deeper into relationship with himself.

A fair summary of the writings of St. Ignatius, the visions of St. Margaret Mary and current church teaching might look like this: The body of Christ gives the body of Christ to the body of Christ. That is, Jesus gives the Eucharist to the church. He draws us into communion and makes us more like himself, incarnate love for God and for others.

The Sacred Heart and the Eucharist

The Sacred Heart is a living icon of Christ’s friendship: his love for us and an invitation to love him in return. Later, Jesuits would promote a “daily offering” to Jesus. In this prayer, popularized by French Jesuit scholastics in the 1840s, one daily offers “prayers, works, joys, and sufferings” to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The movement that promotes this daily offering is the Apostleship of Prayer, also known as the Pope’s Prayer Network. The daily offering extends, so to speak, the Eucharist throughout my day and week. I reflect on God’s love for me and seek to unite my whole day and my whole heart “in union with the holy sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart.” For those attending daily Mass, this practice deepens their eucharistic devotion. For others, it is a daily union with Christ between their Sunday Communion.

St. Ignatius and devotion to the Sacred Heart focus on Jesus as friend and the Eucharist as a means to deeper communion with him and others. More frequent encounters with the Eucharist, through Communion and eucharistic adoration, help us to strengthen this relationship with Christ. A daily offering of self to Jesus through prayer helps make the whole day and all of life more eucharistic.

Joe Laramie, S.J., is the national director of the Pope’s Prayer Network, also known as the Apostleship of Prayer. He is the author of *Abide in the Heart of Christ: A 10-Day Personal Retreat With St. Ignatius Loyola and the forthcoming book Love Him Ever More: A Nine-Day Personal Retreat With the Sacred Heart (August 2022)*. He serves on a committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for the Eucharistic Revival, organizing preachers for retreats.

A stylized illustration of a man with dark hair, smiling, wearing a black clerical suit with a white collar. The background is a solid teal color.

Seven Tips for a More Joyful Priesthood

By Damian Ference

The priesthood is serious business, but it is also human business

Seven men were ordained to the priesthood between 2013 and 2019 at St. Mary Parish in Hudson, Ohio, one in each year. This parish had been my first priestly assignment 10 years earlier (2003-07), so I knew each of these men, and I saw the ways in which their formation in the faith was a true community effort.

During my years at the parish, I worked side-by-side with an incredibly gifted and faithful youth minister and his selfless core staff. I also had the support of a wonderful and open-minded baby-boomer pastor and experienced the prayerful and zealous commitment of an entire parish for making young disciples and helping them find their missions in the world.

What I brought to that mix was not priestly perfection, liturgical elegance or administrative genius, but the joy of a sinner whom the Lord had looked upon. I would never claim that I am the only reason those seven men are priests today—of course they all have their own unique stories and influences—but I do think it helped that my own vocation as a priest has given me great joy. So during my time as parochial vicar I was able to offer a joyful witness to the priesthood that was human and therefore accessible and imitable. I also think that my own joy helped the parents of these young men worry less about their sons becoming priests.

Joy is a gift, and I experience it often. But I readily admit that at times I get too tired, too weak, too lazy or too prideful, and I lose my joy. Yet I have found that if I am actively and intentionally engaged in the following seven practices, I am better able to sustain that joy. These seven practices are not unique to priests, but I write about them

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Perhaps the greatest threat to the joy of a priest is the temptation to see oneself as the Savior. ●●

in the context of the priesthood because it is what I have known for the past 19 years. Adapt them to your own life as you see fit, because the greatest evangelization we can offer is a joyful church.

Pray. In his first apostolic letter, “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis wrote, “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day.” This invitation is so basic and so obvious that it can be easily overlooked or forgotten, even (and especially) by priests.

By our ordination, priests are configured to Christ in a unique way and are called to lead by word and example, particularly in cultivating a life of prayer. But when one’s vocation is to be a professional at prayer, it can be tempting from time to time—at Mass, or when praying the Liturgy of the Hours, or even during personal devotions—to turn on autopilot. I write from experience. Distractions abound, and if I am not vigilant about recognizing those distractions and intentional about praying with them or through them, that daily renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ that is essential for a joyful priesthood is lost.

Praying well is hard work, and it takes discipline. Even to simply tell Jesus, “Lord, I’m tired,” or “Lord, I need you” and then to listen for his response takes both tenacity and humility, the fruits of which are joy. But a priest who is not serious about prayer, even the simplest kind, cannot seri-

ously expect to be joyful.

Maintain strong friendships. Aristotle writes that everyone wants friends and that no one wants to be without friends, and he is right. Jesus Christ, who is like us in all things but sin, had friends. Pope Francis reclaimed July 29 as the feast day of Sts. Martha, Mary and Lazarus, celebrating three of Jesus’ closest friends. (For a while it was just St. Martha’s day.) The Gospels tell us that Jesus was also tight with Peter, James and John, not to mention the great Mary Magdalene.

Like Jesus, a joyful priest will have good friendships, both with brother priests and with lay men and women. Priests need friends with whom they can share their lives, people they can trust and who can trust them. Thomas Aquinas notes that friends help us carry our burdens—they share our crosses, like Simon of Cyrene—and he thinks that the sight of a friend reminds us that we are loved. How true. My parents are deceased, and I come from a small family. I can say without exaggeration that I would not be able to make it as a priest without my friends. They bring me great joy.

Embrace your humanity. One of the most drastic changes in life is going from being a seminarian to being a priest. Even with the best seminary formation, it is hard to prepare for that day when you become perceived as one of the most mysterious sorts of people in the world—wearing strange clothes, choosing not to get married, celebrating sacraments, preaching to fellow sinners and being invited by people into the most important parts of their lives: marriage, birth, struggles with sin, suffering, sickness and death. Some people like you because you are a priest, and other people despise you because of it, but rare is the person who thinks nothing of it.

It is important to remember that before a man is a priest, he is a man—he is a human being. The most joyful priests I know embrace their humanity; they don’t run from it. They enjoy a good meal, a good drink, good friends, good music, a good novel, good art, a good hike. And they laugh a lot. It is true that the priesthood is serious business, but it is also human business. The most joyful priests seem to be those who speak in the same voice whether they are in their collar or in the gym or on vacation. They don’t lead with their office, but with their humanity and, in turn, bring others to consider the joy of the Incarnation and the beauty and mystery of the priesthood.

Befriend people who make you uncomfortable. Jesus loves sinners. Since we are all sinners—we acknowledge this at the beginning of every Mass—this should console

us. But over time it becomes easy to forget. We, priests and lay people alike, often fall into the trap of surrounding ourselves mostly with people who believe what we believe and think what we think. Such people make us feel safe and comfortable. But the Gospels testify that although Jesus had a good circle of friends in whom he took comfort, he also took comfort in being with those on the margins of society, including sinners and tax collectors. He went to them because he loved them, and he knew that their hearts were ultimately made for him. In loving the sinner, Jesus softened the sinner's heart for conversion, which results in joy. Joyful priests never forget that Jesus loved them first as sinners and continues to do so. And then they do the same for others.

Respect the dignity of all people (even—especially—the ones who annoy you). When I was a seminarian, I shared the same graces of the priesthood and the same diocese with the rector of my seminary. But our views of the world and the church were very different. I didn't always like him, but I did love him. When he died, I was honored to concelebrate his funeral Mass, and I believe he would have done the same for me. If one's heart is full of hate, there is no room for joy. Most of us have people in our lives who get under our skin. That's O.K. Loving people we don't always like is a way of remembering that everyone counts, everyone matters—even and especially those who are hard to love. The joy that comes from loving people with whom we don't always get along is real and contagious.

Take risks. When I was sent away for doctoral studies, I figured that upon my return to Cleveland I would be teaching at our little college seminary for the next 10 years, as that was the original plan. A few months before my doctoral defense, my new bishop surprised me by asking me to take on a new position as his vicar for evangelization. I said yes, but I really didn't know what I was saying yes to, as there was not yet a job description. He told me to be imaginative and creative and help him to focus all the efforts of our diocese toward evangelization. Not knowing what I was doing, I took great comfort in the Stations of the Cross, specifically in the fact that Jesus fell three times on his way to Calvary. There's a lot of pressure to get everything perfect in ministry, but Jesus' passion was part of his ministry, and his three falls are a reminder that we will fall too. Not everything I try as a priest will work, even with the best planning. But the Lord rewards those who take risks for his kingdom. The reward is a joyful heart.

Let Jesus do the saving. Perhaps the greatest threat to

the joy of a priest is the temptation to see oneself as the Savior. Father must fix everything, make it all better, bind up all the wounds and heal all the sick, not to mention balance the budget, fix the roof and preach good homilies. Joyful priests take their day off, take their vacation, make their annual retreat and make the time for reading and exercise. In doing so, they model for their people the proper place for prayer and leisure in human living and fight against the temptation of workaholicism, which affects many. A joyful priest remembers that Jesus is the Lord and Savior.

The Rev. Damian J. Ference is a priest of the Diocese of Cleveland, where he serves as vicar for evangelization, secretary for parish life and special ministries, and professor of philosophy at Borromeo Seminary.
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This is a book of holy reflections. The authors hope that you weave your own spiritual threads that create a mosaic, a tapestry, a labyrinth... for a heart that yearns and dares to journey to a place of peace and compassion where all can be united as one.



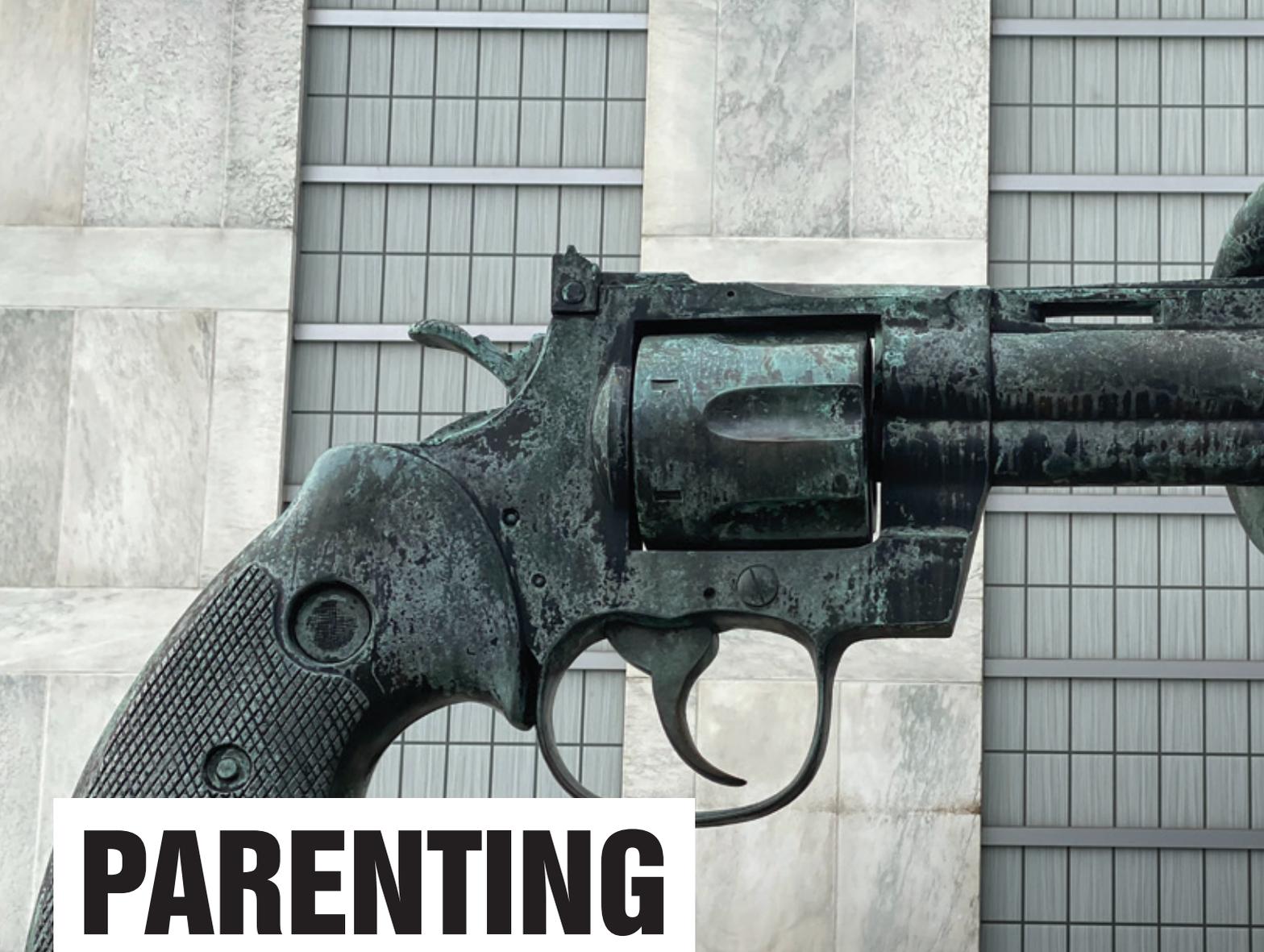
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PARENTING AS A PACIFIST

