

# America

DECEMBER 2022

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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—and what it doesn't*

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## A Last Word

In the early morning of a late winter day in 1909, about a dozen people gathered at 32 Washington Square in New York City. This was the first meeting of **America** magazine. It was led by John Wynne, S.J., our founder and first editor in chief. “We have a mission,” he said: “To create a magazine that will give Catholics a voice in the public discourse of this country; to promote the evangelization of the United States; to support the faith formation of American Catholics; to champion the progress of civil society.”

Father Wynne named his magazine **America** because, he told us, this work stands for two things above all: God and country. In retrospect, it is extraordinary that Father Wynne or any Catholic could have expressed such confidence in the American experiment at a time when this country was still so hostile toward their hopes. But while John Wynne was first and last a disciple of Jesus Christ, he was also a citizen, and a grateful one at that. He knew that this country had welcomed millions of Catholics, men and women who had left field and family and crossed land and sea in search of their future. Father Wynne named his magazine as he did because he wanted it to be a champion of America. Not a blind or uncritical loyalty, of course. You’ll not find that in our pages or in our archives. But you will find an unwavering confidence in the decency of the American people and in the nobility of the American experiment.

For this reason, if **America** the magazine ever ceases to be a champion of America the country, then it will cease to be worthy of its name. You and I surely know what Father Wynne also knew: This country’s history is a

complex mix of lights and shadows. It is far from perfect. But a fallen people cannot afford the luxury of making the perfect the enemy of the good. And the values of democracy, and freedom, and equality under law, the values that have guided the American people through our sojourn—whether those values were realized when spoken or were only aspirations we failed to realize—those values are also the universal principles that safeguard the God-given dignity of the human person.

God and country—in that order. For as much as John Wynne loved this country, he loved God and his church even more. In his vision, **America** magazine would not only champion the nation, but would, above all, support the earthly pilgrimage of American Catholics. **America** would be a spiritual as well as an intellectual resource. Of all of the things that the men and women of this ministry have accomplished during the last decade, this is the thing of which I am most proud: Through all the triumphs and tragedies of the church in its American pilgrimage, we kept the faith; we helped others to find their faith again. While producing news and analysis every day about the most important issues at the intersection of the church and the world, we told thousands of their stories. And there are millions more waiting to be told. So while my time as editor in chief now comes to an end, my colleagues are just getting started.

My friends: In the late morning of an early autumn day in 2012, about a dozen people gathered at 106 West 56th Street in New York City. This was the first meeting of America Media.

If Father Wynne had been there that day, he would have recognized nothing except that which makes everything possible. For he would have seen in the men and women of this ministry the very same faith, hope and daring that he had seen in his colleagues more than a century earlier. In other words, he would have seen what I saw that day, what I have seen across this country in the more than 3,650 days that have followed: a reflection of the light who ultimately illumines our path; the light from light, who even now shines in the darkness and will never be overcome by it.

He is the reason why I now end where I began, with the very same words I spoke to my colleagues on that first day a decade ago; words I have often returned to, but which have a new meaning to me now:

In light of all of the challenges we face as a legacy magazine in a digital world; in light of all of the challenges we face in our church and in our country, I know that there are some who say that our best days are behind us, that we are the last employees of **America**. But you must know here and now that I am not one of those people. I believe in our mission. I believe in God and his church. I believe in my country. I believe in you. And I believe that **America**’s best days are still to come.

---

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



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Pope Francis speaks to Bahrain officials while King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa looks on in the courtyard of Sakhir Palace in Awali, Nov. 3.  
(CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Cover image:  
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## *America's 'People of God' documentary hits home with viewers*

In October, America Media released a groundbreaking documentary meant to deepen the ongoing conversation about the Catholic Church in the United States. Led by executive editor Sebastian Gomes, **America's** video team undertook a yearlong process to produce "People of God: How Catholic Parish Life is Changing in the United States," which in 60 minutes profiles four very different parishes across the country. The documentary, available exclusively to digital subscribers, has received a great deal of feedback.

Thank you for this presentation. It reminds us that we need to continue to empower and form the laity as well as additional formation of the clergy to adapt to the changing world no matter what part of the country we live in. Meeting people where they are and accompanying them to Christ is our mission, celebrated as both individuals and as a community, both local and global.

**David Gruber**

My husband and I are Catholics in the Midwest, currently trying to understand where we belong when it comes to a parish. Our openly gay son is the apple of our eyes and we fully support him and his being able to live authentically. However, finding a place within the church where we can openly and proudly speak about him currently feels unlikely. I hope and pray that this film will open minds and cause discussions to ensue—about many issues, not just LGBTQ+—so that we love as Jesus has taught us to love.

**Mary Kondrath**

Watching your captivating video straight through, I was all the time thinking, "This is the same story playing out in our parish!" I was even naming people at our parish that are a perfect match for the personalities you featured throughout the video. I want to try to find a way to show this video at one of our Knight [of Columbus] meetings. It's a real eye opener. Job well done.

**Peter Arnez**

This documentary was very well put together. I would hope it would be picked up and shown on PBS. It deserves being viewed by a larger audience. It is an excellent exploration of where the U.S. church is today and the questions and issues facing it. Bravo to the team that worked on this documentary.

**Michele Cirone-Collier**

Excellent presentation. I am so concerned about the "graying" of the Catholic Church in the Northeast, as I see so few younger people at Mass. We also have such discord among us. It was nice to hear about St. Cecilia's Parish and its online ministry. Trying to focus on what unites us rather than on what divides us is quite the challenge these days.

**Catherine Arventos**

This documentary brought tears to my eyes. As an elderly shut in, the pandemic brought me the wonderful gift of "attending" Mass at my old parish, which is about 3,000 miles away! I enjoy seeing my friends, even from behind. It is such a gift to be worshiping in a familiar way.

**Pauline Reynolds**

This film makes clear that we are in transition to new ways of being community. It was heartening to see how much courage people exhibited in the face of necessary and inevitable change. The young priest from Wisconsin nailed it by emphasizing relationships over institutional trappings. But I would like to understand more about the disconnect between the institutional church and millennials.

**Maria Roupail**

This video captured a cross section of our beautiful church and faith in God. Mobilization means people no longer attach to one place for 40 years and never move. Myself and others I know moved at least three times for work reasons to new communities, where building relationships is not a given. Family life is not a one-stop shop in one spot forever. My own need was always seeking "belonging" and a need to nurture faith in God within community, which is not easy in a transient culture. In the film I saw how discipleship is a modern current flowing in all of the parishes profiled.

**Marcelle Marion**

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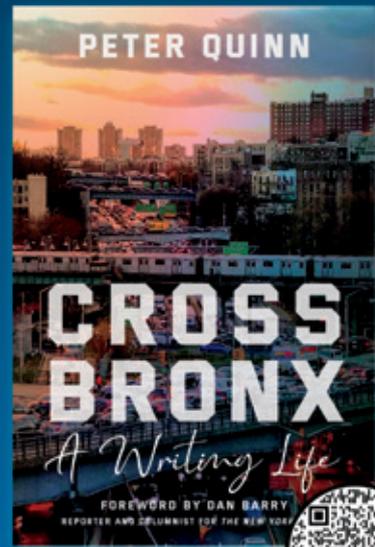
—Alice McDermott

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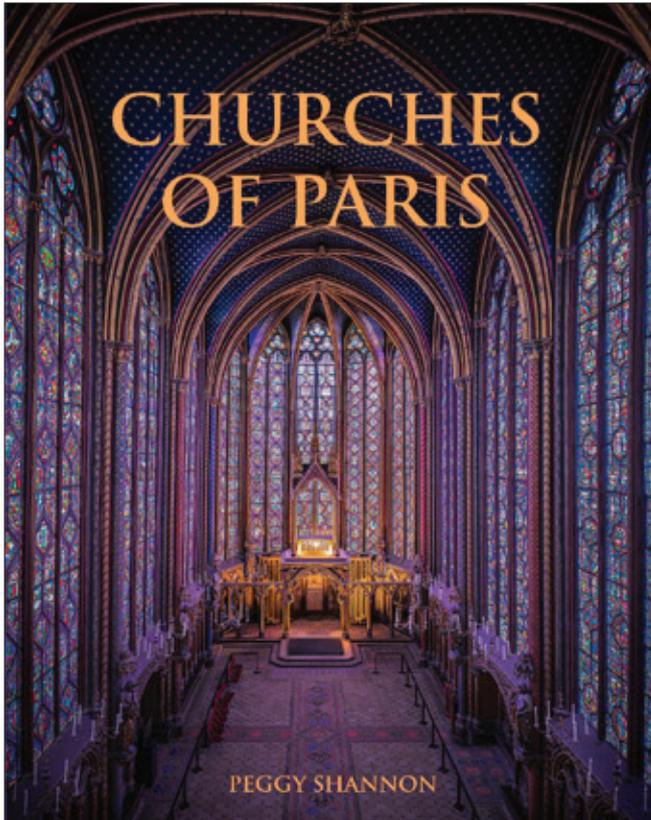
—Terry Golway, historian, author, and journalist

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## Christian Hope in a Hurting World

The legend of the “Christmas Truce” has come down to us in various forms over the past century. The numerous accounts of the ceasefire concur as to one truth: For several hours on Christmas Day 1914, a large number of Allied and German soldiers laid down their guns and emerged from their trenches to share gifts of tobacco, food, liquor and more, and finished off the gathering with an improvised game of what Americans call soccer. (The Germans say they won, 3-2.)

By Christmas 1914, a war that many had gone off to fight just a few months before with great enthusiasm—the “war to end all wars”—had become a brutal, miserable experience. The advent of the machine gun and modern artillery had ruined any romantic visions of gallantry or a heroic death; within a few years, those weapons would be joined by poison gas. “They wrote in the old days that it is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country,” according to Ernest Hemingway, who served in Italy later in the war and was wounded by Austrian artillery. “But in modern war, there is nothing sweet nor fitting in your dying. You will die like a dog for no good reason.”

Time magazine estimated that more than 100,000 soldiers participated in the first Christmas Truce and several others in the following days. The ceasefire began with German soldiers singing “Stille Nacht” from their trenches. British soldiers responded with Christmas songs of their own, and for both sides “Adeste Fideles” was a venerable chestnut they sang together. Suddenly men were holding up welcome signs, shouting, “Don’t shoot!” and cautiously making their

way into No Man’s Land. Gifts were exchanged; prisoners swapped; letters allowed to pass through enemy lines; proper burials were allowed for each side’s dead; most of all, humanity recognized humanity for a time.

It did not end the war and it did not solve any disputes. But the story endures because it speaks both to the generosity of the human spirit in the worst of times and to the hope that accompanies the yearly celebration of the birth of Christ.

We celebrate Advent every year as a season of waiting and expectation, an anticipation of new life. In the darkest season of the year in northern climes, we hold on to this luminous sense at the same time we cannot help but sum up the events of another year coming to a close. The juxtaposition between the anticipatory joy of the former and the sometimes grim calculus of the latter can be jarring.

Three decades after the end of the Cold War seemed to augur an era of global democracy, dictators and oligarchs around the world seem emboldened anew to commit violence and plunder the earth of resources. Soaring commodity prices and supply chain disruptions have raised another ominous specter: widespread food shortages and even mass starvation. The United Nations predicts that 50 million people worldwide face emergency-level food needs, with over 880,000 in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen on the brink of starvation. The droughts and altered weather patterns brought by climate change place hundreds of millions more in danger of shortages of food, water and shelter. Regional armed conflicts—many fought with

American-made weapons—only exacerbate these crises.

Democracy is imperiled at home and abroad—for every nation that manages to bridge a change in regimes without violence, there is another (the United States?) for whom that violence seems all but inevitable. A growing number of Americans say that free elections are imperiled, and many say they simply do not accept election results.

We perhaps thought that partisan rancor in the United States had reached its modern apogee with the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Two years later, we face the cruel prospect that the divisions exposed then are not being healed but exacerbated. The goal long sought by many Catholics—the elimination of federal protection of abortion rights—has not led to anything resembling a civil debate, much less a consensus. In fact, the Supreme Court decision has led to some state-level abortion laws that are even more liberal than under Roe.

Suicides and drug abuse are up across the board, including overdoses and hospitalizations; addictions to other substances and vices are on the rise as well; and more than two years of relative isolation for many has resulted in a marked decrease in public civility, as if we somehow forgot how to get along at all.

The optimists among us might say that all these are but birth pangs, the inevitable pain that accompanies the appearance of new life. But in the Christian tradition, optimism is no virtue. To assume things will get better in the end may be helpful for maintaining a positive outlook, but

it offers little else. For the Christian, hope is the virtue that lives where optimism claims to abide: trust in the assurance of God's fidelity and the belief that we can participate in God's faithful action in the world. For the Christian, hope does not tell us that things will get better, but that in the end, with God, all shall be well.

That hope began in Bethlehem with a cold and hungry family of migrants living in a war-torn and occupied land—people with little to be optimistic about, but to whom God gave many signs to ponder. Few signs suggested reasons to be hopeful for that family, any more than they did for the soldiers in the trenches in 1914—and perhaps not any more than they might for those who suffer today. But like the Holy Family, we will face our challenges all the better when we rely less on progress or bemoan its opposite and instead turn our minds to the sacred truth that God is with us.

We prepare ourselves in these holy weeks of Advent to commemorate once again the moment when hope triumphed over all. To use the words of the Book of Wisdom: "When peaceful silence lay over all, and night had run half of her swift course, your all powerful word, O Lord, leaped down from heaven from the royal throne."

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 facebook.com/americamag New York, NY 10036  
 twitter.com/americamag America Press Inc. d/b/a America Media ©2022

## American corporations are happy to pay for abortions but not for parental benefits

As progressive activists, we are generally happy to see companies add employee benefits in a country that ranks the worst among developed economies for workers' rights, according to a recent survey of labor unions. But we cannot be happy about the newest offering in the meager smorgasbord of U.S. employee benefits: company-supported abortion.

At least 64 major U.S. corporations, including Starbucks, Tesla, Yelp, Microsoft and, most recently, Walmart, are now expanding their benefits to include either more abortion coverage or travel benefits to access abortion.

Dick's Sporting Goods, for example, is offering up to \$4,000 to help cover airplane fares, hotel expenses, bus tickets and other travel costs associated with procuring an abortion.

That is generous, right? These days, one can easily find a \$300 round-trip flight from Texas to New York, leaving you ample cash to spend on accommodation and food. Dick's really, really wants you to exercise your right to an abortion.

Sadly, Dick's is not so generous if you want to exercise your right to be a parent. If you choose to give birth, the company, which made a profit of \$2.4 billion last year, offers paid maternity leave of only eight weeks—less than half of the 18 weeks recommended by the International Labour Organization.

It is not too hard to do the math here. A first-trimester, out-of-state abortion typically costs \$565, according to Planned Parenthood, plus the cost of travel and several nights in a hotel. On the other hand, 18 weeks of paid maternity leave would cost Dick's at least \$6,840 for a worker on their minimum wage. Add to this the costs of lactation breaks, federally man-

dated accommodations, like secure bathroom stalls, and the long-term productivity costs of raising a child. Companies will never admit it, but the truth is that abortion is a good business decision. Providing parental benefits in line with the international standard for developed nations is not.