And why I guarded the door at my daughter's fifth-grade graduation

By Jon M. Sweeney

Only two days after the horrific killing of 19 children and two adults in Uvalde, Tex., I filed into an auditorium to watch my daughter's elementary school graduation ceremony.

She attends Golda Meir, a public school in downtown Milwaukee, Wis., and the 85 children finishing fifth grade were participating in a "bridging ceremony," celebrating their move next year across the street to the middle school campus.

Some time before the speeches and the video presentation that paired a contemporary photo of each child's face beside one of each as toddlers, I found myself lingering near the front door.

In some ways it was just like any other school function throughout the year. Students and parents arrived, masked, and sat down in the auditorium. The latest school shooting was everywhere in the news, but I didn't hear a word of fear nor a mention of the gun violence in the quiet conversation of people near



Unsplash/Maria Lysenko

"The Knotted Gun," a sculpture by Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd, outside the United Nations in New York

I often feel that it's inevitable: Someday I'll be throwing myself in front of a stream of bullets. Maybe I won't be called on to throw myself in front of a stream of bullets, but I will need to be ready to do so. The thought occurs to me at synagogue, too, since not only is the tally of mass shootings going up, but so is the hate that fuels them.

I'm a Catholic married to a rabbi, and I see how anti-Semitism is growing. At the synagogue, I keep an eye on the door while services are going on and make a mental note about which metal chair I might pick up to throw at a gun-toting intruder, or from what angle I might rush at him if he has come to get the rabbi.

Ever since the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado, schools have created safety drills and discussion and training sessions for teachers, staff and students to prepare them to respond to crisis situations involving guns. "Active shooter" has become a phrase known to all. My oldest child was only 6 when the Columbine shooting happened. Our family has grown up in this world.

There is no question that mass shootings are more common at public schools than private ones. I have not read much analysis as to why. And I am not eager to. But the other day I asked a friend whose children attend one of our Milwaukee Catholic schools if he thinks his kids are safer there. He said he thought the small size of the school, along with practical safety measures, created what he felt was a relatively safe environment for his children. His answer spoke to the importance of community in keeping children safe, the vigilance we owe one another at every school.

As a Christian I am told not to fear, and as a pacifist I am told not to defend myself. Just look at the exchange between Jesus and Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26). When the soldiers come to take Jesus away, Peter strikes at one of them with his sword. Clearly, Peter is armed. But Jesus rebukes his friend, the first pope. Put your sword away, Jesus tells him; do you really believe that is how the will of God is accomplished? The church allows for self-defense. But attacking someone, even someone threatening violence, is not what I have been taught to do as a follower of Jesus and a pacifist. But these commands are getting harder to follow.

A Christian is called to be a martyr, a word that means "witness," and the examples given by Jesus of martyr-witnesses are those whom we have come to understand as saints. They are people who, when faced with danger or violence, are willing to sacrifice their lives without harming others, even those who try to hurt them. Even from the cross, with violence all around him, Jesus did not fight back. Instead he said, "Father, forgive them." I want to show forgiveness. I want to respond peacefully. But I also want to keep my eye on the auditorium door.

me. But as we gathered to celebrate this group of school children, those children who died in Texas, who would never make it to their own graduations, were at the forefront of my mind. Surely others felt the same.

My wife and I had arrived early, and from our seats near the front, I kept looking back toward the entrance we had walked through. It occurred to me, *Should there be a guard here?* And then, *Is anyone watching the front door?* So I got up and did that.

Admittedly, this is an unusual move for someone who considers himself a pacifist. When I turned 18 and had to register with Selective Service, I did so by writing "Conscientious Objector" on the form. Since then, I have called myself a peacemaker. I have never held a gun and never want to. But I am also a father. So on this day, I found myself leaving my seat to stand near the entrance and eye every guy who walked through the door.

If I'd seen someone with a weapon, I'd have thrown my 195 pounds at him as best I could.



There is now a worldly reality that may require armed guards under certain circumstances. 💧💧

My wife, the congregational rabbi, is not a Jesus-follower, but she shares my feelings of not wanting guns in religious services, despite the risks religious people face by gathering together. Our local Jewish federation recently provided funding for every synagogue to have an armed guard at high holiday services each fall. My wife accepted the offer but now feels uneasy about it.

There is now a worldly reality that may require armed guards under certain circumstances. In St. Peter's Square in Vatican City, for instance. At the Western Wall in Jerusalem. But the presence of weapons fundamentally changes a space. The result of this capitulation, for me anyway, is that I cannot really pray in those places. Can you really promote a sense of peace by surrounding a place with guns? Does an armed guard make prayer possible, or does an armed guard make a place unholy?

Everyone walking through the door at my daughter's fifth grade graduation turned out to be a parent, grandparent, sibling or friend. I returned to my seat before the presentations began, and the door to the auditorium remained open. It felt like a risk, but what was I to do, really? Every day at school is now a day when our children are at risk. I will not be there to protect my children 99 percent of the time. But I also know that if I am there, I will not hesitate to lead the charge against an attacker.

As that video presentation rolled, showing the beautiful grinning faces of my daughter and her classmates, I wept quietly in my seat, thinking of those parents who, on that same day, were burying their children in the hot sun.

Jon M. Sweeney, a frequent contributor to *America*, is the author of *Feed the Wolf and, coming this fall, Teresa of Calcutta: Dark Night, Active Love*.

Discernment of Spirits

By Mia Schilling Grogan

I enter the story here, caught in the net.
We are a seething, slippery body
bound in the mesh that schools us, makes a mass
that might move as one, pulling knotted rope
behind us through the sea, but banked now spills
us, forgathered in fear, a gasping harvest
of dying flesh. Some scales shimmer in the light.
So many sardines, a few musht and carp,
the fresh tang of the sea soaked in our cells
and leaching into the air to putrefy.
It's not pretty. The Exercises ask
us to inhabit the story, to see
Jesus from within the frame; I'm always
searching for that slipstream word or the right
body to become, and sometimes it's tough:
for years I'd be the cranky older son,
jealous about the party. Now my brain
gets stuck on "prostitutes," the only hint
of a female form in that one. What can
I discern in my loss of patience? I've
done the gender-blind casting. And conjuring
women behind the trees? Been there. But lately,
I crave more—to be typecast in key roles:
blinded by the Transfigured Christ beside me,
bowed over by the bounty of my catch.
To feel the Lord's hand grip my hand to mean,
Come on. I'm told to pay attention to that
yearning. I do. Honestly, we're a mess
inside this net. We're bound for transformation,
beautiful in our abundance, but
also, it's hard to see Jesus from here.
Honestly, it's a lot. And I feel trapped.

Mia Schilling Grogan is an associate professor of English at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. Her poems have appeared most recently in *Presence*, *First Things*, *The Windhover* and *Light*. This poem was a runner-up in *America's 2022 Foley Poetry Contest*.

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I'M AFRAID TO RETURN TO MASS IN PERSON

By Valerie Schultz

And it's not because of Covid

For two years now, I have gone to Mass twice every Sunday, although I do so seated at my kitchen table. I can see the local Catholic church from my window, but I haven't been inside it since the brief window, mid-pandemic, of supposed normality in July 2021. From my small town in Oregon, I go to Mass first in Chicago and then in Los Angeles.

Perhaps I should say that I go to *services* in Chicago and Los Angeles, as no one has yet figured out how to go to Communion by Zoom. I do miss receiving the Eucharist. In years past, when I worked for a Catholic parish, I often went to daily Mass. Back then, I couldn't have imagined going without the body of Christ for months or years, as is the burden of some communities in remote areas of the world. I always felt blessed to have the opportunity to go to Mass whenever I wanted. But I was a different person back then.

My life changed when one of my children came out of the closet. As the parent of a transgender person, I felt called to advocate publicly for civil rights and equal treatment for the L.G.B.T. community, which meant that I had to leave my paid position at the parish. The sexual abuse scandal was also swirling around the Catholic Church at the time. My husband, a cradle Catholic, opted out and be-

came an Episcopalian. The safe edifice of my Catholic family had crumbled.

Long story short: I fell from being a pillar of parish programs to sitting alone in a back pew. I think of my Catholicism now as a fragile little bird that I keep sheltered in the nest of my heart. I'm still here. Even as my trans child felt abandoned and reviled by the faith into which they were baptized, even as my husband was no longer at my side during Mass, I stayed. I was a Catholic, by God. I was not going to be driven out. Rather than throwing up my hands and surrendering, I held on by a fingernail. The personal criticism, the institutional blindness, the wear and tear of alienation, even the lurking guilt I had for not leaving the church to support my child would not win.

But there were many times I wanted to get up and make a dramatic exit during a homily that, for example, compared civil marriage equality to letting monkeys marry. I would tell myself that one priest's unkindness did not represent Jesus. In this age of "traditionalist" rhetoric spouted by some American Catholics in the public square—trashing the pope and pretty much ignoring Catholic social justice teaching—I knew that the call of Jesus was not what I was hearing from those sources. But Lord, they were loud.



Unsplash/Thomas Vitai

Then came the pandemic of 2020, when going to Mass in person was not a safe option; in some places it was not an option at all. Catholics looked for Masses in parking lots or on TV. Searching the internet brought me to two Zoom Masses far from my home. One was streamed from a large and vibrant parish in a city. Another was broadcast by a friend, a retired priest who said Mass at his own kitchen table. I felt protected from the virus by using these opportunities, and my little bird of faith felt protected, too, by the love and compassion that informed the homilies given by the priests and deacons at these Masses.

It's not that I felt safe from controversy, or placated in my own bubble of belief, because these homilies were thought-provoking and challenging. I wasn't hearing only what I wanted to hear. But I felt engaged. I also felt focused. Sitting alone at my table, nothing distracted me from the Scripture readings or the prayers of intercession. Seeing the digital grid of fellow Catholics—living, breathing worshippers who were similarly isolated—somehow gave me a stronger sense of communion than I had felt in a church building in a long time. Several of us sometimes stayed online after Mass ended to discuss the homily. I was finally grasping the meaning of spiritual communion. I didn't ex-

pect it to be enough, but it was.

To be honest, I'd expected to yearn for Communion with a profound physical hunger. After all, I'd thought it was exclusively the Eucharist that had kept me Catholic throughout the years of personal doubt and wavering. When that sense of longing didn't come, it surprised me. The prayer of spiritual Communion, however, has moved me deeply. I've prayed it intensely: *Never permit me to be separated from you.* Although I'm alone, I've felt more connected to God and to the church than I have in years.

Now my local parish offers three weekend Masses. Now I am vaccinated. Now the mask mandates are being relaxed as the Covid-19 infection numbers and hospitalizations recede. We can gather. From my window, I can hear the bells tolling at the start of each Mass. Every week I plan to go. Every Sunday I do not go. Why? I should be running back to in-person Mass so I can embrace the real presence of the Eucharist.

Here is why: I'm afraid. But not of the virus. Frankly, I'm afraid of what I will see, of what I will hear when I get there and step inside.

I'm afraid of once again confronting a superficial pro-life philosophy, one that is pro-pregnancy but against pro-



I think of my Catholicism now as a fragile little bird that I keep sheltered in the nest of my heart. 🕯️

viding any assistance to those in need, even the bootstraps by which they are supposed to pull themselves up. I'm afraid of once again encountering members of the clergy and laity who parrot cruel political talking points while dismissing Pope Francis' call to tenderness. Mostly, I'm afraid that some misguided homily is going to be the straw that breaks me, the last straw that finally makes me leave this church that I belong to, that I say I love. Even as I confess this weakness of faith, I recognize my fear that my little

bird is not viable outside the nest. *I do believe, Lord. Help my unbelief.*

I suspect I'm not alone in this reluctance to go back to face the church as it was before the pandemic. But my Zoom communities are changing, as Mass is now coming from a church building full of actual people, and that is as it should be. The pandemic's revelation of the ability to Zoom on Sunday has been a godsend for homebound folks, and I hope it continues for their sake.

But ours is an incarnational faith. The real presence of Christ demands our presence. I am going to have to get up from my table and go to Mass, to participate in the liturgy and receive Communion, to volunteer in ministry and give back to my parish community in some way. This is how it will go in a perfect world, one in which I am unafraid. I hope and pray to get there.

I'm not there yet.

Valerie Schultz is a freelance writer, a columnist for *The Bakersfield Californian* and the author of *Overdue: A Dewey Decimal System of Grace*.
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‘They Need to Form Those Bonds’

A roundtable conversation on the nature of a Jesuit education

Moderated by Jim Linhares

St. Louis University High School, founded in 1818, is the oldest Jesuit secondary school west of the Mississippi River. Recently, Jim Linhares, the school’s assistant principal for mission, invited a group of faculty members from different disciplines to discuss how the Jesuit character of the school influences the way they teach. A video of their discussion can be found at americamagazine.org/SLUH. This excerpt from their discussion has been edited for length and clarity.

Jim Linhares. What is God trying to do for and with your students through your classes, your discipline and in the daily activities of life in high school?

Jennifer Carroll, English teacher, 10 years at S.L.U. High School: I hope the way that my students are trying to experience God is through the literature that they read. We want our students to be alive and thinking human beings who have a story to tell and who know how to tell their story. We have these great works of literature like *The Odyssey*. This classic work has a lot to teach us about how we relate and interact with each other. How do we help these young men understand the great insights that great

works of literature provide? And how can they make those insights meaningful in their own lives?

Tim Curdt, director of the learning center, 27 years: An Ignatian term that I’ve always been drawn to is “discernment of spirits.” What is bringing you desolation and consolation? We use the examen St. Ignatius gave us. It works in the learning center as a great spiritual method for being both brutally honest and genuinely loving at the same time.

Ignatian spirituality talks about the voices of God and the voices of the evil spirit in a way that doesn’t encourage self-loathing, anxiety or judgment. Even in the process of really tense situations with students about their academic future, we encourage them to discern the honest—but ultimately, foundational and loving—way in which they’re being called to work through the struggles and find solutions, solutions that at the beginning of our sessions didn’t seem possible.

Bill Anderson, science teacher, 38 years: I start every year with the same slide: “Science is awesome”—iItalicized and capitalized. You can’t help but look at the world around us

"We want our students to be alive and thinking human beings who have a story to tell," says Jennifer Carroll, an English teacher at St. Louis University High School.

and be awed by the mystery and the beauty of it. We get a really good chance to see that in projects like our weather balloon launches. The pictures that the boys get, especially the ones at 100,000 feet well up into the stratosphere, let them see the curvature of the earth, the gradations and colors as the atmosphere transitions into space. It's an experience most high school kids are never going to get, something we share with the community as a whole.

J.L. How can we create moments in our classes that are not explicitly religious and that may not even label God or prayer or theology or faith? How do we nevertheless, through reflection and awareness, have students understand that God is indeed in the midst of what we're studying? What are the challenges of doing that?

Matt Stewart, S.J., director of campus ministry, 11 years: Maybe I'll talk about choral warmups, something that wouldn't appear to have anything to do with spirituality. When you warm up, you want students to work on a particular skill, whether it's intonation, breathing, vowels, rhythm or whatever—to get people working together on a project. I remember my very first day in the freshman band as a student at S.L.U. High. We played a B-flat major scale, and I was like: "This is thrilling!" There's this excitement that comes with being a part of an ensemble. In those moments—as band musicians or in a choral setting—you say: "Let's talk about what you just felt." In that moment, you've made a connection with somebody. You're singing nonsense syllables and all of a sudden, we're harmonizing! We can draw their attention to something spiritual even though we're not talking about theology and we're not singing a religious song.

Jennifer Carroll: One of the things I do a lot, especially with freshmen, is to make sure that they talk to a partner, that they work in groups. We change seats regularly. I'm just aware they need to form those bonds. They need to form those connections. It's not something that I say explicitly, but it is really what motivates me to do it.

Mary Russo, science teacher, 23 years. The relationship piece is key: trust. Feeling valued. Valuing each other. If they feel like they've got a voice I'm hearing, they're gonna start to trust me. I always give students a personal prompt: "What do you have for breakfast? Who watched the Cardinals game last night?" Just something to get them looking at each other, connecting with each other. Learning chemistry takes trust, right? It's not easy and we have to do

it through community building.

J.L. How do you pray better and relate to God better because of the experience you've had with the young men you teach and accompany?

Tracy Lyons, math teacher, nine years: I go back to the word joy. I'm not a particularly joyful person. I live in what I like to refer to as my "den of cynicism." But I find joy seeing students at a game or in the hallway or in the classroom. Geometry or stats aren't the most exciting things, but students do get excited when they work on a problem. Or they are excited about a new topic or whatever. The joy of seeing them being young people brings me energy. It makes my job feel like a calling.

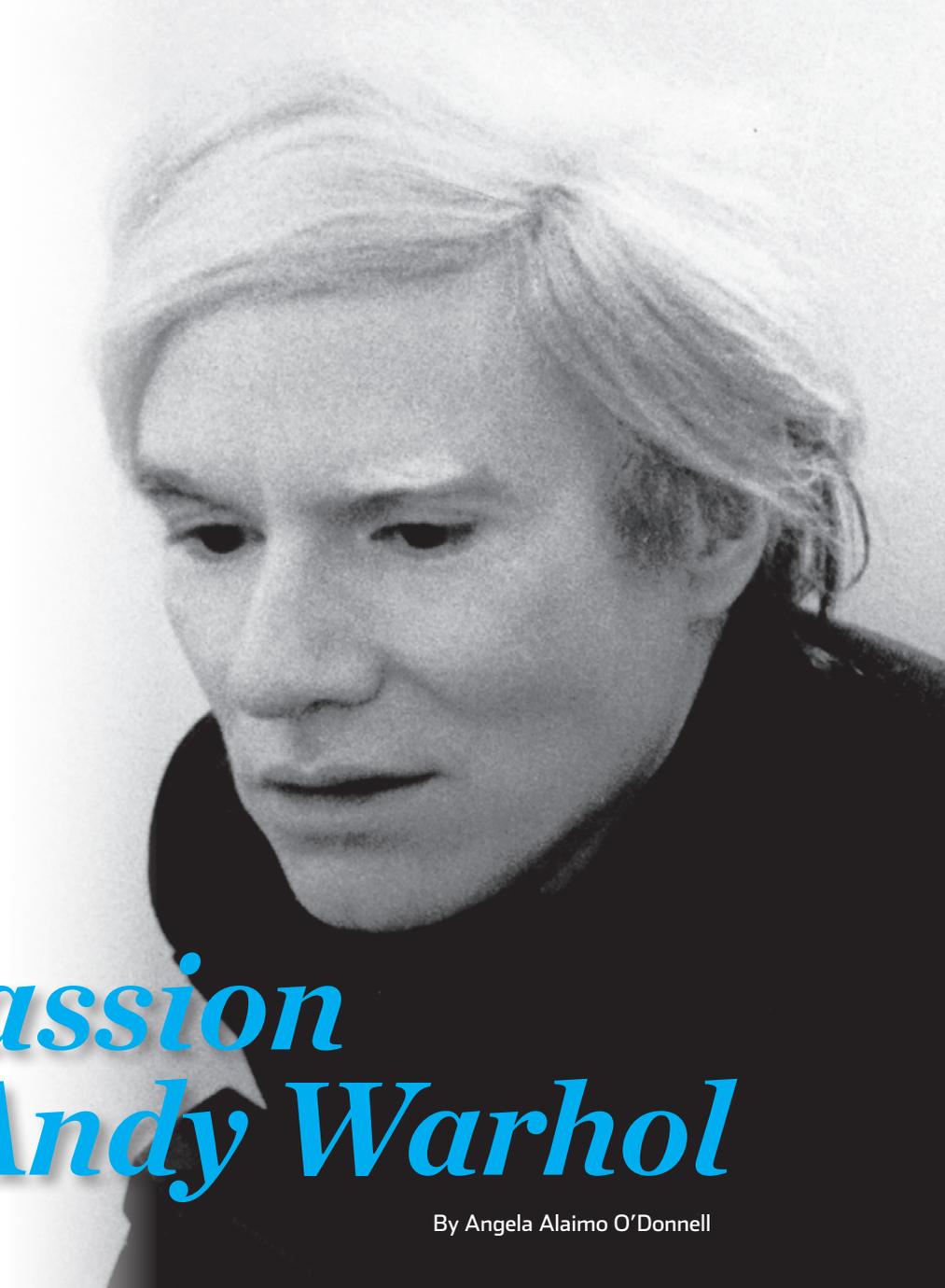
Bill Anderson: I think the hope comes primarily from the young people I see everyday. I see them struggling with those questions and grappling with ways to make a difference. I also see students that we've taught out there making a difference: working in science or business, engineers having an impact on society and our climate.

J.L. Tim, you have the benefit of having sons who are recent graduates from St. Louis U. High. When you think about your own boys, what do you see that consoles you, that reassures you this formation we're talking about is actually happening for them?

Tim Curdt: You know, the ages of 20 through 24 are not usually known as years for religious identity and spiritual practice and attending church. But I know my sons do connect back to the foundation they were given—not just to what my wife and I have given them our whole lives, but to things that were reinforced, complicated, nuanced and celebrated during these key formative years at S.L.U. High. When they're talking about the next stage of their life—what they're interested in or what they're stressed about—I can actually hear their hearts kind of expanding.