In fact, we researched 20 companies chosen at random from a list compiled by The New York Times of those offering expanded abortion coverage or travel benefits. Only eight of them paid maternity leave in line with the I.L.O.'s international recommendation of 18 weeks.

Granted, the I.L.O.'s standard seems like a generous one, but only because we are conditioned to think in the United States that profit comes before people. The way we see it, companies that can afford to shell out thousands of dollars in abortion travel benefits can also afford to provide meaningful benefits to parents, at least in the absence of government-funded paid leave. While some companies, like Walmart and Amazon, do also offer to cover fertility treatments, the overall package of support for working parents is lacking compared with international norms.

We acknowledge it can be difficult to get employee benefits right, but we must also note that proud announcements about benefits in one area sometimes seem to occur at the same time as less publicized actions that undermine workers' rights. In May, for example, Amazon announced a new abortion travel benefit; the following month, the company held 25 mandatory anti-union meetings in the lead-up to the vote by warehouse workers on Staten Island that resulted in their joining the Amazon Labor Union.

That company's anti-union bias

is accompanied by a general lack of regard for the needs of parents. Amazon's executive chairman, Jeff Bezos, was memorably confronted in 2019 by an angry group of self-styled "Mamazonians" disappointed at the company's poor culture of support for working parents and its lack of day care support.

Other companies have recently cut back on benefits for new parents even as they fund support for abortion. Disney-owned Hulu, for example, recently slashed its paid parental leave from 20 weeks to eight weeks, even as Disney has expanded travel benefits for "family planning" in the wake of the Dobbs decision.

As progressive anti-abortionists, we believe that labor justice is pre-born justice. We work to build a world where major corporations will feel the same pressure to protect unborn children from mass violence as they do today to support Black Lives Matter and the right of L.G.B.T.Q. people to simply be visible.

For now, though, companies should, at the minimum, adhere to a less exacting standard: Either pay for abortions *and* support your parenting employees, or stop paying for abortions at all.

Companies that cannot bring themselves to do both should be named and shamed. Women, people who can become pregnant and their children deserve better.

---

*Terrisa Bukovinac is the president and founder of Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising. Xavier Bisits is the secretary of Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising.*

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## Catholic schools outperform public and charter counterparts in first post-Covid national assessment

By Kevin Clarke

The bad news about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on learning was even worse than expected, though the numbers were probably not a complete shock to parents who have spent months juggling Zoom schedules and wondering if their children were learning anything. Children in the United States have suffered unprecedented losses in math and reading scores, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a congressionally mandated report card on academic achievement.

Years of progress in math were reversed during the pandemic as math scores saw their largest decrease ever, and reading scores dropped to 1992 levels. Nearly four in 10 eighth graders failed to grasp basic math concepts. Not a single state saw a notable improvement in average test scores, with some simply treading water.

But the nation's Catholic schools either held the line on their previous N.A.E.P. scores or lost substantially less ground than both public and charter schools. On eighth-grade reading scores, Catholic schools even managed to score a one-point improvement while both charter and public schools lost three points.

According to the N.A.E.P., Catholic school eighth graders scored five points lower in math in 2022 than in 2019, a serious decline but better than the eight-point loss among public school students and the nine-point drop at charter schools. According to the National Catholic Educational Association, Catholic school students' average scores remained 15 points higher than the average scores of their eighth-grade public school peers in the assessment.

"I was heartened by the results," said Kathleen Porter-Magee, an adjunct fellow at the Manhattan Institute and the superintendent of Partnership Schools, a network of urban Catholic schools in Harlem, the South Bronx and Cleveland.

"I think [they are] a reflection of the hard work that Catholic school teachers and leaders have been doing throughout the pandemic and ... a reflection of what Catholic schools' mission-driven, faith-filled and community-focused leadership has done to support kids and communities throughout Covid."

In an assessment posted on Twitter, she pointed out: "If Catholic schools were a state, they'd be the highest performing in the nation on all four N.A.E.P. tests."

In an interview with America, Ms. Porter-Magee said that the performance outcomes "really shines a bright light on just how important the American Catholic school system is to the landscape of American education, and it shows that America needs a truly diverse network of educational options for kids; there is no one-size-fits-all solution."

According to a statement released on Oct. 25 by the N.C.E.A., the report card's data also shows that Catholic schools are near the top in learning outcomes for students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, "demonstrating the system's commitment to underprivileged students."

Lincoln Snyder, the president of the N.C.E.A., called the results a proud moment for Catholic education. "One of the reasons Catholic schools performed so well is that our teachers showed up for the kids," he said. "In every state, we

A student at St. Lawrence Catholic School in North Miami Beach, Fla., wears a protective mask on the first day of school on Aug. 18, 2021.

were among the first to transition to distance learning, and after that brief time, also among the first to return students to a safe in-person environment. That's why I call our educators heroes."

In the first nationally representative study of the pandemic's impact on learning, the N.A.E.P. tested hundreds of thousands of fourth and eighth graders across the country this year—the first time the test has been administered since 2019. Confirming what many had feared, racial inequities appear to have widened. In the fourth grade, Black and Latino students saw bigger decreases than white students, widening gaps that have persisted for decades.

Inequities were also reflected in a growing gap between higher- and lower-performing students. In math and reading, scores fell most sharply among the lowest-performing students, creating a widening chasm between struggling students and the rest of their peers. Los Angeles schools bucked the national trend with eighth-grade reading scores increasing by nine points, the only significant uptick in any district, and a number of other big-city systems like New York and Houston were able to hold the line against achievement losses.

But those better results were not enough to offset what translated into lost ground in every state in the nation. No part of the country was exempt. Every region saw test scores slide, and every state saw declines in at least one subject.

"It is a serious wakeup call for us all," Peggy Carr, commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, a branch of the U.S. Department of Education, told *The Associated Press* after the report card was released on Oct. 24. "In N.A.E.P., when we experience a one- or two-point decline, we're talking about it as a significant impact on a student's achievement. In math, we experienced an eight-point decline—historic for this assessment."

Researchers usually think of a 10-point gain or drop as equivalent to roughly a year of learning.

"Eighth grade is a pivotal moment in students' mathematics education, as they develop key mathematics skills for further learning and potential careers in mathematics and science," said Daniel J. McGrath, an associate commissioner for assessment at the National Center for Education Statistics, in a statement released with the report. "If left unaddressed, this could alter the trajectories and life opportunities of a whole cohort of young people, potentially reducing their abilities to pursue rewarding and productive careers in mathematics, science, and technology."

As the crisis unfolded through the winter and the sum-

mer of 2020, Catholic schools, like all other schools, closed according to state and local mandates aimed at suppressing the spread of Covid-19, but many were quick to reopen to modified in-class learning as soon as they were allowed to. Did that make the difference?

"I think it was huge," Ms. Porter-Magee said. Emerging post-shutdown studies, she said, support the proposition that the more time students have been able to experience in-person instruction, the better they have performed both academically and in terms of social-emotional learning.

She emphasized the importance of following the science in making decisions about school closings and reopenings as the nation struggles with the lingering pandemic or confronts other health crises that might emerge in the future. She pointed out that Catholic school officials never followed an "open at all costs" approach during the pandemic.

By the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, according to Ms. Porter-Magee, 92 percent of Catholic schools nationwide were open to "some kind of in-person learning, compared to only 43 percent of public schools and 34 percent of charter schools."

"That decision to reopen accounts for the biggest part of the story of the difference in Catholic school achievement," she said.

Now that this failing national grade has been released, Ms. Porter-Magee said it is critical for educators and policymakers to begin making investments to mitigate the damage. "We need to be working right now to empower all parents with school choice, so that they can find—pretty urgently—the school that's going to best meet whatever their particular children's needs are, and we're going to have to make sure that we're stepping up additional supports or tutoring and also intensifying our support in school [to counter] student learning loss."

Restoring the lost year experienced by so many who are now fifth and ninth graders will be a national challenge. Ms. Porter-Magee suggests it could be an opportunity for Catholic schools to stand out for families who are looking for alternatives to public schools.

"I hope what this is going to do is rekindle the support for all Catholic schools, but particularly for urban Catholic schools, to revitalize an interest in finding creative ways to preserve the legacy of American urban Catholic schools and American education."

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

# New study of priests shows distrust of bishops, fears of false sex abuse allegations and widespread burnout



Catholic priests in the United States say that they support the goals of the zero-tolerance policy against child sex abuse established in the “Dallas Charter” in 2002, but they worry about being falsely accused of such offenses and do not trust that their bishops would support them in the face of a false allegation. That stress, a new report concludes, could be a contributing factor to high rates of burnout, especially among younger priests.

According to the report “Well-being, Trust, and Policy in a Time of Crisis: Highlights From the National Study of Catholic Priests,” published in October by The Catholic Project at the Catholic University of America, 45 percent of the 3,516 priests responding to the researchers’ survey say they have experienced at least one symptom of ministry burnout. But burnout is less prevalent among priests who are members of religious orders. Among diocesan priests, half say they have experienced burnout, while just a third of religious order priests say the same.

When it comes to the people priests turn to for social support, bishops rank toward the bottom of the list, with lay friends, family and parishioners offering the strongest support. According to the report, “many priests feel that the policies introduced since the Dallas Charter have depersonalized their relationship with their bishops; they see bishops more as CEOs, bureaucrats, and legalistic guardians of diocesan finances than as fathers and brothers.”

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

Priests are seen during a special Mass for vocations at Cure of Ars Church in Merrick, N.Y., Aug. 4, 2022, the feast of St. John Vianney, patron of parish priests.

**60% OF YOUNGER DIOCESAN PRIESTS** (under 45) and about 40% of religious order priests said they experience burnout. The report considers burnout to include “cynicism, feeling emotionally drained, or feeling worn out after ministry work.”

**77% OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS CAN BE CONSIDERED “FLOURISHING,”** based on a self-assessment called the Harvard Flourishing Index, a rate higher than the general population. Researchers found that the level of trust between a priest and his bishop is “a major factor” in the priest’s overall well-being.

**ONLY 24% OF U.S. PRIESTS EXPRESS CONFIDENCE** in the leadership of U.S. bishops in general. That “erosion of trust” is hurting the well-being of priests, the report found, noting that it was associated “with an 11.5% reduction in that priest’s level of well-being.”

**49% OF PRIESTS IN 2022 STATED THAT THEY HAD “A GREAT DEAL” OR “QUITE A LOT”** of confidence in the decision-making and leadership of their bishop, down sharply from 63% of priests who said so in 2001, the year the priest sexual abuse crisis became more widely known.

**67% OF PRIESTS AGREE, 20 YEARS AFTER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DALLAS Charter,** that the church’s zero tolerance policy demonstrates its values in protecting the weak and 66% said it restores trust with the public, but 40% believe the policy is “harsher than is necessary.

**82% OF PRIESTS “REGULARLY FEAR BEING FALSELY ACCUSED OF SEXUAL ABUSE”** and most priests “fear that they will not be supported by their dioceses or bishops should they be falsely accused.”

Source: “Well-being, Trust, and Policy in a Time of Crisis: Highlights From the National Study of Catholic Priests,” from The Catholic Project at the Catholic University of America.

# Giorgia Meloni, Italy's new prime minister, has 'not always understood' Pope Francis

Giorgia Meloni is a Christian and a right-wing nationalist who became Italy's first female prime minister and leader of the country's most far-right government since World War II on Oct. 22.

There is much speculation about how she will relate to Pope Francis. Their positions on the migrant question appear to be diametrically opposed. Her nationalist identity politics and her understanding of Christianity appear to exclude rather than include and communicate a very different vision from that of Francis.

At the same time, she, like the pope, is very concerned about the low birthrate in Italy; and they both see the need to create jobs so that young, qualified people do not have to leave the country.

Given all this, Vatican sources contacted by America, who wish to remain anonymous because they are not authorized to speak on the subject, believe that the 85-year-old pope and the 45-year-old prime minister could in fact develop a constructive relationship.

"The Vatican does not seek to influence or interfere in Italian politics. Its doors are always open to all, from the president of France, Emmanuel Macron, to the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orban, and they will be open to Giorgia Meloni," one senior Vatican official said.

He added, "Meloni is a person who has an idea of Christianity that is 'sui generis,' and I believe that we must not judge nor jump to conclusions before seeing how she moves."

In her autobiography, *I Am Giorgia*, Ms. Meloni described St. John Paul II as "the greatest pope of the modern era." He had a considerable impact on her because "with simplicity and his powerful example, he brought me close to God."

She reveals: "I have followed every pope, but not with the same enthusiasm.... I admit that I have not always understood Pope Francis. At times I have felt like a lost sheep, and I hope that one day I will have the privilege of being able to speak with him, because I am certain that his big eyes and his straight talk will be able to give meaning to what I do not understand."

She has not been shy about pushing back against encroaching "progressive" ideologies. In a speech at a rally in Piazza San Giovanni, Rome, in October 2019, she declared: "I am Giorgia. I am a woman. I am a mother. I am a Christian. We will defend God, the fatherland and the



Giorgia Meloni celebrates on election night in Rome on Sept. 26.

family from Islamization."

Ms. Meloni, who was minister for youth in the media mogul Silvio Berlusconi's government in 2008, may in fact encounter more problems in the near term with political allies in her governing coalition than with the pope. She is adamant in affirming Italy's total support for Ukraine against Russian aggression, even though the leaders of the two other parties that form her center-right coalition, Matteo Salvini's League and Mr. Berlusconi's Forward Italy party, have close relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

For his part, Pope Francis has left Italian politics to the Italian bishops' conference; its president, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, who is very close to Francis, knows Ms. Meloni personally. Cardinal Zuppi has expressed his respect for her and said he recognizes that her role as prime minister is "particularly difficult" at this moment in history, given the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis linked to it and ongoing economic distress as Italy emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cardinal Zuppi said he hopes the new government will work for "the common good," not for "particular interests," and said he will monitor closely how it addresses the problems of "poverty, inequality, young people and the elderly, the environment, the demographic winter, the reception of migrants, and the building of a more just and inclusive society."

Like the Vatican, he is taking a "wait and see" approach, knowing well that not a few Catholics in Italy have welcomed Ms. Meloni's victory.

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

# In Cameroon, the 'Anglophone crisis' descends into banditry and chaos

The Central African country of Cameroon is often called “Africa in miniature” because of its geographic and cultural diversity. Cameroon maintains one of the highest literacy rates on the continent and once ranked among Africa’s most prosperous nations. Yet today, Cameroon’s progress is threatened by a deadly conflict rooted in its colonial past, when different regions of what would become modern Cameroon were administered separately by the British and the French.

A protest that began in Cameroon’s northwest and southwest regions, also known as Ambazonia, has escalated into a civil war as militants seek independence for the minority Anglophone population. The rising tensions and outbreaks of violence that have persisted over the last few years have been dubbed the “Anglophone crisis.”