I know they're gonna be all right; God is with them. They are connected whenever they're engaged with social justice issues, being out in nature or in leadership training. When they are doing those things, I see their hearts on fire. Even if they're not putting explicit theological language to it, I see their hearts jump and that says to me, "It's going to be all right."

Jim Linhares is the assistant principal for mission at St. Louis University High School. He has been on staff since 1983. Jesuit School Spotlight is underwritten in part by Jesuit high schools of the USA East Province of the Society of Jesus.



The Passion of Andy Warhol

By Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

In case you haven't been paying attention, Andy Warhol is back. Honestly, though, he never really left.

Like Melville's mythic white whale, the iconic white-wigged artist and prophet of modernity slips away from public view for brief periods of time only to breach the waters of our collective consciousness again in powerful and surprising ways. Warhol's art seems to grow in value with each pass-

ing year. His "Shot Sage Blue Marilyn" screen print recently sold for a record \$195 million, making it the highest price paid for a piece by an American artist at auction.

This news comes as Warhol's work is powerfully visible in "Revelation," an exhibition recently on view at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York, which explored the influence of Warhol's religious imagi-

nation on his art. In addition, Warhol's fascinating life is the subject of a recent London play ("The Collaboration"), an Off Broadway musical ("The Trial of Andy Warhol") and an immersive walking tour of New York City called "Chasing Andy Warhol." He is also the focus of a documentary streaming on Netflix since early March, "The Andy Warhol Diaries."

The fact that Warhol is made so



For all of his exposure, Andy Warhol, like Melville's white whale, remains an enigma.

MARKA / Alamy Stock Photo

visible to us by means of multiple media—stage, screen and in a traditional museum setting—mimics Warhol's own obsessive dabbling in as many forms of artistic media as were available to him in his lifetime. The man who was credited with the prescient prediction (pre-YouTube and pre-TikTok) that everyone would eventually achieve 15 minutes of fame has clocked many more than

that. Warhol has been dead for 35 years, but that hasn't stopped him from making headlines.

Yet for all of this exposure, Warhol, again like Melville's whale, remains an enigma. He is a serious artist, he is a crass commercialist; a sensitive soul, a shameless huckster; a wild party boy, a Catholic kid from Pittsburgh; a painful introvert, a celebrity hound ravenous for fame.

The more we see of him, the less we understand him. This, of course, was Warhol's intention. To combat the easy categorization the world might try to impose on him, he invented a persona that could not be reduced to any single set of descriptors.

'The Andy Warhol Diaries'

The construction of this mythical self is at the center of the Netflix



Warhol's wounded body echoes Christ's story, his passion giving him a taste of his Passion.

documentary. “Andy Warhol’s greatest work of art is Andy Warhol,” observes art dealer and friend Jeffrey Deitch, one of many celebrities, fellow artists, critics and confidants who appear in the series. Over six hourlong episodes, we also hear, through A.I. technology that uncannily replicates his voice, Warhol “reading” from his diaries and telling his own story. We hear him give voice to his fears (he has many), fall in and out of love, critique the artists and celebrities whose company he keeps, make boastful declarations of his ambitions and poignant admissions of his failures, and wrestle with existential dread. While it’s true that no one really knows Warhol, thanks to the diaries—first published in 1989 and now made available to millions on a media platform Warhol would have found enviable—we are given access to his personal life and private thoughts, which help to humanize him, remove the impassive mask (if only for brief intervals) and enable us to see the passion of Andy Warhol.

It is hard not to be moved by Warhol’s strange life: his beginnings as a shy gay Catholic boy in a steel mill city; his family’s identity as outsiders even among the other Slavs in immigrant Pittsburgh (the family was Carpatho-Rusyn rather than Czech, Slovak or Polish); his knowledge of himself as a person possessed by a passion for beauty in a singularly unbeau-

tiful place; his escape to New York City in pursuit of his vocation as an artist; his unlikely commercial success catapulting him to unimaginable fame and wealth; his two longtime love affairs that he insisted on representing to the world as platonic friendships; and the assassination attempt that marked him for life, both physically and psychically, the consequences of which would lead to his death 19 years later. “The Diaries” reveals that each of these periods of Warhol’s life, even the ostensibly enjoyable ones, were permeated by suffering, and much of that suffering was rooted in the painful reality of being a gay man in a world that he knew despised him.

In the show, Bob Colacello, a longtime friend and editor of Warhol’s magazine, *Interview*, suggests that one of the chief reasons Warhol created such an air of myth and mystery around himself was to keep his true identity, particularly his sexuality, out of the public eye. He also acknowledges the importance of Warhol’s formation in the Byzantine Catholic Church. One of the few sources of beauty in grim, gritty Pittsburgh was St. John Chrysostom Church. Warhol’s mother, Julia Warhola, was an observant Catholic, taking her children to Saturday night vespers and three Masses on Sunday, where they were surrounded by Byzantine icons.

These powerful portraits of the

saints would inform Warhol’s own practice of portraiture as an artist, argues Colacello: “All his really important works were icons—figures to be venerated.” And yet the same church that fueled Warhol’s imagination also condemned his homosexuality, an aspect of himself he was aware of at a young age. Inevitably, his relationship to his faith and to God was fraught, complex and full of tension—the kind of tension that manifests itself in art.

‘Revelation’

In a wonderful instance of serendipity, as I was watching “The Andy Warhol Diaries,” I was able to visit the “Revelation” exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. Assembled by the curators of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, the exhibition featured over 100 items that attest to the powerful role played by Catholic tradition, ritual, language and symbolism in Warhol’s life and art. Ranging from Warhol’s baptismal certificate to photographs of the icons in Warhol’s childhood church; from his paintings of the Madonna to his series of silkscreen photographs featuring America’s grieving madonna, Jackie Kennedy; from his obsessive depictions of “Death and Disaster” to his monumental studies of Leonardo’s “Last Supper”—the exhibition focused on the ubiquity of the idea of the Incarnation, on corporality and

embodiment, and on the centrality of suffering in human life. In gallery after gallery, Warhol's Catholic imagination was on full display, enabling the viewer to see a key element of his work that is just hinted at in "The Diaries."

One of the most striking images I saw during that visit is Richard Avedon's photograph of Andy Warhol's torso taken a year after he was shot in 1968. A single bullet, fired by a mentally ill woman who accused Warhol of stealing a manuscript she had sent him, pierced his lungs, his liver, his esophagus, his stomach and his spleen. Warhol was thought to be dead by the doctors who tended to him at Columbus Hospital in New York until a private practice surgeon, Giuseppe Rossi, noticed the contraction of one of his pupils in the harsh hospital lights and was able to perform the emergency surgery that saved Warhol's life. (This scenario is powerfully narrated by Blake Gopnik in the introduction to his exhaustive biography, *Warhol*, from 2020—another recent laudable attempt to penetrate Warhol's mystery.) Lazarus-like, Warhol was resurrected to a new life.

But that new life would be characterized by fear and pain. Warhol would have to wear a corset to keep his organs in place for the rest of his life. His diet and digestion would be affected, and he would have gallbladder trouble. It was surgery for the latter ailment that would kill him eventually. Warhol would die of complications in the hospital, a place that filled him with dread after the trauma of the shooting, in 1987.

Avedon's photograph is striking in part because it is both prophetic and charged with all of this history. It is also striking because it is the por-

trait of a crucifixion. Seen in that gallery—set beside Warhol's depictions of Christ on the night before his passion; set beside his famous icon of a handgun, the instrument of Warhol's torture and death; set beside his massive portrait of a skull, evoking Golgotha ("The Place of the Skull" and site of the crucifixion)—Warhol's wounded body echoes and participates in Christ's story, his passion giving him a taste of his Passion.

Warhol's suffering takes many forms in "The Diaries" and is particularly evident in his relationships. His friendship with the brilliant young artist Jean-Michel Basquiat begins in joy and is fueled by exuberance as the elder mentor and younger protégé collaborate to create some of the finest works of the late 20th century. (Before the sale of Warhol's \$195 million Marilyn icon, the highest priced work of American art sold at auction was Basquiat's skull painting, which sold for \$110 million.) However, the relationship eventually sours as the two are set against one another by the press and the art world, and they become competitors rather than collaborators. Warhol is left bereft. He would also lose many friends, as well as his partner, Jon Gould, to illness. The plague of AIDS was ravaging the gay community in New York City and elsewhere in the 1980s, filling Warhol with terror and grief.

'The Last Supper'

Given this sense of impending mortality, it is perhaps not surprising that Warhol's last artistic endeavor, regarded by Jeffrey Deitch as "a summation of Andy's whole artistic enterprise," would be "The Last Supper" series. Commissioned by

Alexander Iolas, a Greek art dealer and friend who was dying of AIDS, the series comprises over 100 works, which Warhol worked on obsessively in 1985-86. Among these are Warhol's famous large-scale paintings and silkscreens based on da Vinci's iconic work. Warhol's works feature Christ in the midst of his entourage of flawed male companions as the face of empathy and forgiveness. As Christ consecrates the bread, which is his body, he consecrates all flesh, saintly and sinful. His face exudes peace, compassion and kindness.

"The Diaries" follows Warhol to the opening of the exhibition in Milan, an event he attends despite the fact that he is quite ill, and narrates the painful journey back to New York, where he is admitted to the hospital in which he would die two days later, on Feb. 22, 1987. His *via crucis* finally concludes at his memorial service at St. Patrick's Cathedral, an event attended by 3,000 people, many of them the glamorous celebrities Warhol sought out in life.

In his eulogy, the art historian John Richardson reveals details of Warhol's seemingly secret Catholic life—that he attended Mass multiple times a week, "was responsible for at least one conversion," and "took considerable pride in financing [his] nephew's studies for the priesthood." He waxes eloquent, stating that Andy "fooled the world into believing that his only obsessions were money, fame and glamor and that he was cool to the point of callousness." In reality, "the callous observer was in fact a recording angel. And Andy's detachment—the distance he established between the world and himself—was above all a matter of innocence and of art."

And so we are brought back to the theme with which we began: Warhol's artful dodging of intimacy and authenticity. Warhol's diaries are a strange genre. Rather than a text written by the author, they are transcriptions of daily phone conversations Warhol had over the course of 10 years with the freelance writer Pat Hackett, who edited and published the diaries two years after Warhol's death. "The diaries were different because the diaries were Andy's thoughts in Andy's words," Hackett states in the documentary. "No other part of his work shows this."

Yet even as Hackett makes a claim for the unprecedented authenticity of the diaries, she undercuts it with an equally telling statement: "Andy could have just tape-recorded himself, but Andy wanted an audience."

We can't help but wonder about the diaries, just as we wonder about every Warhol performance, whether this exercise was but another performative gesture in a life that was full of such gestures; or whether this time, on a regular basis, for a few minutes each day over a decade, Andy was being genuine. There is, of course, no way of knowing. "I don't think you will ever figure Warhol out," says curator Donna De Salvo, "And I hope no one ever does." The white whale is still out there, and so is Warhol.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell is a writer, poet and professor at Fordham University and is the associate director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies.

Lord of Hope and Misery

By Diane Glancy

The woodpecker on my gutter sounds like groundfire.
A buzz-saw attack.
An invasion in the eaves.
I look to you, Lord of provision.
Fill my tank with gasoline.
Reload my hope, Jesus.
Bless the birds of sorrow that twitter in my head.
My glory and the lifter of my head.
The birds chirp at the feeder.
Their water bowl is full.
They drink. Jump in.
They splatter bathing in their water bowl.
They set mines along my gutter.
They say their prayers.
They eat safflower. Sunflower. Dried cranberry. Flax.
Peanut. Millet. Hulled pumpkin seed.
Pistachio. Dried raisin.
I eat sugar cookies for breakfast.
I should eat bird seed.
From the window I see one bird chasing others away.
What can I do?
They rush at one another.
Little spit balls.
Spit wads.
Little bullies.
They minister to me.
I see the turbulence of the world in the feeder.
The squabble over territory.
They make a battlefield of my yard.
They jackhammer the eaves.
Squatters.
Ungrateful.
I will give them the bill for their seed.

Diane Glancy is professor emerita at Macalester College and teaches at Carlow University, Pittsburgh. Her latest book is *A Line of Driftwood, the Ada Blackjack Story*. This poem was a runner-up in *America's 2022 Foley Poetry Contest*.

The fall

By Chiwenite Onyekwelu
(for Ibrahim)

Even birds know how beauty
begins at the
 tiny suture between two wings.

But they know nothing about
this fall. We
 slid our bodies down the dune,

the world crumpling into dust
beneath our
 skins. How wildly holy we were,

you and I, sightseeing beyond
this crucifix
 soft on my chest and the almond-

shaped tasbih drooping from yours.
Now, vastness
 shadows what remains on those

sidewalks each time we unlearned
the familiar route
 to school, sang “*baami*” to tease

the girls, or basined a stray sheep
through
 a farmland devoured by brushfire.

At fourteen, I recall my father
gripping a boy
 trying to teach him the origin

of names. Abraham and Ibrahim—
my father says,
 can't you see there are too many

*war-torn countries between
both names?*

So, I mistake your glint. I mistake
my friend for a gun, and he
offers to smuggle
 me out of harm. And this is where
the fall begins, you and I
tumbling from all
 that height, an emptiness forming
right at the spot
where two shoulders once merged as one.

Chiwenite Onyekwelu is a Nigerian essayist and poet whose works appear or are forthcoming in *Chestnut Review*, *Gutter Magazine*, *Prairie Fire*, *Rough Cut* and elsewhere. He serves as chief editor at the School of Pharmacy Agulu. This poem was a runner-up in **America's 2022 Foley Poetry Contest**.



The Transformation of the Emerald Isle

People in Dublin react as Ireland voted in favor of allowing same-sex marriage, May 23, 2015.

“Ouch!” You’ll say that more than once when reading Fintan O’Toole’s *We Don’t Know Ourselves*. American readers familiar with O’Toole from his reviews in *The New York Review of Books* or his work as a drama critic may not be aware that the Irish writer is also quite the polemicist. He turns the knife on an impressive array of persons, political and social institutions, and cultural nostrums in the 600-plus pages of this “personal history” of Ireland from the year of his birth (1958) to the present day.

“My life is too boring for a memoir and there is no shortage of modern Irish history,” he writes. “But it happens that my life does in some ways both span and mirror a time of transformation.” Accordingly, O’Toole brackets his material to focus on events that have occurred in his lifetime; this approach means he can flavor every analysis with personal memories and reactions, making this a far livelier history than most.

That notion of a personal account also gives his arguments something of a Teflon coating: On the few occasions I found myself pushing back against his description or analysis, I was faced with the fact that this is an Irish author writing a personal history of his experience of Ireland. There’s not a lot of rhetorical room there to respond with “Actually, that’s not true.” And is there any more obnoxious cliché than that of the Irish-American weighing in on the *auld sod*?

The Ireland of O’Toole’s childhood had not changed much in the four decades before his birth, in part because the major engine of change— young people—emigrated in huge numbers every year. As a result, the Ireland of 1958 was “almost suffocatingly coherent and fixed: Catholic, nationalist, rural,” he writes. But at the same time, “Ireland as a lived experience was incoherent and un-fixed,” because there was a second, less visible reality:

The first Ireland was bounded, protected, shielded from the unsavoury influence of the outside world. The second was unbounded, shifting, physically on the move to that outside world. In the space between these two Irelands, there was a haunted emptiness, a sense of something so unreal that it might disappear completely.

And indeed, the population of the Republic bottomed out at 2.8 million people three years after O’Toole’s birth; more than a century earlier, it had peaked at 6.5 million. Three in five Irish children raised in the 1950s were destined to leave at some point in their lives, a “slow, relentless demographic disaster” that made the nation seemingly impervious to change.

And yet today, Ireland is a modern state, seemingly well-integrated culturally and economically into Western

We Don't Know Ourselves
A Personal History of Modern Ireland
By Fintan O'Toole
Liveright
624p \$32

Europe. The population of the Republic is over five million, and in terms of gross domestic product, Ireland is one of the wealthiest nations in the world. By almost any financial marker, the Ireland of today bears little resemblance to the poor, rural, traditional nation of half a century ago. "This was the great gamble of 1958," O'Toole writes, where "everything would change economically but everything would stay the same culturally."

The reality has turned out somewhat different, as economic growth brought more than just financial change. Politically and culturally, Ireland had always functioned as an alliance between church and state, and the Catholic Church held enormous sway over education, health care, politics and even the legal supervision of minor vices. The Archbishop of Dublin, O'Toole notes, was not embarrassed to call local radio stations and order bans on songs he considered too risqué.

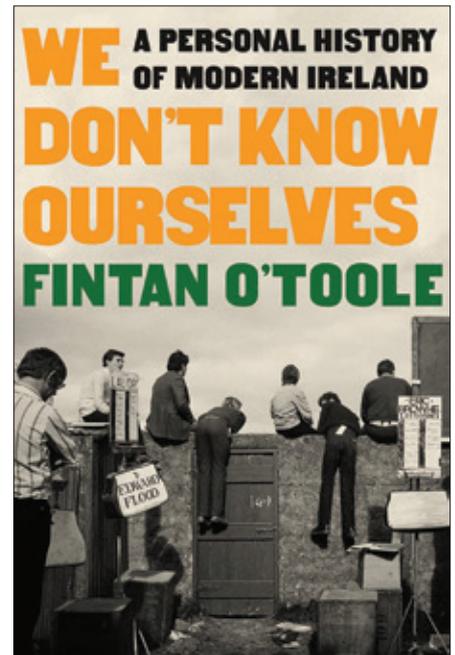
The arrival of mass media made the situation almost comic. How should church and state respond in order to defend the traditional morals of the Irish people? Cut out all the sexy bits of "Casablanca"? Try to jam the signals of the British Broadcasting Corporation? Rail against the corrupting influence of European media, only to end up with an entire generation of children obsessed with American Westerns? (These had been suitably bowdlerized already by Hollywood in accordance with the Hays Code, largely written by—you guessed it—Irish-Americans.)

The deference long paid to priests

and men and women religious by civil society also began to lose its strength in the 1960s and 1970s as the church showed its clay feet more and more. Like many Irish children, O'Toole was educated through high school by the Irish Christian Brothers, and his tales of their brutality match many other equally grim accounts. It was the cane or the leather strap the schoolboys feared; it would not be long before the stories of sexual abuse also became widely known (and O'Toole is quick to note that physical abuse and sexual abuse often go hand in hand).

O'Toole reserves a special circle of hell for any kind of church authority, and his treatment of the Christian Brothers reaches far past a "personal history," a curious moment in the book when his evidence seems to contradict his point. He quotes Éamon de Valera, a hero of the 1916 Easter Rising and Ireland's most prominent politician for decades: "I am an individual who owes practically everything to the Christian Brothers." He quotes Charles Haughey, another prominent Irish politician: "What the Brothers do is lay foundations for practically every aspect of one's life." But neither quotation—or a number of others—is used to show the good the Christian Brothers intended or accomplished; they are instead, to O'Toole, evidence of just how awful the violence was. Only a man beaten into submission, we are meant to conclude, would be so unable to articulate what had been done to him.

In any case, whatever iron grip the Christian Brothers or any other religious order had over its pupils



has become a thing of the past in Ireland. Once it became clear that sexual abuse (as well as other horrors like the Magdalene laundries and the mistreatment of so many other vulnerable adults) had occurred throughout many hybrid church-state institutions, the Irish were even quicker than many other modern societies to shrug their shoulders and wave farewell to traditional religious adherence.

A rather different gospel rose to the fore in the 1990s and 2000s, as the Celtic Tiger economic boom promised prosperity, a more cosmopolitan worldview and integration into the world economy. O'Toole even finds a cabbie—all good journalists know to interview the cabbie—who has bought a vacation flat in Cape Verde, a country he has never visited and cannot find on a map. "A good investment," he declares.

"Ireland became a large-scale version of a TV makeover show," O'Toole writes, "with the 'before' pictures showing a slovenly, depressed wretch and the 'after' images a smiling bling-bedecked beauty, who went on to start her own self-improvement

course for similarly abject little countries.” And the new gospel did not brook dissent: “To state the obvious was to be a heretic.”

When the worldwide economic crisis of 2008 once again relegated Ireland to the ranks of European charity cases, O’Toole writes, the Irish were strangely accepting of their fate: “There was a cold but effective consolation in the return of the barely repressed—this was a drama that could be shaped as a medieval morality play. That drama had three acts—sin, punishment and redemption.”

Today, Ireland has recovered economically, to a large extent, from that crash. And while the culture might superficially resemble that of 1958, it has changed dramatically. In the last decade alone, public referendums have legalized abortion and same-sex marriage; Mass attendance and religious vocations are both in steep decline; immigration (to Ireland, not from it) is a growing reality, particularly in the megalopolis that is now Dublin. In 2017 Ireland became only the fourth country in the world to have an openly gay head of state.

Even the seemingly intractable political morass of violence and revenge represented by the Troubles seemed to have an end in sight with the passage in 1998 of the Good Friday Agreement between the British and Irish governments, as well as most of the political parties in Northern Ireland, on the political future of Northern Ireland.

“In 1958, and for many decades afterwards, there was this sense that, if it did not pretend to know itself thoroughly and absolutely, Ireland would not exist at all,” O’Toole writes in the book’s final pages. “Ireland did not

start as one fixed thing and end up as another. It moved between different kinds of unfixedness.” And it is O’Toole’s analysis of the peace accords that captures most aptly that change in Ireland over the course of his lifetime.

When the Irish Republican Army agreed to sit at the negotiating table without insisting on the reunification of all 32 counties as an absolute requirement—ever the *sine qua non* of I.R.A. politics—the group’s leaders were tacitly admitting that the rallying cry of three generations of freedom fighters was no longer seen as a realistic possibility. But the people of the Republic, O’Toole notes, “more or less accepted it.” These days you’re more likely to find an Irish-American singing the old rebel songs than the Irish themselves. Why?

“Certitude was what you killed and died for,” O’Toole writes. “Doubt was what you could live with.” From economics to religion to social change to cultural ferment, that formulation might be as succinct a description as any of the journey of Ireland to the present day.

James T. Keane is a senior editor at *America*.

Woman to (Defiant) Woman

What is a woman?

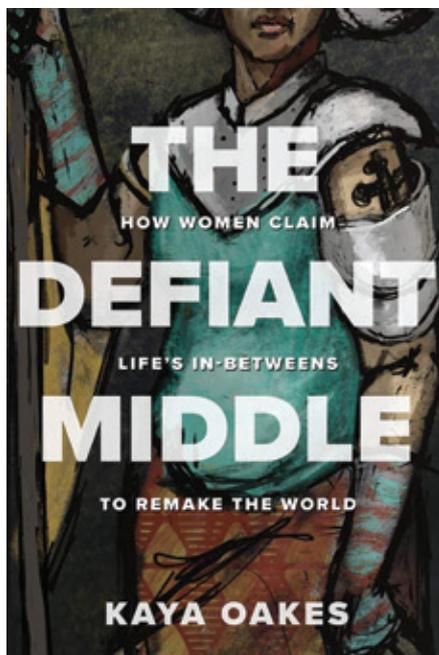
This was, in effect, the question asked of Supreme Court nominee Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson by Senator Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee at Jackson’s confirmation hearing in March. One of many attempts to cast doubt on the judge’s candidacy, the question had commentators from across the political spectrum scram-

bling to respond. For some, like the Fox News host Tucker Carlson, the answer is obvious. A woman is “a human being with two x-chromosomes; ask any geneticist.” Anyone who disagrees with him, he says, is delusional. Other pundits rushed in with their views on the biological, historical and cultural determinants of this thing we call “womanhood.”