At least 6,000 civilians have been killed since the conflict between government and separatist forces began in 2016, and more than 765,000 people have been internally displaced from the Anglophone regions. But what began as an independence struggle with significant popular support has disintegrated into something closer to banditry.

On Sept. 16, an attack occurred at St. Mary’s Parish in Nchang, a community in the Diocese of Mamfe. The church and parish buildings were razed by fire, and five priests, a sister and three laypeople were kidnapped. The separatists are demanding a \$50,000 ransom for the release of their victims.

The Rev. Cornelius Jingwa, one of the victims, issued an appeal in a video released by the kidnappers on Oct. 19. “So far it has not been easy,” he said. “If you take a good look at us, you will see our sad and tired faces.”

Father Jingwa reported that the condition of the hostages is not good. “I have fallen seriously ill; even my brothers are not at all well,” he said.



A Jesuit working in Cameroon—who did not wish to be named for security reasons—said that the kidnapping shows just how deeply the Anglophone crisis has permeated Cameroonian life. He said that in the past the separatists would only fight government forces and attack those they believed to be collaborating with the government.

Now all vulnerable people appear to be just as likely to be victimized. “We are really worried about the situation of the church and the people there,” he said.

Many Anglophone Cameroonians initially supported the pro-independence movement; their support has diminished as independence fighters engaged in kidnapping for ransom, at times killing villagers. The head of communications for the Cameroon Bishops’ Conference, the Rev. Humphrey Tatah Mbuy, told local media that there are reports that government soldiers arrest people and only release them upon payment of bribes. The separatists do the same.

The conflict and disorder can be traced back to Cameroon’s earliest days as an independent state. The northwest and southwest of Cameroon, known as “British Cameroons,” were under British colonial administration between 1919 and 1961. A popular vote in 1961 supported union with French Cameroon.

Since the reunification, however, Cameroonians of the English-speaking regions, which comprise 20 percent of



A Rapid Intervention Battalion member patrols the abandoned village of Ekona in the Anglophone region in October 2018.

CNS photo/Zohra Bensemra, Reuters



Pope Francis, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Governor General Mary Simon in Quebec City on July 27

CNS photo/Paul Haring

## Are 'nones' to blame for Canada's declining Catholic numbers?

New figures from the Canadian national census reveal that the share of the population that describes itself as Catholic is dwindling, though Catholicism continues to be the largest Christian denomination in Canada, with about 30 percent of the population, or nearly 11 million people, identifying as part of the Catholic Church in 2021.

About 50 percent of Canada's 38 million residents identify as Christian. That number is down significantly from 2001, when more than three-quarters of Canadians said they were Christian.

One reason for the decline is the increasing number of people who reported having no religious affiliation—12 million, according to the census. The percentage of these so-called nones has risen to about 35 percent in 2021, more than double the 17 percent who reported no religious affiliation in 2001.

Catholicism's decline was especially noticeable in Quebec, the French-speaking and historically Catholic province where secularism is considered a key cultural value. While Quebec remains the sole province in Canada where the majority of residents—54 percent—describe themselves as Catholic, that percentage is down significantly from a decade ago, when 75 percent of residents said they were Catholic.

Quebec's commitment to secularism has played out in controversial ways in recent years, with critics arguing that efforts to remove religion from the public square are actually aimed at religious minorities, especially Muslim residents. In 2019, Quebec passed a law that forbids government employees from wearing any religious articles while working, including hijabs and crosses.

The census found that 1.8 million people in Canada identify as Indigenous, of whom about 27 percent describe themselves as Catholic. Earlier this year, Pope Francis visited Canada to apologize for historic abuse and mistreatment of Indigenous children at residential schools run by the Catholic Church.

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

Russell Pollitt, S.J., *Johannesburg correspondent*. Twitter: @rpollittsj



## A Final Word With Matt Malone

*On Oct. 11, Matt Malone, S.J., sat down with executive editor Ashley McKinless for a final interview to discuss his years as editor and take questions from America's staff. Their conversation has been edited for length and clarity. A longer version can be found at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).*

***This month marked your 10th anniversary as editor in chief of America. So we'll start at the end of that decade. Why are you leaving now?***

The charge that I was given was to lead the organization through a transformation where it would become a multiplatform media company, to grow the audience and to get us to a place that was near or at breakeven. And we've accomplished almost all of that. We've done what I came to do, what I was asked to do.

I also think that turnovers are a good thing in the life of any organization. Ignatius believed that. If you're too long in a job, you begin to develop blind spots because you get impatient having to deal with the same problems over and over again, and you begin to mistake new problems for old problems.

***Where were you when you found out you were going to be the next editor in chief, and what were your first reactions?***

I was studying at the University of London and at the Catholic University of Louvain. The president of the Jesuit Conference called and said, "Do you want to do this?"

I think I was given the freedom to say no. But if I had, there might not have been an America to come back to because we were in kind of desperate straits. I thought I had whatever combination of skills was needed to do the job.

It was Father Thurston Davis's magazine that I inherited. You have the magazine before Father Thurston, and then you have the magazine after Father Thurston. Father Thurston was the first editor who really thought in a multiplatform way, even though he wouldn't have articulated it that way; but he understood the power of brand and how that brand could be rolled out across multiple platforms.

But 50 years later, we needed a magazine for the 21st century. That was clear because the way we were running Thurston's magazine at that point was coming up against these market forces that were besetting every legacy magazine in the country.

***In your programmatic document "Pursuing the Truth in Love," you said that the most important challenge we face is existential. The most fundamental question is, who are we? So did you know who America was? Or was***

***that a process of trying to figure that out together with the team?***

The answer to that uncertainty was a brand or what theologians call a charism. What is the essential identity of this group? I began to think that as we went through a transformation, as we went multiplatform, the thing that would hold all of it together is this notion of brand. And if we could articulate this and bring it into the culture of the organization, so that it became just second nature to us, that would be our guiding light, getting to that place where we could say, "America is your smart Catholic take on faith and culture."

What does America do? We lead the conversation about faith and culture. We empower you to do the same. How do we do it? We do it by producing content that is relevant, unique, accessible and impactful. Why do we do it? To promote the evangelization of the United States, the faith formation of American Catholics and the progress of civil society.

***Another major theme of "Pursuing the Truth in Love" was your concern about polarization in the country and the church. What were your concerns then and how would you grade how we're doing now?***

We can always be better, but I think we have by and large implemented what I articulated there in terms of what we were going to be. We're going to be a place that was unafraid of having a diversity of voices, that was unafraid of ideas that were different from our own. From my point of view, what was most important in all of that brand work was the rediscovery of America as a ministry. And like all ministries, it participates in the one ministry of Jesus Christ, which is reconciliation.

What does reconciliation look like for a media company? I thought it had to be about bringing people together who were rapidly coming apart. We had to bear witness to a different way of being as a church instead of mimicking the patterns of division and polarization that we were seeing in secular society. That was extremely dangerous; we were debasing the church's intrinsic identity by doing it.

***When America published an article by Arthur Brooks, then the president of the American Enterprise Institute, it was like the end of the world for some of our longtime readers. What do you say to people who have loved Amer-***

# America



Ashley McKinless and Matt Malone, S.J.

***ica for a long time and feel threatened by change—who worry that something’s being taken away from them?***

Part of the reason I went back to the practice of having the editor in chief write the Of Many Things column every week was because I wanted to narrate for our readers and for the audience what was happening. And I didn’t want to get too far ahead of them. So there was a lot of narration work that occurred before we published Arthur Brooks. And what I discovered was a transition among our readers from “Why is this person in America?” to “I really don’t like this person’s ideas.” But the first objection has pretty much gone by the wayside.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating, too. We have dramatically increased the size of our audience while pursuing this strategy. And I think that there are very few people who have read America for the last 20 or 30 years who would like to go back.

I have a fundamental trust in the readers of America. I always believed that they were well educated, they were faithful Catholics and they knew the Jesuits. And one of the things that they expect from the Jesuits and our lay colleagues is that we will say something different; they expect something like the classroom of competing ideas that they experienced when they were students.

***In the last few years, we’ve covered some really difficult stories in the church. I’m curious: On a more personal***

***level, what has that done to your own faith and relationship with Jesus?***

This may seem odd because of what we lived through together—covering things like the Pennsylvania abuse report and Ted McCarrick and these other awful, awful stories, these traumas we really lived through together—but my faith is stronger after 10 years in this job. When I became editor in chief, I was far more worried about the church than I was about the country. Now the reverse is true. Part of that is that the survival of the church is safeguarded by the promises of the Lord himself, which the republic does not enjoy.

But I have also visited the church in every part of this country. And I find that I’ve been much more edified than disedified by those encounters, the faith of Catholics, the work that goes on every day. All around us, people are encountering Christ for the first time. They’re being baptized, they’re being married, they’re being buried, they’re being fed, they’re being housed. People are accompanying them. People are holding their hand when they die or when they’re sick or when someone they loved has gone.

All of that is happening all around us all the time, around the clock. That is the work of the church. And I’ve been in a very privileged position in this job to see that up close, and it really inspires me. It really consoles me.

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Ashley McKinless, executive editor. @AshleyMcKinless.



# IN THEIR HOUR

*One nonprofit's uniquely holistic approach to helping incarcerated women and their families*

By Christopher Parker

“How far back do you want me to begin the story?” Aisha Elliott asked me.

I told her to start with whatever she felt was best.

“Well, I came into contact with Hour Children while I was incarcerated, serving 25 years to life for a second-degree murder charge,” she began.

Ms. Elliott’s voice sounded firm and self-assured. She was calling me from Cleveland, Ohio, where she moved in 2020 to leave New York, the state of her upbringing and her incarceration. She had spent 21 years in the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, two in the Albion Correctional Facility and two in the Taconic Correctional Facility.

Ms. Elliott entered prison as a 20-year-old in 1992, and like more than 60 percent of incarcerated women in America today, she was a mother of children under age 18. At the time, she had no idea if or how she would see her toddlers, then 1 and 3 years old, again.

The statistics were not in her favor: A 2020 report from the Department of Justice found that incarcerated women lose parental custody at some of the highest rates of any parents—including parents whom courts have found abusive or neglectful. Children with mothers in prison are significantly more likely to face jail time and homelessness across their lifespan.

But Ms. Elliott managed to beat these odds, with the

help of an organization that enrolled her in parenting classes during her sentence, provided her housing when she came home on June 2, 2016, arranged for her first job out of prison and trained her for her second. That organization is called Hour Children, and Ms. Elliott said that without it her family would be in pieces.

“My kids are my absolute best friends. Now we have the greatest, coolest relationship, and there’s no way that I can attribute that to anybody other than the parenting center and the courses I took,” she said.

Since 1992, Hour Children has helped hundreds of women like Ms. Elliott reintegrate not only into society but into their family lives. The Queens-based nonprofit applies a uniquely holistic approach to helping incarcerated women, with a presence inside women’s prisons in New York State and in the lives of inmates after release in New York City. Their initiatives aim to prepare women during their sentence for re-entry into society and then provide support after it ends.

This mission informs everything about Hour Children, including its name, which is a reference to three crucial times for an incarcerated mother’s relationship with her child: the hour of her arrest, the hour of their visit while incarcerated and the hour of their reunification upon release.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Hour Chil-



dren, which has grown from an unassuming but adamant voice of advocacy for imprisoned women to an essential presence in several of New York State's female correctional facilities.

Everyone I spoke to, from current employees to alumnae of the program, credited the nonprofit's success to one woman: its founder, Teresa Fitzgerald, C.S.J., known affectionately as Sister Tesa. It was her vision three decades ago that launched Hour Children out of a run-down convent building in the Queens neighborhood of Long Island City.

### **An Unplanned Ministry**

Sister Tesa retired as the executive director of Hour Children in July 2021 to begin her tenure as president of her religious order, the Sisters of St. Joseph. She joined the order immediately out of high school in 1964. Her parents, both Irish immigrants, had raised her in the hamlet of Hewlett, N.Y., on Long Island.

She encountered the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph while in Catholic school, just as she was discovering her own interest in education. By the time she graduated, she had discovered her vocation. "They were wonderful role models and good people, happy people. That's why I chose to do it. I never regretted one second," Sister Tesa told me.

She began her career as an educator, teaching and serving as a principal in several Catholic schools on Long Island. She loved working with children and had no plans to change her ministry.

But her work took an unexpected turn in 1979, when another Sister of St. Joseph, Elaine Roulet, invited members of the congregation to join her in helping incarcerated women. Sister Elaine had been working with mothers at the Bedford Hills facility in Westchester County, N.Y., since 1970, advocating for a playroom and a nursery inside the prison. Now she wanted to help inmates rebuild their families upon their release.

Sister Tesa joined Sister Elaine to start Providence House, initially founded as a place for women to live once they came home from prison, hoping to connect with their children. Soon after, Sister Tesa started looking for a permanent place where children could stay and visit their mothers during their prison sentences.

In 1986, as she was pursuing this idea, she realized a convent building could provide a suitable location for the new service. Her religious order had a presence in St. Rita's Catholic School in Long Island City, and some of those sisters told her that the pastor at St. Rita's would be willing to sell the old convent next door.

"We met one night, the dark of night, and he was just



# Incarcerated women would write letters and record bedtime stories on tape to send to their children.

very open and supportive of it all,” Sister Tesa said. “We negotiated everything on the sidewalk.”

She called that facility My Mother’s House, and it remains part of the Hour Children network today. For nine years, the ministry that would become Hour Children operated out of that convent. Sister Tesa said that all the sisters trained as foster parents, and a group of children lived with them during their mothers’ sentences; the sisters frequently drove the children 45 miles north to Bedford Hills for visits.

Before long, Sister Tesa expanded the work of the organization to assist formerly incarcerated mothers beyond just caring for their children. She incorporated and officially named the organization in 1992. Her guiding principle when she founded Hour Children remained the same throughout her tenure as head of the organization: “Listen to the people you serve.”

“You don’t put your own expectations out there, your own vision,” Sister Tesa said. “You listen to their stories, and you listen to the stepping stones they needed to really move forward with their life.”

This principle developed into Hour Children’s current model of providing tools for success during prison as well as housing and job resources after release. Sister Tesa began building up Hour Children’s offerings in Long Island City, purchasing new buildings to house more women during their re-entry, while she built up services available within prisons.

Those in-prison programs included parenting classes, Ms. Elliott’s early introduction to Hour Children in 1995. She said she took classes entitled “Parenting From a Distance” and “Parenting Through Films.” Slowly, she became more involved with Hour Children and started working in

the parenting center herself.

Ms. Elliott said she initially gravitated toward Hour Children because Sister Tesa was eyeing new housing opportunities for women without small children, and her own daughters would be adults by the time she left prison. She knew she would need somewhere to go when that day came.

During her 20-year involvement, Ms. Elliott developed a relationship with and deep affection for Sister Tesa, the slight, smiling Irishwoman wearing a gold crucifix who seemed simultaneously at ease and in charge while working at Bedford Hills.

Upon her release, Ms. Elliott moved into an Hour Children house. By that time, Sister Tesa had built a system for re-entry that provided women a wide range of tools they might need to succeed after incarceration, both as citizens and as mothers.

Sister Tesa had listened to the post-incarceration struggles of her clients and responded to them. She had expanded housing offerings, career paths and child care services to take care of a range of her clients’ needs. Hour Children has become a national model for assisting re-entry, earning Sister Tesa recognition from the Obama administration, CNN, Irish America magazine and others.

As she begins a new phase of her vocation, Sister Tesa said that she will lead the Sisters of St. Joseph with the same principles of love and mercy that guided her at Hour Children. She is especially fond of a maxim often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel. When necessary, use words.”

“That’s a very important piece of the Gospel message for me, that we look at people and accept people for who they are, and don’t use labels,” she said. “Every human being is really important in God’s eyes. There’s no such thing as a castout, ever.”

## Houses and Homes

On a weekday afternoon, the block of 12th Street between 36th and 37th Avenues in Long Island City echoes with the laughter of children. Among the low, discolored brick buildings and chain link fences are several schools—public, charter and Catholic, all within a three-block radius—along with a library and playground nearby. When recess starts, everyone knows it.

It is a fitting neighborhood to house Hour Children.

Rubernetta Chavis, the director of mental health initiatives, walked me around the block and took me into the Hour Children buildings. On the way, we passed a hair salon founded and run by one of Hour Children’s former cli-



Photo provided by the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Sister Tesa Fitzgerald plays with some of the children of Hour Children at a residential house in Long Island City, a neighborhood of Queens, in 2014.

ents. Ms. Chavis pointed out businesses that donate food or services to the charity.

“I know, whenever I get pizza, to go to that pizza parlor because they help us out,” she said, pointing to a storefront across the street that provides coupons and gift certificates for Hour Children events and fundraisers.

We headed into My Mother’s House, that first housing facility purchased by Sister Tesa more than 30 years ago. It was immediately clear that this used to be a convent, with its wide communal dining room and kitchen.

Hour Children has made the space its own since then. No two walls are painted the same shade of bright green or purple or blue. The basement has been converted into a day care center.

A lot has changed in the organization since its founding. The array of services now provided by Hour Children reflects the complex and often interrelated needs of women caught in the justice system. Programs in the prison facilities and in Queens work in close relationship to give

clients the best shot at successful reintegration.

In Bedford Hills prison, “everybody knows Hour Children,” said Christina Illenberg, an executive assistant. She spent 25 years incarcerated, most of it in Bedford Hills, and she said that she spent about four of those years working for Hour Children before her release in 2020.

Hour Children runs the nursery there for women who give birth while in prison. Thanks to the efforts of Sisters Elaine and Tesa decades ago, working in tandem with dedicated and driven women inside, mothers can live with their child for up to 18 months after birth. That time is crucial, not only for the emotional wellbeing of mother and child but also to allow the mother to figure out what comes next. Some women are released in time to go home with their babies. Others must start making plans and heartbreaking decisions about custody for the child.

Judy Clark did not give birth in prison, but her daughter was only 1 year old when she was arrested in 1981. Ms. Clark was a key player in building Hour Children’s initia-



Hour Children began as a home for children whose mothers were incarcerated. Sister Tesa and her colleagues trained as foster parents in order to serve as caregivers for children whose mothers were incarcerated.

Photo provided by the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph (2012).

tives in Bedford Hills during her 38-year sentence. She said that she began working with Sister Tesa from her earliest years inside.

“The children’s center was a major part of the experience inside,” she said. “It was a community in which we built the programs to address the issues we experienced.”

Ms. Clark remembers the development of the curriculum for the classes that Ms. Elliott took, focused on how to parent from prison. She said that women would write letters and record bedtime stories on tape to send to their children. Similar methods are still taught in the Hour Children parenting centers.

Ms. Clark said that Hour Children’s growth was spurred by the changing needs of the women involved. When it started, she said, most of their clients were young mothers. But when that changed, the options had to expand.

“As our children grew, we saw new needs. As our children became teens, we knew that the kids in their teen years needed different experiences with each other and with us,” she said.

One thing that did not change, however, was the orga-

nization’s focus on physical visits. The visitation program has retained the same mission and basic format since the 1970s, transporting children to reunite with their mothers inside, even as its capabilities have grown. At the maximum-security Bedford Hills prison, Hour Children provides a week-long overnight experience in partnership with local host families. This past summer, 35 children stayed in nearby homes and made use of every minute of the prison’s seven-hour visiting time each day.

As a result, children can come from all over the state instead of just nearby New York City. Once that program began, Ms. Elliott’s children visited her from Utica during her time in Bedford Hills—a 220 mile journey only made possible by a host family.

### Post-Prison Success

The ultimate goal of all of these in-prison initiatives is to set women up for success upon their release. Many women seeking to become clients of Hour Children undergo an intake process and interview while still incarcerated. Ms. Clark spoke about a “mutual commitment” made between

# The ultimate goal of all of these in-prison initiatives is to set women up for success upon their release.

the two parties.

That is because Hour Children means more than just affordable apartments, as Ms. Chavis explained to me. It is a comprehensive program. Women who qualify to live in My Mother's House fall in Population G of New York's supportive housing laws; they either have a disabling medical condition or a substance use disorder. Other houses offered by the organization serve other at-risk populations.

Most women in the program will move through communal housing and into permanent housing, but all go through at their own pace. When Ms. Elliott left prison in 2016, she came to the Hour Children house in Richmond Hill, a neighborhood to the southeast of Long Island City. Hour Children allowed her to tour all of the facilities, including the more independent housing that she would move into later. Ms. Elliott said that one apartment in Flushing called to her.

"When it's my turn to live independently, this is where I want to live," she recalled thinking. "Now that I'm in an entire house, it was just a room. But when you're coming from a cell, that room looked really big."

Not every room at Hour Children houses mothers and their children together. At My Mother's House, for example, only five of nine apartments host families with young children. Ms. Elliott said that she determined during her exit interview with Sister Tesa that it would be a bad idea to try to move back in with her family in Utica. Widespread substance abuse and a lack of job opportunities would likely have landed her back in prison. But she also needed her own space to adjust to the realities of 25 lost years.

"Even when they're 30 and 32, they're still 1 and 3 in your mind. You can't go home to grown folks and be mommy. It just destroys relationships," she said.

The employment-focused Hour Children program,

called Hour Working Women, is also based in Long Island City. It currently provides education and job trainings for 36 clients. Recent offerings have ranged from electrocardiogram and medical assistant training to culinary classes. Hour Children works one-on-one with women to find job opportunities, providing footholds that allow them to start making money and paying bills.

In the most recent cohort of 12 women who completed certified medical assistant training, 10 have been placed in paid internships, and eight are negotiating job contracts for after their internships end.

Ms. Elliott trained as an electrician and joined a local union, working on the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, among other projects. She enjoyed the work, even though she did not ultimately remain in that job.

As she moved through her re-entry, Ms. Elliott found the most independence and self-reliance that she experienced since 1992. When it came time for her to leave Richmond Hill and have her first personal, private space in 25 years, the room she had yearned for in Flushing was available.

Ms. Elliott was ecstatic.

## The Hours to Come

The administrative offices of Hour Children occupy the basement floor of one of their residential houses; its employees work in the same building where its clients live.

Dr. Alethea Taylor began her tenure as executive director of Hour Children in January of this year, taking over for Sister Tesa. She was previously a distinguished lecturer on education and counseling at Hunter College, a role she enjoyed, she said, but that was not as fulfilling.

"I wasn't living my purpose. And my purpose is to serve women who are formerly incarcerated or justice-impacted, to help them and guide them towards choice and having a voice," she said.

Dr. Taylor has never been incarcerated but grew up with family members who were in and out of prison. She saw how people who were left on their own after incarceration were set up for failure when applying for jobs or housing. She witnessed the many injustices of the American justice system. In her new role, she said that she hopes to grow Hour Children's advocacy work and prevention services while still providing its core offerings.

"Hour Children really needs to be a voice in the community and be a voice in the political realm about the issues," she said.

For now, this job falls primarily to Ms. Clark, who works as Hour Children's first-ever community justice advocate. Ms. Clark works with city and state government to take action on the needs of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people.

Aisha Elliott, second from left, leaves prison on June 2, 2016, picked up by her daughters and her granddaughter.

Photo provided by Aisha Elliott.

Sisters Elaine Roulet and Tesa Fitzgerald attend an Hour Children event in 2007. Sister Elaine introduced Sister Tesa to the ministry of reuniting families of incarcerated women.

Photo provided by the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph



One gaping hole in the justice system, Ms. Clark said, is that conversations about life after incarceration tend to start far too late into each person's sentence, leaving people scrambling and unprepared to return to their lives. "We need a system that looks at re-entry not at the end of your sentence but at the beginning of your sentence," Ms. Clark said.

Ms. Clark and Dr. Taylor hope Hour Children can help change policy, addressing the root causes of post-prison homelessness and unemployment as well as treating their symptoms. Ms. Clark is currently fighting for the Fair Chance for Housing Act in New York City, which would outlaw discrimination by landlords against people with conviction records.

Dr. Taylor said she hopes to broaden the scope of Hour Children re-entry services. She wants to expand family therapy, allowing the broken bonds between a mother and her partner or a mother and her own parents to heal. The primary focus has always been on re-establishing the moth-

er-child relationship. Dr. Taylor wants women to have the option to extend that to other family members who might hold onto resentment.

Dr. Taylor also emphasized the work that remains to be done within Hour Children itself. When she arrived, she said that staff had brought concerns to her about diversity and inclusion within the organization. "We're an organization that is predominantly serving people of color, but our staff don't necessarily match our clientele. So that's something that we will be working on," she said.

Dr. Taylor does not believe in filling anyone's shoes ("Everyone walks their own journey," she said), but she does hope to continue Sister Tesa's core mission.

"As the founder of this organization...she thought so succinctly about every aspect of a woman's need, and built that into the organization," Dr. Taylor said. "That's someone that's really thinking about the home and the whole person."

Hour Children will continue to pry open doors that society has closed on incarcerated women. As far as Ms. Elliott in Cleveland is concerned, their model for re-entry support is unmatched.

Ms. Elliott came into prison as a high-school dropout, but quickly earned her G.E.D. and began taking university courses through a Mercy College program inside Bedford Hills. When President Clinton's 1994 crime bill threatened access to those classes by denying Pell Grants for incarcerated women, she and Ms. Clark fought together with others to build their own program with Marymount Manhattan College. She left Bedford Hills a college graduate.

Now she works remotely for Columbia University's Justice Lab, conducting research on mass incarceration across the country. Her work currently focuses on conditions in the state of Oklahoma.

On the day she left prison, Ms. Elliott remembers, she was released directly into the responsibility of Hour Children. They had met with her as she prepared for release, helping with tasks as fundamental as securing a state ID and as small as learning to use an iPhone. Now someone from the organization would be there waiting for her to take her to Queens for onboarding.

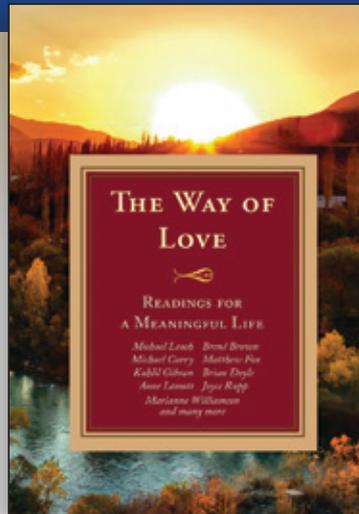
At least that was the plan. But Sister Tesa made an exception for Ms. Elliott, one she will "forever appreciate."

Her daughters picked her up instead.

Christopher Parker is a Joseph A. O'Hare fellow at America Media.

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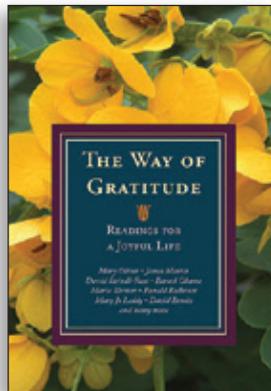
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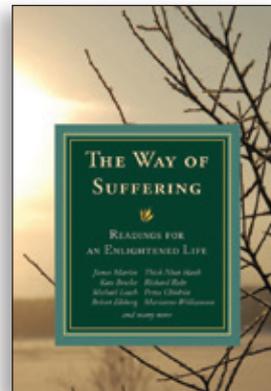
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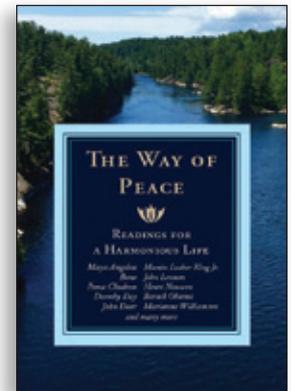
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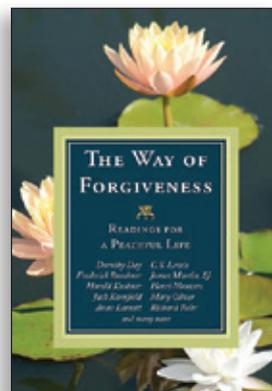
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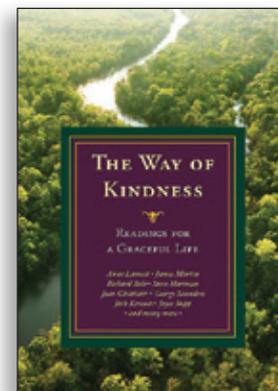
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# POEMS OF LIGHT AND COLOR

## *On the enduring sublimity of stained glass*

By Sonja Livingston

Back in the early 2000s, I enrolled in a writing workshop in Madrid. In one of our first meetings, the teacher invited us to close our eyes and picture the place we knew best. This was easy. Corpus Christi Church in Rochester, N.Y., has always been my hub.

“Describe the space,” he said, “while incorporating each of your senses.”

I wrote about the gothic arches and tangle of ivy covering the sandstone. I described the creak of pews and the scent of melting candles. I wrote about the statue of Mary with her garland of plastic roses and the wood-beamed ceiling where I once mistook a bat caught in the rafters for a dove. More than anything, I focused on the window over the high altar.

*The window leaks light onto whitewashed walls, I wrote. And thickens the air with its hues. When the sun hits just right, the window spills its scarlet and sapphire into the church and everything’s on fire—if stained glass had a taste, it would be overripe plum, sweet and strong in the mouth.*

The description is perhaps overdone. But it was Spain in July. Bougainvillea petals carpeted the walkways and the sangria freely flowed. The greater truth is that, overwrought or not, the description mirrored my affection, and I had admired that chancel window my whole life. As a child, I would sometimes arrive early to church just to stare into it as the sun rose and filled it with light.

The description became a paragraph and then a passage in my first book. Then, a year or so after it was published, I received an email from Valerie O’Hara, whose book club had read the book. Of all the passages she had read, Valerie was





Sonja Livingston

The chancel window at  
Corpus Christi Church in Rochester, N.Y.

most moved by my description of the stained glass. It turns out that Corpus Christi's windows were produced by her family's stained glass studio 100 years earlier. Valerie, too, was a glass artist who now ran the family business, and she was delighted to read how much her family's work could matter.