The exchange between Blackburn and Jackson was on my mind as I read *The Defiant Middle: How Women Claim Life’s In-Betweens to Remake the World*, the latest book from the writer, journalist and *America* contributor Kaya Oakes. In it, Oakes inadvertently provides her own take on this perennial debate. She professes that those claiming womanhood, adjusting to the infinite and often contradictory expectations that come with the designation, have every right to it. As the legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon puts it, “Anybody who identifies as a woman, wants to be a woman, is going around being a woman, as far as I’m concerned, is a woman.”

Supporting this view in a crisp 200 pages, *The Defiant Middle* offers reflections on what it means to live as a woman today. This meaning is mediated by the situation in which Oakes finds herself writing: in the midst of a pandemic, living in the Bay Area, lecturing at the University of California, Berkeley, and grappling with growing older in a society and a church that both continue to prize feminine youth, fecundity and docility above all else.

She weaves personal anecdotes with examples of medieval women, from Hildegard von Bingen to Julian of Norwich, who transcended the confines of their environments through mystical, courageous and



The Defiant Middle

How Women Claim Life's In-Betweens to Remake the World

By Kaya Oakes
Broadleaf Books
200p \$26.99

downright odd episodes—not least the case of Wilgefortis, an apocryphal noblewoman who fervently prayed for disfigurement to escape an unwanted marriage. When Wilgefortis sprouted a beard soon after, ending the forthcoming nuptials, her father had her crucified.

Or so the story goes.

Oakes presents these women religious and their modern analogues as reminders of how women throughout the ages resisted the stifling definitions of “womanhood” they were forced to compete against. With these profiles, she focuses on the interplay of spirituality, religion and gender with the same nuance and grace evident in her previous work. In fact, the prelude to *The Defiant Middle* traces

its origins to an essay she published in 2018, which portrays the period women in their middle years find themselves—simultaneously straddling too much and not enough—as an opportunity for defiance rather than erasure.

As we age, women see less and less of ourselves and our peers portrayed admirably in popular media, professional settings and positive, life-giving relationships. “Most women in general,” writes Oakes, “are in fact lacking in practical role models for what it means to be middle aged or old, to grow into eras of life we don’t have a context for.” What’s worse, this context is constantly shifting. Alongside every new expectation placed on women is the tendency to place it within enduring struggles “between career and family, between a creative life and financial well-being, between selfishness and selflessness.”

The book is organized according to characteristics women are defined by and cast themselves against. Some chapters—like “Barren” and “Alone”—look at the choices women make, or are thought to make, on how to go on living. Others are immutable, like age: “Young” takes readers through that brief interval when girls with strong convictions are either discounted outright or unfairly thrust into positions of leadership, tasked with solving the monumental problems caused by previous generations. Oakes meditates on the meaning of “maturity” by referencing her own experience as a fiercely independent child, as well as the experiences of young women who have challenged the status quo and were punished for it, from 15th-century French warrior-saint Joan of Arc to the Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai.

For Oakes, maturity is a consequence of necessity—the need to sublimate, repel and rebel against the violent urges of the opposite sex and against the demands of domestic life and cultural customs that rob women of sexual empowerment, educational opportunity and fulfilling political futures.

Then there are chapters classified as emotional states—like “Angry” and “Crazy”—that, when used as descriptors, are meant to disparage or discount the women they are marking. The chapter on “Anger” is a potent testament to the issues women face when expressing any kind of anger other than the absolutely righteous kind. Even this form of outrage from women is ignored by religious authorities in favor of remembering dutiful and delicate qualities, as in the passive and pure Mary of the parish courtyard over the Mary of the Magnificat.

The mid-century anarchist and co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day, features prominently here. Sometimes cold, frequently austere and undeniably successful at caring for the poor and spreading word of their plight, Day serves as a crucial model of holiness precisely because she was angry “on behalf of the vulnerable, and in that sense, angry on behalf of herself, because she, too, was vulnerable.”

Oakes elevates figures who pushed against their patriarchal religious settings in creative and controversial ways, including Jemima Wilkinson, otherwise known as Public Universal Friend, the gender-transgressing founder of an offbeat Christian sect in pre-Revolutionary America. The defiance Oakes highlights is not limited to the mosque, church or synagogue;

it takes place wherever “mansplainers, reply guys, and every other person who thinks they have more knowledge and more experience than a woman possibly could” are found.

In the case of Judge Jackson, the person who asked her to define “woman” is in fact a woman herself—one with a different set of encounters from myself, Jackson or Oakes, yet one who still has to live with this identity in a world governed by men. If there is an enemy in this book, it is men who, through their “fault and power,” harass and minimize the women of their time.

But sometimes the hardest negotiations and most searing betrayals take place woman to woman. “Every woman,” claims Oakes, “keeps a memory store of slights, abuse, enforced subjugations within her.” I cannot pretend to know what happens when this “store” becomes overstocked with memories of mistreatment at the hands of fellow women, nor does *The Defiant Middle* give much attention to institutional or personal conflict between women, whether in contemporary Senate committee hearings or the cloisters of 14th-century France.

What I am sure of is that in *The Defiant Middle*, Oakes proves herself to be the sort of practical role model she seeks out and so eloquently writes of. Even for the boys.

Anna Marchese works at Columbia World Projects at Columbia University. She is a former member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and a former intern at America.

What Are the Body's Limits?

“I feel stiff. Plastic. Unused.... Do you know what I mean?” So says one of the main characters at the start of *The Body Scout*. Careful readers will take note of this complaint, which turns out to be more apropos than one could ever envision.

In this debut novel, Lincoln Michel explores the limits of what it means to be human through a future in which companies tempt consumers with upgrades—new arms, organs and more. While this is a book about consciousness and creation, these topics are explored through a story about America’s national pastime: baseball. The main character, Kobo, is a cyborg scout for a professional baseball team controlled by a biopharma company. But unlike scouts as we know them today, who seek out players, he also scouts for scientists whose work can help teams upgrade their players to the best condition. The companies that own baseball teams earn huge profits through selling upgrades and merchandise—and strong-arm scientists into employment against their will.

Kobo once played baseball himself, when humans with cyber enhancements were allowed to be part of a league, and he has \$2 million of medical debt. He is plagued by a pair of threatening debt collectors, who follow him until their death. Kobo grew up underground in what is known as South Crown Heights, and his parents were killed in a tunnel collapse. Neighbors took him in and raised him like a son—his adopted brother, JJ Zunz, becomes a star baseball player for the Monsanto Mets and the mod-

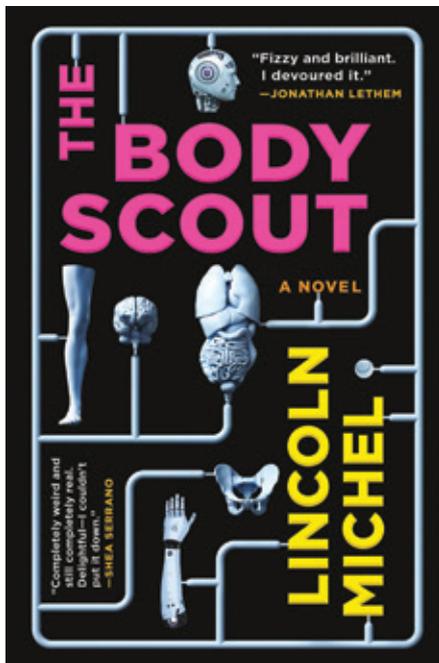
el on which a startling new program is based. “People didn’t like being tricked into thinking something fake was real,” we are told. But in this novel, nothing is as it seems. The villain behind this spectacle, the owner of the Monsanto Mets, is known as The Mouth. His bravado is apparent from the start. “You ever heard of Einstein? He was a big deal, back in the day,” he says at one point. “If he was alive, he’d be working for me. If I’d let him.”

The Body Scout explores what it means to create life, when it begins and the responsibility that families have to one another. In this version of society, “much of the economy had been replaced by drones, algorithms, and zotech pack animals. The megarich considered employing humans to be a sort of charity. Or maybe it was simply more satisfying to order around people than robots.”

Much of the action in this mystery is driven by Kobo’s love for Zunz, who he believes is missing or dead, and by his growing connection to his recently discovered niece. Zunz is less concerned about Kobo, it seems, as he is caught up in the excitement of the project that he stars in: the World Series.

Cue the “Diseased Edenists.” They are an activist sect of the Edenists, purists who believe life is sacred and so oppose the economy of artificial upgrades as unnatural. According to the Diseased Edenists, “We don’t think it’s enough to only avoid upgrades. To us, the problem is the corporate control. That’s proprietary software running your arm. Brand-name chemicals in your system.”

Upgrades aren’t the only feature of this society that Edenists object to; Gerald, a Diseased Edenist leader,



The Body Scout

By Lincoln Michel
Orbit
368p \$27

grapples with are near on the horizon as advances in artificial intelligence, medicine and the metaverse bring us closer to the time we may have similar upgrades to choose from.

But to put the quandary in context, Gerald points out: “Humans have been a mere blip in the history of life on the planet. What are you, six feet tall? If your height was life on earth, humans are the dandruff on your scalp.”

The narrator puts it another way: “We’re all born with one body and there’s no possibility of a refund. No way to test-drive a different form. So how could anyone not be willing to pay an arm and a leg for a better arm and a better leg?” What are the consequences of constantly transforming one’s physical body when someone profits from it? Where will such experiments end? The book takes us through to one disturbing outcome.

Imagining a city overrun with the zotech creatures created by corporations, Kobo quips: “Venom was quick, capitalism killed you nice and slow. Then sent you a bill.” Gerald is perhaps a voice of wisdom from his underground hideout, telling Kobo, “You can’t control life, no matter what patents you hold.” Control is a key theme in this novel, from control of one’s body to control of the economy to control of life itself and what form it will take, all the way to control of the narrative that society will be told about what happens to JJ Zunz.

Throughout the novel, the author introduces us to characters from Ko-

bo’s past. Their choices show us the complexity of this tech-dominated world and the way individual perspectives and values affect how humans navigate the situations they find themselves in. The book is often hard to put down, as one new obstacle after another deepens the mystery. At a key moment of revelation, Kobo “felt like a rat let out of a maze, only to find himself in a larger one.”

This is a thrilling, thought-provoking adventure about capitalism and loyalty, trust and greed, temptation and fulfillment. As imaginative as Michel is, we would be prudent to heed the warnings embedded in this sobering and raucous romp.

Cynthia-Marie Marmo O’Brien is a writer, editor and educator in New York City.

Friendship With Christ

As a former student of the Christian Brothers in grammar school, I will forever be grateful to them for introducing me to a spiritual exercise that has remained with me for 70 years. Every hour in school a small bell would ring, and the class would pause to “Remember that we are in the holy presence of God.” Then, after a brief silence, Brother would say: “Live, Jesus, in our hearts,” and we boys would respond “Amen.”