•••

More celebrated panels of stained glass than Corpus Christi's chancel window certainly exist, and I have been lucky enough to see some of them for myself. I have wandered wide-eyed through cathedrals in Paris and Rome, bowed my head in Celtic abbeys, visited ancient Mediterranean sanctuaries and sat in an Eastern European church so resplendent I felt ensconced in a rare and glittering box.

Closer to home, western New York churches showcase creations by European masters as well as pearlescent panels of Tiffany glass. Just a few hours downstate, Union Church in Pocantico Hills features a series of stained glass panels by Chagall and a rose window by Matisse. Compared to Chartres Cathedral's high-flung treasures and the feast of color that is a Chagall, my favorite church window is rather ordinary—but even the most ordinary examples of beauty offer a bridge to the divine. I have never looked into Corpus Christi's window and not felt closer to God.

Designed to rise above the niches and scrollwork of the high altar, the window is a luminous wash of greens and blues joined by jewel tones and flame-tipped slants of scarlet and gold. A host of angels crowd the panel's edges, while a concentration of blue suggests the Holy Mother's robe, but the window's subject otherwise takes a back seat to the interplay of color and light.

The transept windows clearly depict the Immaculate Conception and the Resurrection, but the chancel window, which is centered on the Nativity, is looser in form and nearly abstract. Close up, the figures are better defined, and the tableau more obviously illustrates the birth of Christ; shepherds lower their heads and the Magi bend forward with their gifts. But from the pews, the effect is deeply felt; and, more than anything, the window evokes upward movement and the beating of wings.

•••

Valerie's email about the window took me by surprise. I'd written about the color and shape and even the imagined taste of the glass, but until Valerie reached out, I never considered where the windows came from, who sketched the designs, painted the faces onto the saints, and painstakingly cut and fitted the glass. I tried to picture

# How can a colored window so greatly affect a person's experience at church?

all the people who have looked into that window during weddings and funerals, baptisms and *quinceañeras*, and every single Sunday at Mass. I thought about my own particular window, of course, but of others as well. From medieval cathedrals to rustic chapels—most of us agree that stained glass is lovely and can elevate our experience at church. But how often do we consider the men and women who created these uplifting works of art? Looking into the history and origins of my favorite window helped me to appreciate it on another level.

Commissioned in the first decade of the 20th century, the window is one of 24 panels of stained glass planned for Rochester's 14th Catholic church. Corpus Christi was incorporated in 1888 to accommodate the state's booming western population and soon outgrew the small brick building in which it began. It took decades to raise the funds needed to break ground on a larger church; and when it was finally built and blessed by Bishop McQuaid in 1903, the envisioned windows were not yet in place. This was not unusual. Because stained glass is time-consuming and costly to create, patrons are usually required. Chartres had Louis IX and Blanche of Castile. Union Church downstate had the Rockefellers. Corpus Christi had the local carriage maker Joseph Cunningham.

Mr. Cunningham's commission of the church's most prominent window was one of the few planned windows to be installed. The nave was outfitted with amber-tinted "placeholder" glass to be replaced with original designs once other patrons emerged. But new patrons never emerged. The Depression struck, followed by war and suburban flight. Donations dried up, as did attendance. One hundred and twenty years later, the plain amber windows have become permanent fixtures. This is not as unfortunate as it sounds. The nature of stained glass renders even



Sonja Livingston

Scale drawings of stained glass windows designed by Pike Stained Glass Studios in Rochester, N.Y.

the humblest of panels grand. The placeholder windows transform summer's glare and infuse upstate winters with warmth, making every hour a golden hour at church.

In closing her email, Valerie invited me to tour her family's stained glass studio. More than a decade later, I finally took her up on the offer.

•••

One of the first images you see when you walk into Pike Stained Glass Studios in Rochester is a photograph of a young Valerie O'Hara kneeling in an angelic white robe. The stained-glass rendering of Valerie's heavenly likeness undoubtedly illuminates the window of a nearby church. Pike has always been a family business, which meant family and friends took turns posing for the photographs used as models for the full-sized drawings that would become patterns for the cutting and assembly of glass.

Valerie tells me the details of the studio's history as she gives me a tour. After apprenticing with William Comfort Tiffany in New York, William Pike, the company's founder, began his Rochester studio in 1908. As a teenager, Mr. Pike's nephew James O'Hara spent summers working with him. After completing advanced degrees in New York, Mr. O'Hara and a fellow artist, Norma Lee, who was also his wife, moved upstate to work at the company, eventually as-



Right: Stained glass windows designed by three generations at Pike Stained Glass Studios. Top to bottom: Blessed Sacrament Church, Rochester, N.Y., ca. 1912 (first generation: William Pike et al); Our Lady of Czestochowa Church, North Tonawanda, N.Y., ca. 1973 (second generation: James O'Hara, designer); Sisters of St. Joseph Chapel, Pittsford, N.Y., 2003 (third generation: Valerie O'Hara, designer)



suming leadership.

Like her father, Valerie O'Hara came to the art young, working in the studio after school, beginning at age 12. By the time she graduated from the School for American Crafts at the Rochester Institute of Technology and began at Pike full-time, she had already been an apprentice for half her life. In 1987, Valerie bought the business from her parents and continues their tradition today.

The family's windows adorn buildings throughout western and central New York. With more than 850 original designs by three generations of artists, their work is part of the region's fabric. Most of their windows are found in churches, but people can encounter their colorful designs while cramming for exams in local libraries, attending soirees in area mansions or stealing a moment's peace in the nondenominational chapel at Cornell University.

After viewing the gallery of images in the entryway, we

Photos courtesy of Pike Stained Glass Studios



# I never considered who sketched the designs, painted the faces onto the saints, and painstakingly cut and fitted the glass.

pause at a table spread with sketches from the past century. I am struck by the magnitude and variety of the projects, their exquisite patterns, rich color and attention to detail. Styles range from Gothic and medieval to modern and Art Nouveau. Some projects require Valerie to blend the traditional with the contemporary, combining the unique story of a person or a place with classic imagery and design.

A commission for Rochester's St. Stanislaus Parish, for instance, pairs the likeness of a 21st-century firefighter lost in the line of duty (19-year-old Tomasz Kaczowka) with the third-century St. Florian, who watches over the young man as he battles the flames. A window for St. James Episcopal Church in the Finger Lakes town of Hammondsport depicts scenes of local significance, like vineyards and Keuka Lake, and even a vintage Glenn Curtiss biplane piloted by the donor's husband.

The award-winning artist leads me through a great bank of colored glass and shows me the space where each piece of glass is selected for color, then cut. We visit worktables where pieces are smoothed and painted before being assembled and slotted into lead strips, soldered at the joints and sealed. Each panel can take months to complete. The work is meticulous and time-consuming, but while designs are always adapting to changing aesthetics and purpose, the tools remain relatively simple. Apart from the use of electricity-powered soldering irons and a steel wheel cutter, the process for creating stained glass windows has not changed much in 1,000 years.

•••

It is impossible to pinpoint the art form's beginning. Stained glass windows are believed to have been inspired by the techniques of jewelry making, cloisonné and mosaics. Colored glass was produced and used for ornamentation throughout the ancient world. Some early Christians even arranged sheets of thinly sliced alabaster and travertine into wooden frames as a sort of precursor to stained glass in their churches. Archaeological evidence points to colored glass windows in seventh-century British monasteries, but the technique for fitting pieces of glass together with lead strips—as we know stained glass today—was not refined until the ninth century. Once it began, the medium flourished and peaked in the Middle Ages alongside the building of magnificent ecclesiastical sites. A glassworkers' guild was formed in London as early as 1328. Known as The Worshipful Company of Glaziers and Painters of Glass, their motto was *Lucem Tuam Da Nobis Deus*, Latin for *O God, Give Us Your Light*.

Then, as now, stained glass windows required mastery in both artistic and technical realms. Besides enhancing the space into which it is set, a window must weather the

elements, bear its own weight and fit seamlessly into the architecture. As Valerie guides me through her downtown studio, she speaks as an artist, but also as a draftsman, glazier, cutter and engineer. In the early days, Pike employed different people in such specialty roles. These days, Valerie manages it all.

When the tour is over, I linger near an old window. Valerie has been more than generous, so I limit myself to one final question as I prepare to leave: "Why is stained glass so special?" I say. "How can a colored window so greatly affect a person's experience at church?"

For the entire tour, Valerie has been knowledgeable but unassuming, as if she does not take for granted the ability of her work to uplift the human heart.

"Stained glass is the only medium," she says, "that relies on transmitted, instead of reflected, light."

I think of Corpus Christi's chancel window. Fixed into its sandstone well for more than a century, it is nonetheless dynamic. Like the sky itself, color and form are linked to the movement of the sun and shift and deepen as the glass channels light. Even when a panel is clearly pictorial, stained glass relies on fragmentation and the transmutability of light and is, on some level, always moving and abstract. It's an artful assemblage of colors and shapes, yes, but much more than the sum of its parts. In this way, a stained glass window functions more like a song or poem in its ability to move and move us as it transcends the material world.

•••

One summer in the 1980s, a man came walking through my family's city neighborhood. Ours was a dead-end street, compact and diverse. The houses were modest, but a handful contained panels of stained glass in the dining rooms. The leaded windows were small but fitted with a

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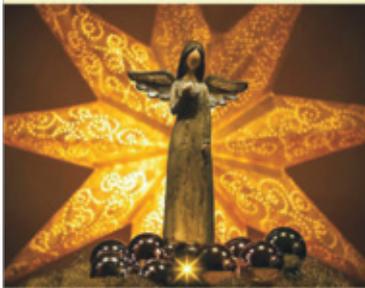
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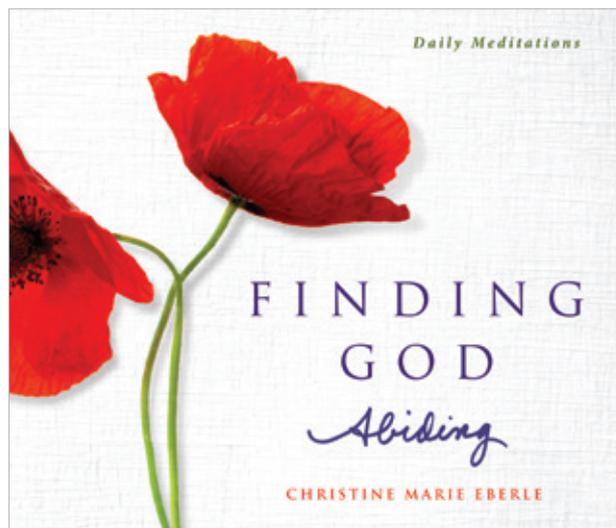
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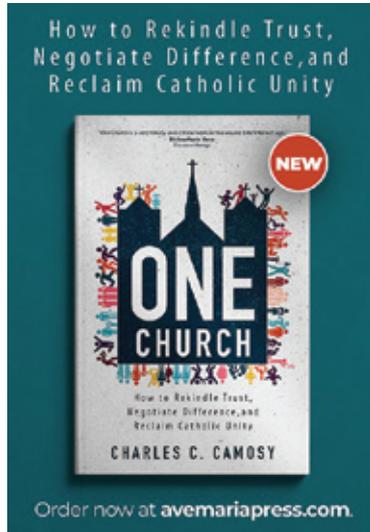


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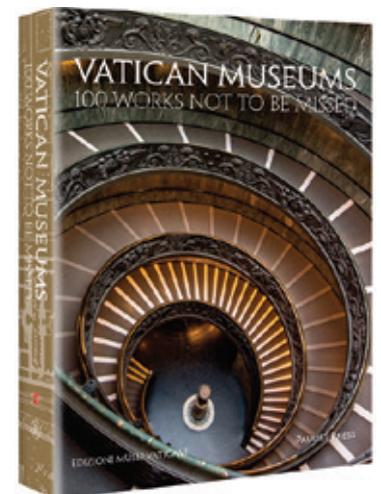
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checkerboard pattern of tinted glass that obscured the view of porches and telephone poles while ornamenting the otherwise plain rooms.

We kids watched the man walk door to door. Most strangers were Jehovah's Witnesses or men sent to collect the rent on household items our mothers leased, but this man did not discuss heaven or badger my mother for a payment on our color TV. Instead, he eyed the small window and offered her a few hundred dollars.

Most anyone lucky enough to have a panel sold it. The neighborhood was falling apart. People could hardly pay their electrical bill; what good was a bit of colored glass in the face of that? But my mother—who had sold my brother's saxophone to buy Christmas gifts one year and bartered our dining room furniture as payment to the neighbor who had painted our house—said no. As much as she was willing to part with things and was always in need of money, my mother regularly chose beauty over practicality (often to our dismay). She sent the man packing. She might not have anything in her wallet but her bit of beauty was intact.

As with other elements of traditional worship, some view stained glass as fussy and old-fashioned. Given the serious financial, social and operational problems facing many church communities, focusing on aesthetically pleasing objects might seem frivolous and out of touch. At the same time, given that spiritually inclined Americans seem to favor a walk in the woods over Sunday Mass, it is important to remember the natural human inclination toward beauty and light. No matter our religious affiliation, we hunger for pathways that exalt our spirits and transport us to something larger than ourselves. The countless artists, patrons and congregations who sacrificed to build such awe-inspiring and luminous portals between the world as we know it and the world that lies beyond, did so to encourage and sustain our experience of the divine.

Like the bit of colored glass my mother refused to sell, Corpus Christi's chancel window is my portion of beauty, worth more than its worldly value. It is my touchstone. It reminds me of the necessity of tending not only the body but the spirit, even and especially when times are tough. Our spirits are fed by many things—peals of unexpected laughter, bouts of wild generosity, the profound stillness of a winter night—but also by the light of the sun filtering through a panel of blue and green glass.

Sonja Livingston describes in her latest book, *The Virgin of Prince Street: Expeditions Into Devotion, a series of journeys that explore tradition within a swiftly changing personal and religious landscape. She divides her time between Rochester, N.Y., and Richmond, Va., where she is an associate professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University.*



Sonja Livingston

Glass samples at Pike Stained Glass Studios in Rochester, N.Y. Inset: The stained glass artist Valerie O'Hara as a child. Family and friends often took turns posing for the photographs used as models for the glass images.

# AMERICA'S OWN STAINED GLASS

## The rich history of the LaFarge Windows

By Nicholas D. Sawicki

It is not often that you find stained glass on the 11th floor of a mid-century skyscraper in Midtown Manhattan.

The “LaFarge Windows,” housed in the offices of America Media, have little to do with the noted 19th-century artisan John LaFarge, but rather serve as a monument to the extraordinary life of his son, John LaFarge, S.J. A champion of civil rights, proponent of international peace, brilliant critic of the arts, a Harvard dandy turned Jesuit country priest turned editor, LaFarge junior spent 37 years on the staff of **America**—serving as the fifth editor in chief from 1944 to 1948.

When Father LaFarge died in 1963, the editor in chief at the time, Thurston N. Davis, S.J., commissioned the Rambusch Company to create these windows as a tribute to the late Jesuit. (It should be noted that Father LaFarge was chaplain to the St. Ansgar’s League, established by the Rambushes to support the Catholic Church in Scandinavia). The windows were installed in the chapel of America House at 106 West 56th Street in 1964.

When **America** sold its longtime headquarters on 56th Street in 2017, the Rambusch company came once more—**America** does not leave an editor behind. Viggo Rambusch, who had created the windows in 1964, returned with his sons to remove, restore and reinstall the windows in **America**’s new headquarters at 1212 Avenue of the Americas. For the first time in their long history, the south-facing windows dedicated to Father LaFarge glitized and gleamed as the sunlight passed through them—a privilege denied by the back alleys they faced at 56th Street.

The windows themselves draw on older techniques, in which each pane is individually crafted to have a watery effect. And the medallions throughout the windows tell the story of John LaFarge: a sunburst for the Society of Jesus; St. Ansgar for his personal relationship to the church in Scandinavia; the coats of arms of Harvard and the Univer-





The LaFarge Windows at America Media's current headquarters on the Avenue of the Americas in New York City



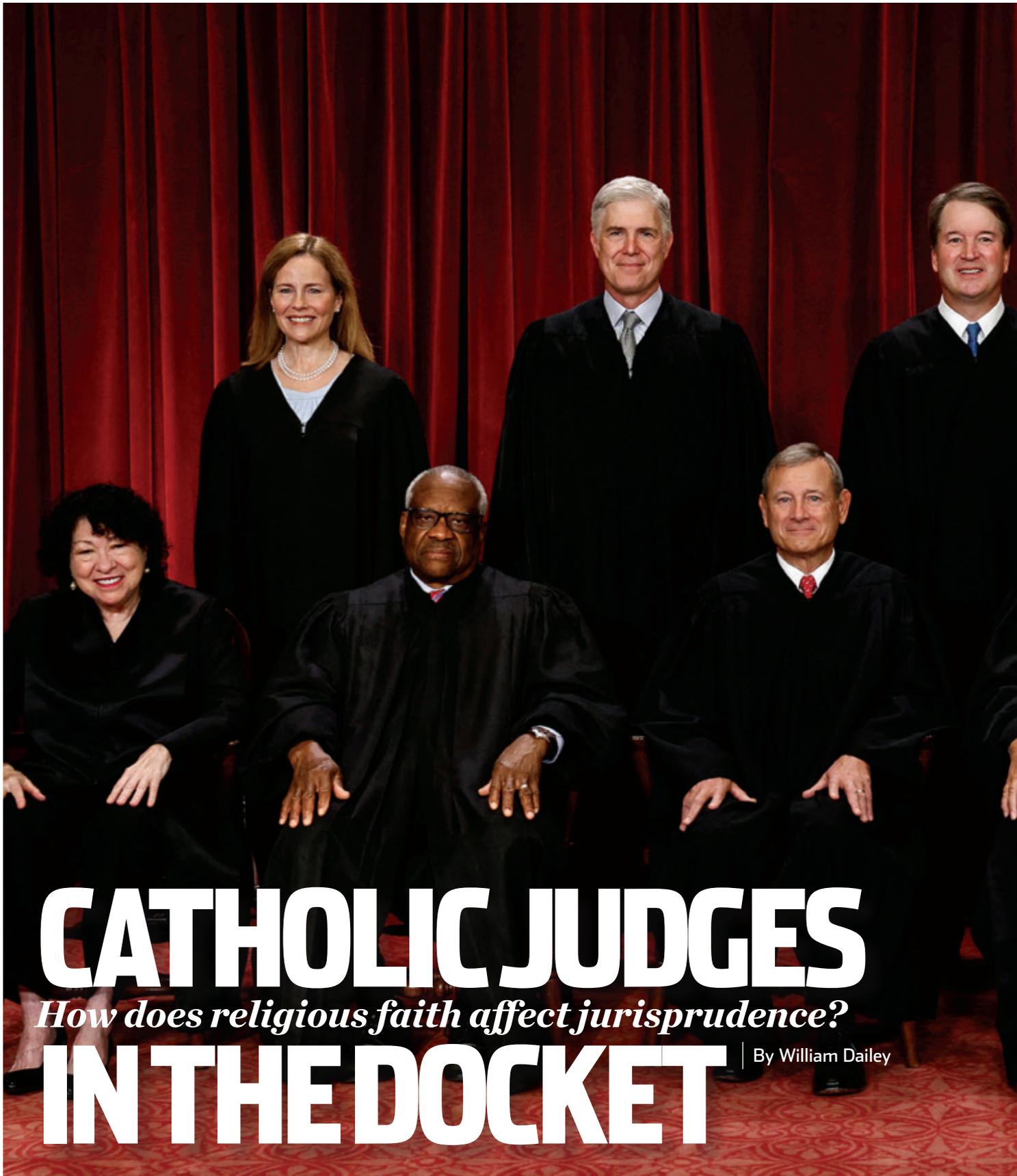
sity of Innsbruck, both instrumental in Father LaFarge's education; the coat of arms of the State of Maryland, where Father LaFarge spent years ministering to poor Black communities; symbols from the international peace and ecumenical movements; homages to Father LaFarge's robust literary output; and the coat of arms of John XXIII, the last pope Father LaFarge served. (The damaged original of the coat of arms was replaced; the author has it in his study—a treasured gift from the Rambusches.)

When the windows were being moved and reinstalled, Matt Malone, S.J., *America's* 14th editor in chief, made a request to add two new medallions. The first was of the Lincoln Memorial, with the words "I have a dream." Not only was Father LaFarge a proponent of civil rights, but the March on Washington was the subject of his last "in the field" report for *America* before his death. The second addition depicts Father LaFarge's tombstone—including the inscription taken verbatim from its site in Hyde Park, N.Y.

Stained glass tells a story—in both its creation and the narrative it sets out to tell. The LaFarge Windows are a unique narrative housed in the new headquarters of this review.

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Nicholas D. Sawicki is associate director of development for the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and a frequent contributor to *America*.



# CATHOLIC JUDGES

*How does religious faith affect jurisprudence?*

# IN THE DOCKET

By William Dailey

U.S. Supreme Court justices pose for their group portrait in Washington on Oct. 7, 2022. Seated, from left, are Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Clarence Thomas, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., and Justices Samuel A. Alito Jr. and Elena Kagan. Standing, from left, are Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Neil M. Gorsuch, Brett M. Kavanaugh and Ketanji Brown Jackson.



CNS photo/Evelyn Hockstein, Reuters

Eight of the last nine Republican nominees appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court have Catholic backgrounds. So too does one recent Democratic nominee, Justice Sonia Sotomayor. That has led to a high court with the striking demographic of six justices raised Catholic (Clarence Thomas became Catholic as an adult), one with a Jewish background and now another raised Protestant, Justice Ketanji Brown-Jackson.

In the not too distant past, observers occasionally spoke of the “Catholic seat” and the “Jewish seat” on the court, so the triumph of both groups in overcoming prejudice has led to a couple of crowded seats. Until Justice Breyer’s retirement, the court had no justices who were raised as Protestants, only Catholics and Jews. Not everyone is happy with this story of successful integration of two immigrant communities into America’s legal elite. Hence the recent headlines in *The New York Times* (“Too Much Church in the State”), *The New Yorker* (“The Sins of the High Court’s Supreme Catholics”) and *The Associated Press* (“Anti-Roe Justices a part of Catholicism’s Conservative Wing”).

It is certainly striking that there is something like a Catholic “supermajority” on the court, and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* has, of course, led to an energetic discussion of this reality. It raises the question whether and to what extent the faith commitments of the justices matter for their behavior on the court. The answer to that is complicated but is, in each instance, best summed up as “for the most part, not much.”

### **A Supermajority?**

There are some important qualifications to this that I must hasten to add. As a Catholic and a priest, I hope and believe that my faith—and that of my fellow Catholics—matters a great deal to the enthusiasm and integrity with which I take up my work and the values I bring to it as a neighbor and citizen.

One way into the complexity of the matter is to consider why I wrote, “something like a Catholic supermajority on the court.” Of the seven justices with Catholic backgrounds, two are not



# The faith of Catholic judges should matter to them to the extent it inspires them to serve with integrity and zeal.

practicing Catholics—Justice Sotomayor and Justice Gorsuch. While each was raised in the Catholic faith, Justice Sotomayor told *The Washington Post* that she is “maybe not traditionally religious,” and Justice Gorsuch attends an Episcopal parish. So in the *Dobbs* case that overturned *Roe*, four of the five justices in the majority are practicing Catholics, while Chief Justice Roberts declined to go as far as the majority in upholding the Mississippi law, and Justice Sotomayor dissented.

Like any important social phenomenon, the preponderance of Catholics on the court does not admit of a single, simple explanation. Take Justice Sotomayor’s appointment. Surely it was important to President Obama that he was able to appoint the first Hispanic justice to the court. In doing so, he was not seeking to affirm (or deny) Catholic theology but to recognize an important demographic reality of 21st-century America and to build a court more reflective of this. In turn, Justice Sotomayor reflects a broader trend: American Catholics—not unlike the American Jewish community—has historically emphasized legal education as a path to mainstream acceptance.

While this is an important dimension of the story, so too is the 50-year existence of *Roe v. Wade* as a controversial centerpiece of American law and politics. In my lifetime (I was born in 1972, the year *Roe* was argued), the Catholic Church in the United States went from being largely associated with the Democratic Party of labor unions, urban immigrant communities and John F. Kennedy to having a closer connection with the Republican Party and its opposition to legalized abortion.

During that time, the parties became more ideologically pure at the national level, such that it has become difficult to imagine a pro-choice Republican presidential candidate or a pro-life Democratic one. Presidential candidates wanting to follow through on pledges to appoint justices likely to repeal *Roe v. Wade* were apt to turn to candidates with Catholic backgrounds, who happened to be readily available. Application of Occam’s razor suggests that this simplest explanation has at least some important role in the story.

## A Good Catholic and a Good Judge

Where have these developments brought us? The picture is more complicated than the headlines I noted at the outset might suggest. Commentators, for instance, have noted that Justice Gorsuch studied at Oxford University under the Catholic natural law theorist John Finnis, but they have less frequently noted that he wrote the majority opinion in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which held that gay or transgender employees enjoy protection as such under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and from which Justices Alito, Thomas and Kavanaugh dissented.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, meanwhile, famously changed his vote from overturning *Roe v. Wade* in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* to upholding it. At the same time, Justice Kennedy voted in high-profile death penalty cases like *Kennedy v. Louisiana* (barring the death penalty for child rape) to limit the application of the death penalty under the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition against cruel and unusual punishments, again separating him from fellow Catholics on the court.

We might ask which justices, on which occasions, were being Catholic justices and which were just being good or bad justices? How can one tell? On this very issue of the death penalty, just two years ago **America** ran a nuanced and provocative essay (“Catholic Judges and the Death Penalty,” February 2021) wondering how Catholic witness and Catholic jurisprudence might coincide. That essay, in turn, hearkened back to the now well-known treatment of the same topic by now-Justice Amy Coney Barrett (“Catholic Judges in Capital Cases,” *Marquette Law Review*, 1998).

In an article in *The Marquette Law Review* in 1998, written with John Garvey, the recently retired

CATHOLIC JUDGES

An American flag is visible in the top left corner, and classical architectural elements like columns and a pediment are visible in the background. The text is overlaid on a white rectangular area.

president of The Catholic University of America and a former University of Notre Dame Law professor, she concluded that a judge being faithful to Catholic teaching on the death penalty would in some circumstances have to recuse herself from a case rather than formally cooperate in imposing the death penalty or, alternatively, would be required to ignore the law in favor of her substantive view that the death penalty is unjust.

There are (at least) two ways to think about how to answer the questions raised here. First, what constitutes being a good judge in our system from the point of view of American law and tradition? Second, what constitutes being a good judge from a Catholic perspective? It may surprise readers to learn that in neither instance is there a definitive answer or, at least, a definitive answer that is both comprehensive and generally acknowledged.

Article III of the U.S. Constitution lays out “the judicial power” in our system, but it does not tell us much about how judges are to exercise that power. Should they be “originalists” or “living constitutionalists” or “living originalists”? The civil law tradition includes within it a constant conversation about how judges are supposed to do their job of interpreting the law and deciding cases in accord with those interpretations.

The Catholic tradition, meanwhile, following St. Thomas Aquinas, traditionally understands human law as belonging in one of four basic categories of law: the eternal, the divine, the natural and the human. Eternal law deals with what we might call the laws emerging from God’s providential plan for creation, including physics and chemistry but also the conditions of human flourishing and salvation; divine law is concerned with those things we need to know for salvation but cannot attain by reason alone, requiring divine revelation; and natural law deals with the rational creature’s participation in the eternal law. The lynchpin of this participation is the conscience, which St. John Henry Newman speaks of as God’s “messenger” in us.

Human law, in turn, is derived from the eternal, divine and natural law—but not identical with it. Not every precept of morality is properly codified in the positive human law. Because of this last fact, the problem arises of how to distinguish between the human law and the moral law, and the obligations Catholics have when undertaking an official role in human legal

systems, American or otherwise.

Note that Catholic legal theory does not mandate any particular form of government but calls for the state “to defend and promote the common good.” The common good was defined at the Second Vatican Council in the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.” We may more easily intuit the forms of oppression that pose obstacles to that fulfillment than we can look to the Catholic tradition for guidance on whether legislatures should be bicameral or unicameral, or whether there should be an electoral college.

### **Catholic Judges and the Law**

Within the limits of the secular American legal tradition, there is a breadth of opinion about how to interpret and apply the law, and whether and to what extent a judge’s own view of morality might affect her opinion. In *Kennedy v. Louisiana*, referred to above, Justice Kennedy wrote (with the concurrence of non-Catholic justices) that the court relied, in part, on its own “independent judgment” as to “the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society” in barring the death penalty for child rape.

Justice Alito, joined by fellow Catholic justices Scalia, Thomas and Roberts, wrote in dissent that the state legislators’ contrary judgment had not been shown to violate either the original meaning of the Eighth Amendment or subsequent precedents. None of the justices in the majority or dissent made reference to Catholic social teaching on the death penalty and, of course, none would be expected to. Rather, one might think they were forbidden from doing so under a commitment to the First Amendment’s barring of the establishment of religion.

I take no position here as a lawyer on whether the *Kennedy* decision was rightly decided as a matter of U.S. constitutional law. It plainly reached a result that conforms with the Catholic Church’s own evolving teaching opposing the death penalty, rooted in St. John Paul II’s “The Gospel of Life” and continuing through Pope Francis’ revision of the Catechism of the Catholic Church declaring the death penalty “inadmissible.” I am happy to celebrate that as a Catholic. So long as each justice in the case was undertaking his or her



# CATHOLIC JUDGES IN THE DOCKET

## **Our judicial system is designed to give judges the best chance at doing their jobs free from influence or bias. But those judges are appointed by politicians who are elected.**

duty with utmost care, no justice may be said to have been doing better as a Catholic than another justice in the case. Catholic teaching does not dictate the interpretation of legal texts and precedents, even where Catholic teaching does instruct as to the just outcome of a case, and Catholic jurists are permitted to distinguish between the correct answer to a legal question and the correct answer to a moral question.