I was reminded of this prayerful practice when reading *Entering the Twofold Mystery*, the new book by Erik Varden, a Cistercian monk and the bishop of Trondheim, Norway. In many ways the book issues this invitation not only to Varden’s fellow monks—to whom the reflections were initially addressed—but to all of us

says of biopharma companies, “They create whole life-forms without care or thought. They’re gods who care nothing about their creations. They’re impure. We want to bring the impurity to the world.” As a form of protest, the Diseased Edenists release zotech (creatures that humans have created) with capacities including poison into crowds, wreaking havoc. “The biopharma and government deform life and then sell new creatures as easily as they sell shirts or cans of soda. We show them there are repercussions to messing with nature.”

Stripped of the extremism of the Diseased Edenists, the Edenist philosophy has much that Catholics will recognize, including a profound respect for life and belief in one creator. But perhaps the Edenists go too far in their repudiation of technology, seeming to prefer their bodies to be “pure” than to be healed with medical science. While *The Body Scout* is a sci-fi novel, some of the issues the novel

who strive to remember that we live and move and have our being in God's gracious and sanctifying presence through Jesus Christ.

The "Christian conversion" to which the title of the book refers is incumbent upon all the baptized, whether monk or Christian in the world. For each one of us, it is both unmerited grace and consuming challenge.

Early in the book, Bishop Varden states a conviction that runs like a leitmotif through the chapters. "The incarnation of the Word set in motion a radical redefinition of relationships that will slowly transform our very sense of self. We are summoned to rise to full stature, to perform with generosity and grace the mission allotted to each one of us in God's design for the redemption of the world."

Indeed, the book begins with the author telling of his encounter as a young university student with a homeless man on the streets of Paris. That revelatory encounter, recalled with awe and discretion, decisively changed and shaped the course of the author's life, transforming his "very sense of self." The book bears witness to its continuing impact.

The encounter sparked a realization that permeates Varden's writings: that of the concrete actuality of faith and the commitment it entails. It is the same concreteness that characterizes the *Rule* of St. Benedict, the great guidebook for monks. But, again, many of its precepts apply equally to all those baptized into Christ Jesus. As Varden writes, by our common baptism, "we are called to manifest that Christ is real, that he heals and saves, that his love is the substance of our lives, no fairy tale."

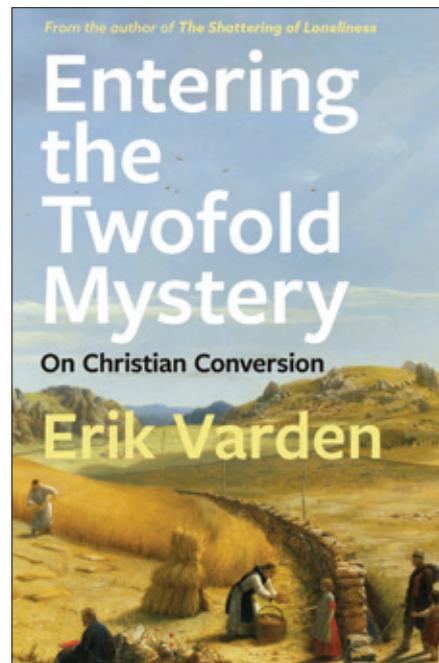
Varden's conferences and hom-

ilies aim to foster "a deepening friendship with Christ." In this endeavor the liturgical year provides a privileged framework for entering more deeply into the mystery of the incarnate Word. Thus he includes, in Part Two, homilies that he has preached over the years on the solemn feasts of the church year, during Sundays of ordinary time and on several feasts of saints.

The homilies are brief but memorable. Drawing upon Catholicism's rich spiritual tradition, they offer insights that penetrate to the heart of the mystery being celebrated. Moreover, they are enriched by frequent appeals to works of art, painting and poetry, music and movies, giving substance to the injunction of Pope Francis to draw upon the *via pulchritudinis*, the way of beauty, in theology and preaching.

On Christmas Day Varden exults in the "sacramental world" that the Incarnation discloses. He draws upon the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning and rejoices that "earth's crammed with heaven/ and every common bush afire with God." Holy Week immerses us in the realization that history itself is replete with intimations and anticipations of God's full agency and presence in Jesus Christ.

Holy Thursday presents a fine reflection on Jesus' love "to the end," and Varden remarks incisively that "infatuation is blind, like any passion. But love sees. It is alert to what a person might become. Indeed, it generates becoming." And Good Friday celebrates the scandalous paradox that "on this day of supreme anguish, we sing of joy," because dying he destroyed our death! Easter proclaims



Entering the Twofold Mystery
On Christian Conversion
By Erik Varden
Bloomsbury Continuum
272p \$24

the sure foundation of our faith: "Jesus, who was dead, is alive and exerts a transformative influence beyond constraints of time and space." And the privileged witness to this new reality is the transformed lives of disciples—then and now.

So much of the thrust of the book—from the encounter with the homeless man to the considerations of the place of obedience and humility in Christian lives to the richly challenging reflections on the liturgical year—can be summed up in words preached on Pentecost Sunday. "We shouldn't domesticate the Spirit. It comforts, but also devours. It is a refiner's fire." Varden continues insightfully: "A certain literature of cheap spirituality would have us think that the Spirit's

gifts are mere accoutrements; improving additions to our normal self; functions of interior design. Not so. To pray for the coming of the Spirit takes courage. It requires a will to be remade, to be made new.” Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Varden offers no cheap grace. The Spirit’s coming is costly... but life-giving.

At the same time, Erik Varden, bishop and monk, recognizes that each day is a new beginning. The today, the *hodie*, of the psalms calls us daily to find our center once more in Christ. Each hour we must remember that we are in God’s holy presence. My sixth-grade self learned this from the De La Salle brothers. Erik Varden learned it from the monastic tradition. Many learn it through Ignatian spirituality. They are all rivulets of the mighty river of the great tradition that flows from the temple of the Most High, where stands the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Rev. Robert P. Imbelli, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, is the author of *Rekindling the Christic Imagination*.

A Beautiful, Terrible, Fragile Park

In this captivating book centered around the creation of Yellowstone National Park, Megan Kate Nelson provides a story of consolation for many, but of desolation for too many more. She juxtaposes the growing awareness by 19th-century Euro-Americans of Yellowstone’s mysterious beauty and awesome geology against the tensions, injustices and atrocities perpetrated in the United States in the decades following the Civil War.

The final words of the book speak volumes: “The United States is both beautiful and terrible. It is both fragile and powerful. And what lies beneath the surface in this nation is always threatening to explode.”

One could begin the story with the Jesuit priest Francis Xavier Kuppens, who traveled with the Blackfeet people into the Yellowstone Territory in 1864. Kuppens soon told Thomas Meagher, the acting governor of Montana Territory, about the wonders of the region, and Meagher wondered if some sort of national park (then an unfamiliar concept) should be created in order to preserve the area. Even earlier, in 1832, the painter George Catlin, who traveled the West and created images of many Indigenous peoples, “envisioned a government protected ‘magnificent park’ of ‘pristine beauty and wilderness,’” which would protect and preserve the areas from destruction by settlers.

But Nelson does not mention Kuppens or Catlin. She begins with Truman Everts, who became lost during an expedition of the area headed by Nathaniel Langford in 1869 and barely survived 37 days in the wilderness. Then, in great detail, she documents the geologist Ferdinand V. Hayden’s contributions and the large group he led doing scientific work in 1871. Accounts of such trials and adventures, disseminated widely in magazines and the press, “helped to bring Yellowstone into the American imagination as a place of both wonder and terror.”

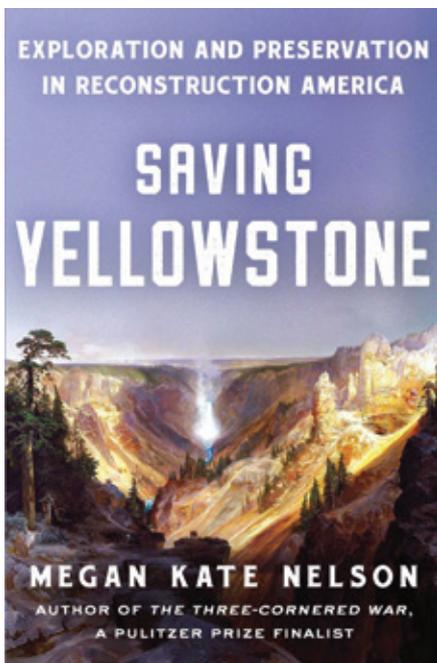
Nelson also focuses on the Hunkpapa Sioux Chief Sitting Bull and the Philadelphia financier Jay Cooke, developer of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Nelson claims that they, along with Hayden, “determined the future

of the American West.” One could argue that Crazy Horse, Red Cloud and other Native Americans—along with Kit Carson and other mountain men, “Buffalo Bill” Cody, Ulysses S. Grant, a multitude of nameless soldiers, Mormons and others—were also significant figures; but let us focus on the book she wrote, not the one she didn’t.

This book tells how the desire to explore the Yellowstone Basin and surrounding areas, the lust for gold and power, the expanding nation’s desire for a transcontinental railway, the sad and sinful rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the reimposition of racist policies and practices in the South intersected in the last third of the 19th century. We are given an illuminating gallop through the times and lives of some of the people who made the world we live in today.

For Nelson, volcanic Yellowstone is a metaphor for the United States being born again after the Civil War. It is a place where the paths chosen involved the taking of lands from Indigenous peoples and the yielding to the reimposition of societal structures poisoned by racism and white supremacy (despite the Grant administration’s strong attempts to thwart the Ku Klux Klan); it is also a place where the government attempted to balance the desire for manifest destiny and economic prosperity with a hope for the preservation of a pristine wilderness with all its awesome majesty.

Hayden’s expedition and Thomas Moran’s paintings, including the large canvas “Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone,” provided the imagination of the nation with views of Yellowstone’s mystery and wonder. But the \$40,000 appropriated for Hayden’s explorations came at a very heavy price for



Saving Yellowstone
Exploration and Preservation in
Reconstruction America
By Megan Kate Nelson
Scribner
320p \$28.99

of the park while also appreciating the dynamics of 19th-century America.

For those who think historians should strive to understand the motives and actions of the era from the perspective of the people of the times, this book may seem to lean toward judging that those who lived in the last third of the 19th century should have had the wisdom and sensibilities of the 21st-century. Hindsight is 20/20. We must not be too quick to assume, assess and ascertain from present-day perspectives. Ultimate judgment must be left to a higher authority than that of historians with knowledge of the unintended consequences of choices made.

The extensive bibliography is very helpful, and numerous footnotes are ample evidence of solid research. Maps will enhance the reader's appreciation of the scope and scale of Yellowstone National Park, 2.2 million acres preserved "forever and for all" on March 1, 1872.

Overall, this work is revelatory of our shared history. With all the pain and tragedy of Yellowstone's story, consolation may be taken in the hope that the foresight and wisdom of those who preserved this wonder for all the world's peoples will prevail long into the future.

Richard G. Malloy, S.J., is director of mission and ministry at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Baltimore, Md., and the author of *Being on Fire: Top Ten Essentials of Catholic Faith and Spiritual Direction: A Beginner's Guide*. He provides priestly ministry during summers at Yellowstone Park.