I was fortunate to serve as a law clerk to Judge Diarmuid F. O'Scannlain of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. He once gave a keynote address at the University of St. Thomas Law School, in which he captured the matter well:

Let us assume for the sake of argument that a Catholic feels passionately about the rights of the unborn or of immigrants, and that our nation's laws are unjust to both. There are many commendable jobs a person might pursue in order to vindicate those positions. But I respectfully suggest that the job of federal circuit judge is not high on the list. A person wanting the sort of job that can improve the justice of our laws ought to be running for office, writing for a think tank, or working in some other sort of advocacy role. Accepting a commission to the federal bench means agreeing to enforce the laws as they are, not as one would have them be.

Judge O'Scannlain was right to distinguish the role of the judge from the roles of many others in our system, and

the extent to which the moral views of individuals will be more or less relevant to their work in those various roles. I think Judge O'Scannlain would agree that it is not always so simple. I noted earlier that Occam's razor suggests the Catholic faith (as well as its adherents' public affiliation with the G.O.P. legal community) was relevant to the presidents who appointed the justices who ultimately voted to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Is that to suggest that those justices failed in their duty, as I have laid it out, to separate their Catholic commitments from their judicial duty? I think not.

First, it must be noted that those justices did not read any Catholic principle into the Constitution. The decision permits legalized abortion in any or all states. Also, we would do well to recognize that judges are also human, and the law is very often debatable and in that sense indeterminate. Judges must sometimes make determinations even where the law is unclear, and it would be naïve to suggest that in some cases where the law is contestable and indeed hotly contested, their own larger commitments and world view will not enter into how they weigh the factors at issue in any given case.

Our judicial system, by having judges appointed rather than elected and serving life tenure subject only to (rare) impeachment for bad behavior, is designed to give judges the best chance at doing their jobs free from influence or bias. But those judges are appointed by politicians who are elected. We may, then, say that the judiciary is a less political branch, but still insist that it is a political branch of our democracy.

We should guard against the presumption that judges we disagree with in such a system are acting in bad faith, or on the basis of faith, and recognize instead that we want human beings to settle our most fundamental and vexing legal issues, even despite our human fallibility and the certainty that sometimes we will disagree deeply about the right outcome in vital cases. This will be true whether a judge is Catholic or atheist, Jewish or Hindu. The faith of Catholic judges should matter to them to the extent it inspires them to serve with integrity and zeal. We can and should ask no more.

---

*William Dailey, C.S.C., is a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross. He serves as the St. Thomas More Fellow of the de Nicola Center for Ethics & Culture at the University of Notre Dame.*

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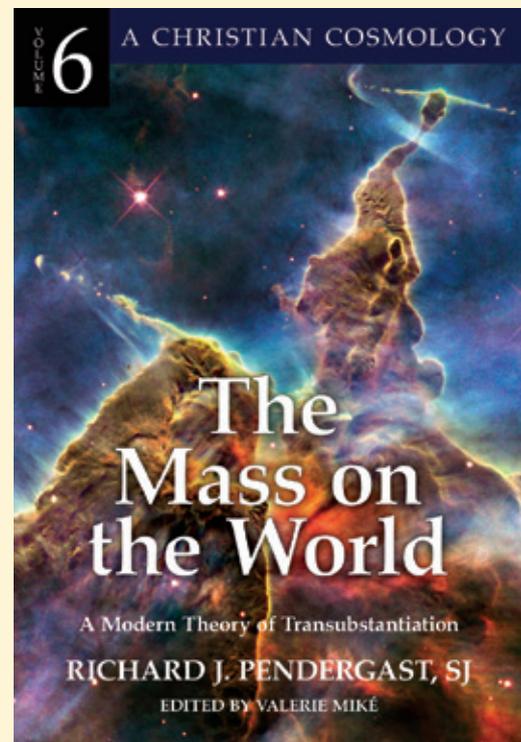
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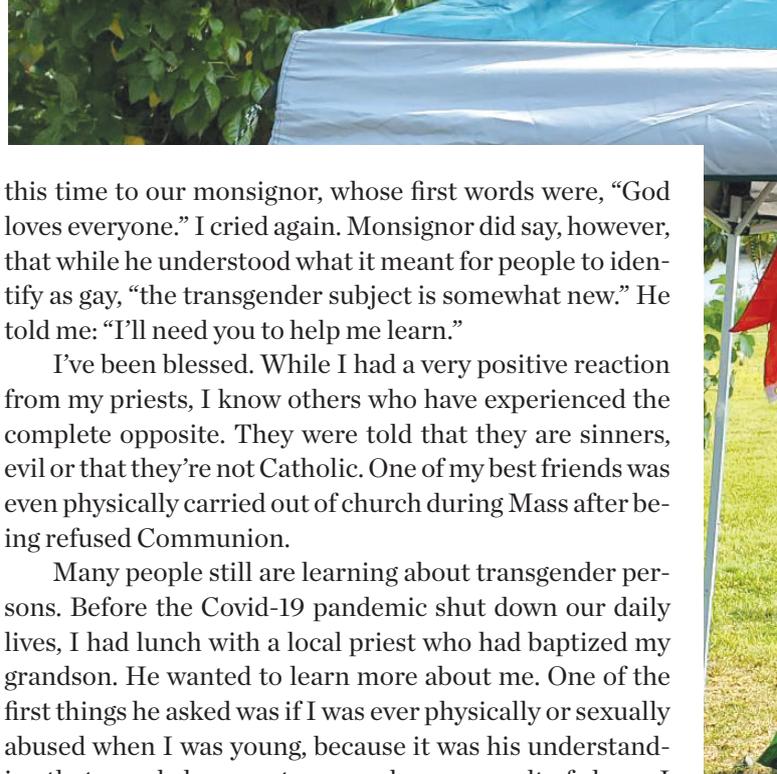
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# ‘God Loves Everyone’

## What I want the church to know about my life as a transgender Catholic woman

By Christine Zuba

About eight years ago, after 29 years of marriage to my wife and two beautiful children, I walked into confession with something to discuss.

For as long as I could remember, since about the age of 3 or 4, I knew that I was different. As a child, for years I would go to bed praying that I would wake up as a girl. This is a story commonly echoed by many transgender people like myself.

I am a lifelong Catholic. As part of my transition, I decided to speak to a priest during the sacrament of reconciliation. I obviously knew what our church taught with respect to being gay. At that point, however, the church was still silent regarding transgender persons.

My faith has always been strong. I’ll never claim to be the perfect Catholic; I do make mistakes. Occasionally (but not often), I miss a Sunday Mass, and I’ve been known to utter a bad word once in a while (especially during Philadelphia Eagles football games). I do my best to be a good person, though, trying to live each day as if it may be my last.

I was, and still am, very confident in my relationship with my God. I knew I would be the same person walking out of the confessional as walking in, no matter what some might say or claim about me. While my “outside” was changing, everything else—my heart, my mind, my soul and my faith—remained unchanged.

When I told our associate pastor I was transgender, the conversation immediately diverted to sex. “Excuse me, Father,” I remember saying, “this has nothing at all to do with sex; this has to do with who I am. You can throw me out if you want, but if you do, I’m coming right back. This is my church too.” Father said he was not planning to do that. After a little more discussion, he said, “Let’s together say a prayer to our Blessed Mother to help guide you on your journey.” I was crying as I left confession.

About a month later, I returned to confession again,

this time to our monsignor, whose first words were, “God loves everyone.” I cried again. Monsignor did say, however, that while he understood what it meant for people to identify as gay, “the transgender subject is somewhat new.” He told me: “I’ll need you to help me learn.”

I’ve been blessed. While I had a very positive reaction from my priests, I know others who have experienced the complete opposite. They were told that they are sinners, evil or that they’re not Catholic. One of my best friends was even physically carried out of church during Mass after being refused Communion.

Many people still are learning about transgender persons. Before the Covid-19 pandemic shut down our daily lives, I had lunch with a local priest who had baptized my grandson. He wanted to learn more about me. One of the first things he asked was if I was ever physically or sexually abused when I was young, because it was his understanding that people become transgender as a result of abuse. I have never been abused.

About a year after my transition, our monsignor asked if I would be interested in becoming an extraordinary minister of holy Communion. Shortly thereafter we also started an L.G.B.T.Q.+ ministry in our parish.

It was through this ministry that I became aware of other, similar ministries across New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York. The Covid-19 pandemic introduced the world to Zoom, and this technology has allowed many people across the country and the world to become acquainted and to share stories. Through Zoom, I’ve participated in numerous parish L.G.B.T.Q.+ ministries as well as informational sessions with priests, religious and diocesan school administrators to help them better understand and accompany transgender adults, youth and children. I’ve met many loving, kind, wonderful L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics and allies.

About four years ago, I was invited (along with 17 gay and lesbian Catholics, supportive clergy, and parents) to dinner with Cardinal Joseph Tobin at his residence in Newark, N.J. It was a beautiful and amazing evening. An introductory reception preceded a beautiful dinner and conversation, after which Cardinal Tobin sat back and asked each of us, “How can I help you?”

I often wonder, however, what it is about me and people like me that causes so much fear among my fellow Catholics. Why am I and the transgender community selectively targeted by some as a threat to the family and the world. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I understand our faith says that “God made them male and female.” But God made a whole lot more, and every-



The author, left, with her friend Fran McGarry, at South Jersey Pride in the Park, in Cherry Hill, N.J.

thing in between. Our world, science, technology, even our church, has changed over time. Today's science recognizes that something can happen between the body and mind, causing a misalignment between the two. I don't often quote science, though. I just know that "I am," that God made me this way, and that God made me this way for a reason.

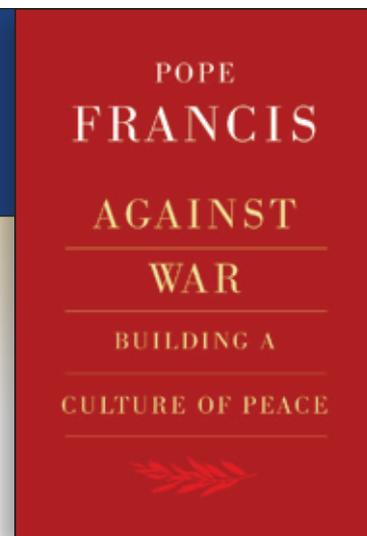
I don't wake up in the morning thinking about being transgender. Our lives are no different than anyone else's. We live, we work, we pray. We have families.

We ask simply to be accepted and to be a part of our church, no better or worse than divorced Catholics, or Catholics who may not strictly follow other church teachings.

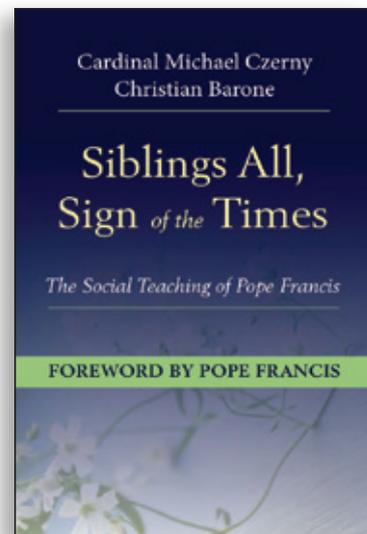
Pope Francis has spoken out for L.G.B.T. Catholics, saying that God "does not disown any of his children." He is reported to have told Juan Carlos Cruz, a sexual abuse survivor and a gay Catholic man, that "God made you this way and loves you this way," in reference to his identity. I pray that someday our church will take this to heart and that this message will reach trans Catholics, too.

Transgender persons are not an ideology. We are not a threat. All of us are a part of God's great universe, made in the image and likeness of God, a God who is neither male nor female.

*Christine Zuba is a transgender Catholic woman from Blackwood, N.J., and a member of Saints Peter & Paul Parish in Turnersville, N.J. She is chair of the Transgender Ministry of Fortunate Families. This article has been adapted from an essay published on outreach.faith.*



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# DISCOVERING THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

I've visited over 100 churches across the globe. Here's what I've learned.

By Jill Rice



On the final day of World Youth Day in 2016, after a night spent on the colder-than-expected ground in a field a few miles outside Krakow, Poland, I and three million of my closest friends from around the world attended Mass celebrated by Pope Francis. The prayers of the Mass were in Latin, which made my future-classics-major heart happy, but the pope spoke his homily in Italian. A woman behind us was translating what the pope was saying to her companions in Spanish.

That was the first time that the universality of the Catholic Church really hit me. Here we were—the Australians who camped out in front of us, the Danes we had met the day before, the translating Spaniards and, of course, we the Americans—all hearing the same message, all in the same place for the same reason.

In international settings like this, it is easy to recognize our global church, but my parents have always tried to help me appreciate the universality of our church wherever I am. When we go on vacation, it's my dad's job to find the local brewery and my mom's job to find the local Mass times. Which one is more important depends on whom you ask. But by now our family has been to approximately 50 churches across 22 states, and it is always fascinating to note the ways in which the core of the experience is the same, but small differences give the parish local character. There was the church with a solid glass, engraved crucifix hanging from the ceiling, or the one with a massive, centuries-old organ in the choir loft, or, most noticeable to us, the one set high on the hill, reachable only by 100 stone steps. (My mom loves to echo Mary Magdalene when the tabernacle isn't behind the main altar: "They have taken away the body of our Lord and

we know not where they put him!")

In my first semester of college, my English professor asked our class to go out and "live" New York City. How else would I experience it except through the lens of my faith? I embarked on a pilgrimage of sorts, though I wouldn't have called it that at the time: I decided to continue my family's tradition of seeking out the familiarity and innovation in Catholic churches. That semester, I visited 39 Catholic churches on the island of Manhattan.

In some, I simply prayed a decade of the rosary; in others I attended Mass. That semester, my Saturday nights were spent on Google Maps, figuring out the best route to get from my first to my eighth church on any given Sunday. Many are only open during or around Mass times, so I needed to time my trips precisely. (I largely succeeded, save for one Sunday when I was thwarted by thousands of runners and fans filing through my pre-planned route for the New York City Marathon.)

Even on a 23-square-mile island, on just a single day, I was able to experience how massive, how universal, how *katholikos* the Catholic Church is. There is great comfort in knowing that in each church there were people worshipping the same God, hearing the same Gospel, striving to live out the two greatest commandments.

Gaining a greater appreciation for this universality has also helped me in my personal faith journey. I moved from a semi-rural place to New York City five years ago, and while most of my political and religious views are in opposition to the average New Yorker, living among this diversity of life experiences and opinions has been a blessing. My journeys remind me that there are many more things that bring us



together than separate us, both among Catholics and among people of good will simply living in the world.