Dublin Fallout

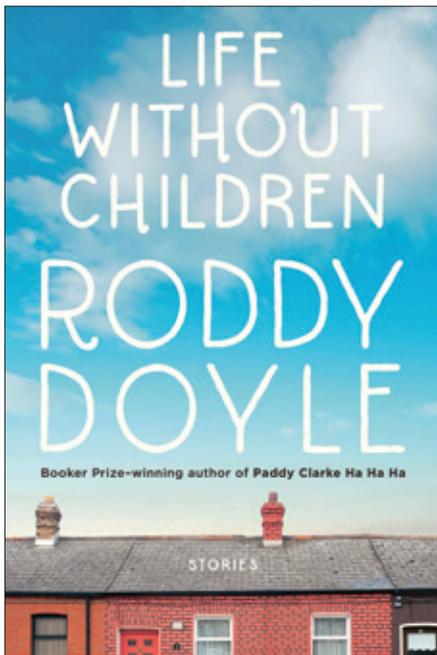
The Dubliner Roddy Doyle often depicts the lives of ordinary working-class Irishmen who enjoy drinking a pint—or two, or more—in his stories. In his last novel, *Love*, two old friends traded stories and memories over several drinks in the pubs of Dublin. But Doyle, who won the Booker Prize in 1993 for his novel *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, is a serious bloke whose *Love* was really about love and friendship, as well as the love of drink.

In his latest book, a 10-story collection called *Life Without Children*, Doyle tells stories of catastrophes—unemployment, a deadly storm and Covid-19—and their socioeconomic and psychological fallout on Irish families. Four of his stories were originally published in *The New Yorker* or *The Irish Times*; and of the eight stories that take place during Covid-19, six are new.

Some of Doyle's "childrenless" characters are in their 60s and lament the loss of their grown children after they have gone off on their own. Yet some of those grown children have returned to live at home, which can induce more familial closeness and sometimes more lamenting. Other characters are younger; some are married; and often, as the title says, they are literally without children.

Unnamed characters lend a sense of the "everyman" to a few stories. Doyle's working class protagonists and his minor characters often use strong language—occasionally referring to or quoting Shakespeare, Yeats and Melville—to reveal character and provide comic effect.

Most of Doyle's stories take place in and around Dublin, with the excep-



Life Without Children

By Roddy Doyle

Viking

192p \$25

cold that no virus could get across the sea. He begins to think that his own “doubts” and “dread” are a virus that he has been carrying for years; immediately and mistakenly, he dismisses his metaphor as “sentimental, self-pitying drivel.”

The other Covid stories are very good, especially “The Five Lamps,” “Masks” and “Gone.” In “The Five Lamps,” a man who has come to believe “he’s no good at living” drives to the outskirts of Dublin during the lockdown. He walks into town looking for his missing son, who left home at 17 and has been gone for four years.

In “Masks,” a man in his 60s walks along the Dublin coast near Bull Island as he ruminates about his past, regarding the discarded masks he finds as vile things akin to garbage; yet he collects and wears them.

“The Curfew,” a tale about a storm in 2017, is almost as good as the title story. When tropical storm Ophelia approaches Dublin, the unnamed protagonist feels safe and quotes “King Lear,” expecting the winds to blow and crack their cheeks. Like the storm in “King Lear,” this tempest reflects the turmoil within this old Irish father about his four children. He has been diagnosed with coronary artery disease, which the doctor calls “widow’s block.” The doctor advises him to do nothing for now and “don’t Google.” Then, paraphrasing Lear to Kent, he warns, “That way lies madness.”

Absent any storm or the latest plague, times were already tough for Sam and Emer, the main characters

in “Box Sets,” which appeared in *The New Yorker* about five years before the onset of Covid-19. They try to convince themselves to believe the “optimism on the radio” about the economy. Although Emer is still working, Sam has been jobless for three months. He has been watching a lot of television, especially in pubs. He and Emer vow to tighten their belts and renegotiate the house mortgage if they have to. Maybe even drink less? “No way,” they joke.

But their marriage is strained and inert. Sam does not want to do much of anything. When Emer reminds him that they are going to a friend’s house, he replies, “I’d prefer not to,” a truncated line from Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” a story in which Bartleby refuses to do much of anything, including leave. Later in Doyle’s story, the couple fights. He throws a mug, breaking it, and leaves. Soon he returns, expecting everything to be all right and contemplates a “future measured in box sets” of 30 years of television programs. One gets the idea that, like Bartleby, Sam would prefer to make no changes in his and Emer’s life at all.

Each external natural or economic catastrophe creates an internal conflict within Doyle’s characters that is classical and sometimes Shakespearean. The ways in which the fictional characters respond, individually or as part of a family, range from pessimism to optimism and from listlessness to vitality—or somewhere in between. As in real life, they are as varied as the stars in the heavens.

Joseph Peschel, a freelance writer and critic in South Dakota, can be reached through his blog at josephpeschel.com/HaveWords.

tion of the best piece and title story, “Life Without Children,” which originally appeared in *The New Yorker*. In it, Alan, “a sixty-two-year-old bachelor with a wife” on a work trip, sits in a pub in Gateshead reminiscing while his wife Sinéad is back home in Dublin. Once the busy father of four, Alan feels unneeded now that his kids are grown up and gone, and he considers leaving his wife. There, sitting in the pub, Alan observes that “social distancing” is a phrase everyone understands in Ireland but not in England, where the pubs are crowded.

He watches a stag party of 30 drunk men from Belfast “sweating, coughing, wheezing” and “barking, whacking one another.” He considers joining them, but he tells himself it is “going to end in tears” and “in blood.” Instead, he walks to Newcastle, all the while doubting the wisdom of people gathering in crowds, where he comes across women at a hen party. Alan tries to convince himself that it is so

God the Mother

It is commonplace to speak of God as Father. Our language is steeped in biblical tradition and church teachings that often employ male or masculine imagery to speak of God. Jesus prays to the Father in heaven. In the Trinity, God is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The image of God as Father can have many benefits, such as making our relationship with God feel more personal and familial. It can influence views of God as a protector, provider and punisher, which are some attributes that can be associated with fathers. There are of course pitfalls to such imagery as well, as it creates an opportunity to gender God and promote male-dominant or male-centric ideas of God.

People deal with these tendencies in different ways. Many continue to use male pronouns and images when speaking of God, and some ac-

knowledge potential problems and limitations. Some people opt to use gender-neutral or gender-balanced language when possible, such as “God/Godself” instead of “God/himself.”

Scripture offers us a plethora of images and language for reflecting on God and divine attributes, and we might want to embrace the diversity within the tradition. God is called a fortress, rock, shield, storm, lover and shepherd, among many other epithets. The image of God as mother is also found in the Bible, although it does not always garner as much attention as it should.

In the first reading on the Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Isaiah describes a vision of a restored and vindicated city of Zion (Jerusalem). As with many cities in ancient texts, Zion is referred to as a woman, and the conditions the people have endured are

compared to a woman in labor. The vision describes a time after the Babylonian exile, and those who have suffered now receive comfort and sustenance. This time of renewal is compared to a mother nursing her child. God is intimately involved, as the text affirms: “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.” A child suckling at her mother’s breast is a beautiful reflection and image of the intimacy and care that comes from God. The city of Zion represents a maternal divine comfort, as it offers protection and sustenance that sustains life.

Reflecting on God’s love and care as that of a mother for her children can help us to draw new insights, nuances and meanings in our relationship with God. The image of God the Mother is evocative and pushes us to broaden our vision and language for what is associated with the divine.

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TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), AUG. 28, 2022

Confronting ableism and creating spaces where all can live and thrive.

Are We an Ableist Church?

The St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center of Chicago offers Masses in “total communication,” meaning they are fully spoken and signed. The center enables deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing members of the community to experience and participate in Mass together, creating a welcoming and interactive faith community. A member shared his experience as a Catholic with me, saying that in most places, the church is the church of the hearing. But St. Francis Borgia and similar parishes that offer total communication Masses serve an important role by making the church more inclusive of all people.

In the Gospel for the Twen-

ty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Jesus reflects on the kingdom of God. While the kingdom is not named explicitly in the parable, it is compared to a great dinner. Jesus describes people being invited to a banquet, and he says to the Pharisees that when they host an event, they should not invite friends, family and rich neighbors.

Instead, people who lack financial means, people with physical differences and difficulty walking and people with sight impairment should be invited. These groups, those called “poor, crippled, lame and blind,” symbolically represent all who are unable to repay an invitation to the party. The friends and wealthy people rep-

resent those with means and access to resources.

Jesus’ vision of what the kingdom of God should be is instructive and should inspire us to reflect on ways that we can avoid ableism, which privileges people who are considered able-bodied. Rather, we should work to create a church and world that are open, inclusive and accessible to all, recognizing overt and covert ways that people with differences and disabilities have been excluded from full participation in the community of faith. The Gospel calls on us to recognize and appreciate the diversity that exists in our church and world and create space for all people to thrive.



Meet the Author

Jaime L. Waters teaches at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. She is an associate professor of Old Testament.

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Imperfect Weddings

The point isn't to spend as much as possible

By Sara Scarlett Willson



Wedding season is upon us again, and despite the economic uncertainty brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, one estimate puts the average cost of a wedding in the United States at \$28,000. The perfectly staged photos of various stunning nuptials on social media make it easy to forget that the financial cost of receiving the sacrament of marriage is technically, at least, \$0.

I have never had \$28,000 to spend on a party, and even if I did, the thought of spending it on a wedding reception makes me break out in an anxious sweat. Perhaps I just lack the feminine gene that covets bespoke candles, elaborate centerpieces and meters-long tulle bridal veils from Etsy? Maybe. But I can't help feeling that something has gone badly wrong with wedding culture and the marriages it produces.

Catholic priests are more intimately involved with dispensing this sacrament than are the clergy of other denominations, from marriage prep classes all the way to the big day itself. They have a potentially heroic opportunity to remind couples that there is something powerful and valuable to be found in marriage unrelated to the cost of the wedding.

Huge, expensive weddings are becoming an expectation that is impossible for most people to live up to. I suspect that some couples think more about their dream wedding than the

marriage that will follow it. A close female friend of mine, for example, used to ask my opinion on elements she was planning to include in her dream wedding before she even met her now-husband. When he finally came into her life, he was expected to kowtow to her fantasy. He had to remind her that it was his wedding, too.

I know many men who are put off marriage by the thought of wedding expenses. I also know a couple who took out a loan to finance their wedding, only to see the debt outlast the marriage itself. This is what happens when more thought is put into the party than into the institution.

In the United States, couples are getting married later and later (the median age for a first marriage is now 30 for men and 29 for women), often after having drifted into cohabitation, or are not getting married at all. The pressure to have a perfect wedding, with perfectly staged photos for social media, may be one factor.

Priests could remind couples getting married in the church that something intimate, profound and spiritually essential is getting lost amid \$28,000 worth of wants rather than needs. To be sure, it is a delicate subject to raise. Even if a priest senses that a couple is losing sight of the important things, does he fear that a gentle correction will drive two more young people from the church? But reining in this fashion of excess could be rev-

olutionary for those with less means. Marriage prep classes are one opportunity to accomplish this, if priests are bold enough to raise the subject and couples are wise enough to listen.

Some priests may still feel that how much couples spend on their weddings is none of their business. But marriage is not just for the couple; it involves the whole parish community. There may be members of that community who, on seeing weddings become exorbitant spectacles, are tempted to delay their weddings until they find themselves in a better financial position. It may seem counterintuitive, but this could make them worse off. A recent report found that the married poor experience more relationship stability than the unmarried rich.

As for me, my ideal wedding would be a candlelit church ceremony in the early evening attended by family and close friends, followed by a modest dinner. A wedding is not meant to be a performance or entertainment for spectators. Gentle reminders from priests of what is really important on a wedding day might help get marriage back on track.

Sara Scarlett Willson studied politics and international relations at Royal Holloway, University of London, and now works as an author. Twitter: @Sayde_Scarlett.

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