When we enter our churches with these similarities in mind, we are also more open to the stirrings of our heart. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, I returned to in-person Mass in New York in September 2020, and the priest processed up the aisle to “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow.” The tune is nice, but it had never made me cry before. But that day, it brought me back to the “normal” times, to those thousands of times I had sung in the midst of a congregation. As my tears flowed, the thought of the whole church united in song once more gave me hope that such events would one day be “normal” again.

There’s something magical about being able to go to Mass anywhere in the world and know, on some deep level, exactly what you will find. This summer, I spent two months in Germany. And as I stood, sat and knelt during Mass in the majestic Cologne Cathedral, I was amazed that I could understand most of what was going on during Mass. I could pick up a few words and phrases thanks to the German classes I was taking, but it was the motions of the priest and the order of the Mass itself that served as the most useful translation for my prayer.

And during that same trip, on the feast of Corpus Christi, I went to the Church of the Heart of Jesus. As I walked in, the choir was practicing for the upcoming Mass and singing “10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)” with lyrics in German and English. I was surprised to hear a song I recognized. At a time when my homesickness was acute, the sound of a familiar hymn once again brought me to tears. But I cried knowing that, even though I was thousands of miles from where I’d grown up, I was home.

Jill Rice is a Joseph A. O’Hare fellow at America Media.



# Restore and Build a Cemetery Ministry to Evangelize

The Diocese of Toledo has entered a 20-year agreement with the investment fund of CFCS Capital to transform its diocesan cemeteries. CFCS Capital offers a ministry and evangelization opportunity. With it, dioceses can reach people who might have never entered a Catholic church.

CFCS Capital accesses a dedicated pool of dollars to convert the business risks of this ministry into an annuity for the diocese. The annuity enables constant growth and ongoing ministry success.



**Bishop Daniel Thomas**  
Diocese of Toledo

*“Our partnership with the dynamic ministry of Catholic Funeral & Cemetery Services to serve our people during the critically important final stage of life is based in trust and pastoral care and I look forward to seeing our partnership progress in the coming years.”*



CATHOLIC FUNERAL  
& CEMETERY SERVICES

**CFCSMission.org**

# To Make of Hell a Heaven

By Phil Metres

*“For relief of the Prisoners in the several Gaols, and for the support of Mercer’s Hospital in Stephen’s-street, and of the Charitable Infirmary on the Inn’s Quay, on Monday the 12th of April, will be performed at the Musical Hall in Fishamble-street, Mr. Handel’s new Grand Oratorio, called the MESSIAH, in which the Gentlemen of the Choirs of both Cathedrals will assist, with some concertos on the Organ by Mr. Handel.”*

—newspaper notice, Dublin, 1742

*“To harmony like his, celestial power is given  
To exalt the soul from earth, and make of hell a heaven”*

—from a performance review, 1743



Each Christmas my dad would wrestle  
with the old reel-to-reel

as if it were angel, grapple  
its dusty mouth open

until the orchestra would stir,  
the chorus rise. I’d hear

Mom groan, *The Messiah, Again?*—  
its interminable

chorus of voices a Babel  
We could not knock down.

Like the old tower in Kildare,  
Conolly’s Folly, stone

by stone hauled by the hungry poor  
Irish mauled by the famine,

winter 1741.  
In the heart of Dublin

on Fishamble Street, the lovers  
of charity gathered,

some seven hundred souls, to hear  
Handel’s first Messiah—

at which a priest leaped from his seat,  
literally moved to speak—

*Woman, for this be all thy sins forgiven!*  
Freed hundreds from prison,

this song. *WONDERFUL. COUNSELOR.*  
*ALMIGHTY GOD. THE EVER-*

*LASTING FATHER*, my father  
sang, finding a river

deep beneath his heart now surging,  
the dam so overflowing

I felt the music sting my eyes.  
Without moving my mouth,

I prayed such light would curl inside  
our voices when, at last,

they flowed out.

---

*Phil Metres is professor of English and director of the Peace, Justice and Human Rights program at John Carroll University. His latest poetry collection is Shrapnel Maps.*

# Retirement Fund for Religious

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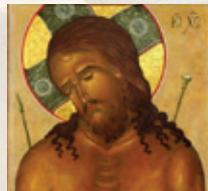
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# A Christmas Classic Born in Ukraine

By Jim McDermott

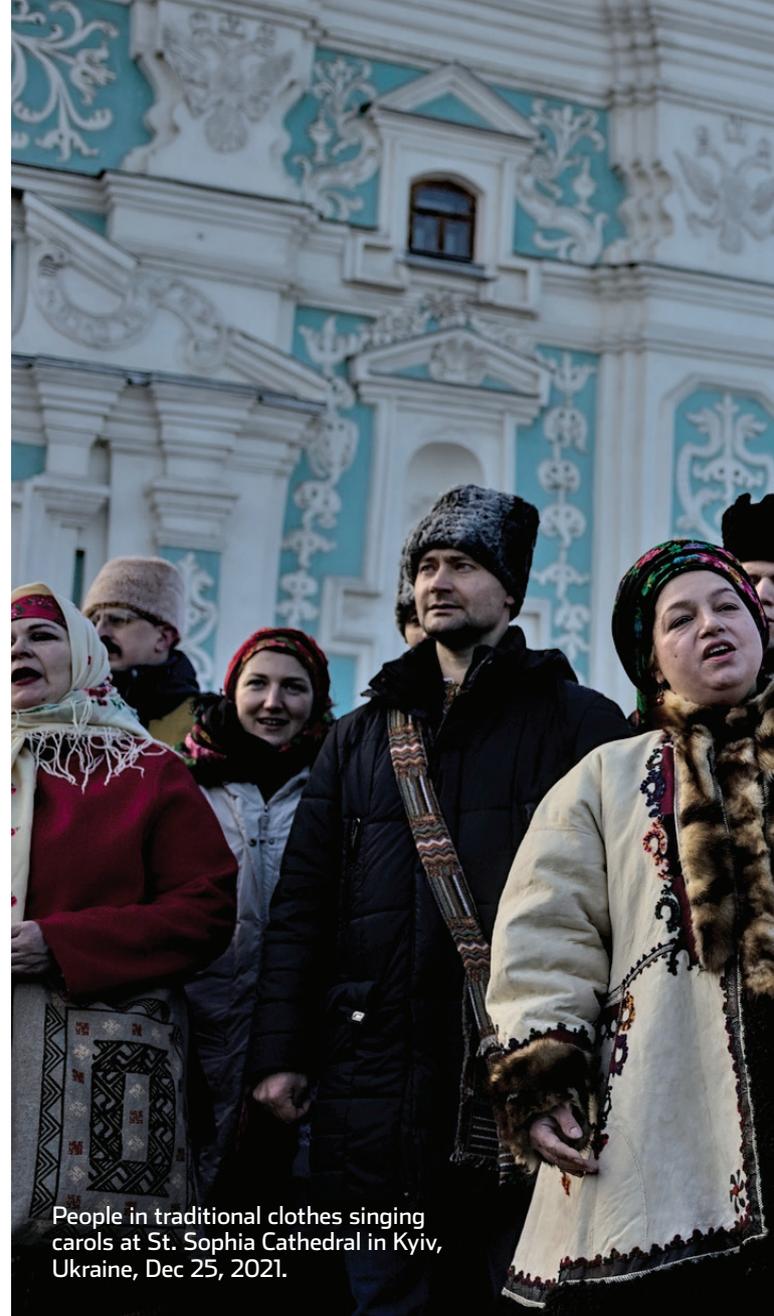
On Dec. 4, Carnegie Hall will host a holiday celebration to benefit Ukraine. Compositions by Leonard Bernstein, George Gershwin, Eric Whitacre and others will be performed by choral groups from North America and Europe in honor of the 100th anniversary of the Christmas song “Carol of the Bells.” (If you can’t quite place it, “Carol of the Bells” is that earworm-y Christmas carol we hear in a million commercials around the holidays, usually featuring bells playing the same four notes over and over at high speed. Google it and you’ll know it right away.) Proceeds from the event, called Notes From Ukraine, will benefit the United24 campaign to rebuild that nation.

How does a Christmas carol rate a party at Carnegie Hall? And how is a song used in 100 holiday ads somehow connected to Ukraine? It turns out every carol that we sing at Christmas has a story behind it, some inspiring, some strange. Each week in Advent on the America podcast “Hark!” we explore the fascinating stories behind our favorite Christmas songs.

In the case of “Carol of the Bells,” that tale involves two music teachers, 76 choir singers, a political revolution and, believe it or not, a murder.

## The Music Teacher

Mykola Dmytrovych Leontovych was supposed to be a priest. Like his father, his grandfather and later his younger brother, Leontovych attended the Kamianets-Podilskiy Theological Seminary in what is today western Ukraine but was then part of the Russian Empire, to learn the family trade. He had also grown up around music; his father played a half-dozen instruments and directed Leontovych’s



People in traditional clothes singing carols at St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, Ukraine, Dec 25, 2021.

school choir, and his mother was a singer. Leontovych, too, played several instruments, sang and wrote choral arrangements for the seminary. When the choir director died, the seminary put him in charge.

So when it came time to graduate in 1899 and start a career, Leontovych followed a different set of family footsteps and became a music teacher, arranger and composer. Although he walked away from a life in the priesthood, he did not leave his faith behind. In fact, he would go on to craft the first Eastern Orthodox Ukrainian liturgy written in the vernacular.

Ukraine has a rich history of folk songs. Even before the advent of Christianity they were a part of everyday life, a way of blessing one’s neighbors or worshiping ancient gods, with sometimes quite complex multi-part harmonies



sung a capella.

Leontovych believed in the power of song to bolster people's spirits. Everywhere he worked he created choirs. During strikes and protests against Czar Nicholas II's leadership in 1905, Leontovych organized a choir of workers to perform at meetings. They would sing arrangements of Ukrainian, Jewish, Armenian, Polish and Russian folk songs. It got him into trouble. Eventually he was sent back to his home province in what is now central Ukraine.

In private Leontovych created choral arrangements for these ancient folk songs. But he was a perfectionist and could spend years working on a single arrangement before he let anyone see it. It was not until 1914 that he finally agreed to allow any of his arrangements to be performed.

One such song was a simple four-note melody called

"Shchedryk," or "Bountiful Evening." In the song a swallow, whose yearly return to Ukraine signals the break of spring, invites the listener to look out on their property and see the prosperity that spring has brought. "Come out, come out, O master,/ look at the sheep pen," the singers extolled. "There the ewes have given birth/ and the lambkins have been born./ Your goods [livestock] are great, you will have a lot of money by selling them."

Ukraine had many folk songs like this celebrating the birth of a new year. But Leontovych's arrangement had a unique driving energy; the song somehow seemed to dance among elements of the choir. The Ukrainian conductor Oleksander Koshyts liked it so much he convinced Leontovych to let him produce it in Kyiv in 1916. It was well received; and three years later, when Koshyts organized the



# Every carol that we sing at Christmas has a story behind it, some inspiring, some strange.

first-ever international tour of a Ukrainian choir, he made “Shchedryk” the choir’s signature piece. Through Koshyts, Leontovych’s melody would eventually find its way to the United States, and unexpectedly, to a whole new setting at Christmas.

## Singing for Independence

But first the Ukrainian people would come to know both tremendous hope and cruel loss. In 1919, Symon Petliura had a problem. Two years earlier, after the Bolsheviks overthrew the Russian Romanov monarchy, he had become president of a sovereign Ukrainian nation, the Ukrainian People’s Republic. But its existence remained fragile; the Bolsheviks refused to recognize the country’s independence. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of World War I, the world’s great powers were gathering in Paris to determine the new borders of Europe.

A former journalist, Petliura saw that he needed a way to generate international support for his fledgling state. According to the Ukrainian government’s website, Petliura had an idea while listening to another work from Leontovych at a concert: to create a choir of the country’s best voices and send them on an international tour. They would “sing for the independence of Ukraine.”

Over the next two years the Ukrainian National Chorus performed hundreds of concerts in 45 cities in 10 European countries, dressed in tuxedos and gowns, signaling to the world that the Ukrainian People’s Republic was a

modern country. Everywhere the choir went, they passed out brochures about their nation and sang what would become the country’s national anthem. Their efforts were a huge success. “Ukraine’s cultural maturity must become the legitimation of its political independence in the world,” the Austrian press wrote. In France, people dubbed Leontovych the Ukrainian Bach; his “Shchedryk” regularly brought the house down.

But by 1921 the country that the Ukrainian National Chorus was promoting no longer existed. The Bolsheviks had completely overrun the state. They sent in thousands of secret police to root out “counter-revolutionaries,” which in practice meant not only political opponents but intellectuals, religious leaders and members of the bourgeoisie.

One of their targets was Mykola Leontovych. In a cruel twist on the Nativity story, a man approached Leontovych’s parents while Leontovych was visiting them during the Eastern Orthodox celebration of Christmas, wondering if they might have a room for him for the night. They opened their doors to the stranger, who spent the night sleeping in the same room as their son. At dawn the agent pulled out a rifle and shot him. Leontovych was later declared a martyr of the Eastern Orthodox Ukrainian Church.

## The Hit in Our Repertoire

Though the Ukrainian People’s Republic no longer existed, the tour of the Ukrainian National Chorus did not end. The famed American impresario Max Rabinoff, who was originally from Russia, heard the choir perform in Paris and organized the continuation of their tour from 1922 to 1924 through seven countries of the Americas. The choir would do 400 concerts in 150 cities, including 115 cities in 36 states in the United States. They also recorded a number of their songs, including “Shchedryk.” As in Europe, everywhere the choir went people called for encores of Leontovych’s song. In his memoir Koshyts would write, “Shchedryk was the real hit in our repertoire.”

On Oct. 5, 1922, the choir performed at Carnegie Hall. The story is often told that in the crowd that autumn night was a 20-year-old music student named Peter J. Willhousky. Born in Passaic, N.J., he, too, came from an Eastern European family passionate about music. He and all seven of his siblings had attended the Russian Cathedral Choir School in New York.

After his graduation from the Damrosch Institute of Musical Arts (which would later become the Juilliard School), he also became a well-known and successful

choir director and arranger of music. The Harvard geologist and writer Stephen Jay Gould was a high school student in the chorus that Wilhousky created and managed. In a 1988 remembrance, Gould recalls Wilhousky's generosity: "He was one of the finest choral conductors in America, yet he chose to spend every Saturday morning with high-school kids." He also remembers Wilhousky's perfectionism and the impact it had on him: "His only rule, tacit but pervasive, proclaimed: 'No compromises,'" Gould wrote. "The idea, however, is infectious. As I worked with Wilhousky, I slowly personalized the dream that excellence in one activity might be extended to become the pattern, or at least the goal, of an actual life."

Among his many jobs, Wilhousky made choral arrangements for Arturo Toscanini's NBC Symphony Orchestra radio broadcasts. And there came a moment, according to a letter that Wilhousky sent to the Ukrainian musicologist Roman Savytsky, when he found himself in need of a short number to fill out a program starring a high school choir. Contrary to the legend that he heard the original concert at Carnegie Hall, Wilhousky tells Savytsky in the letter that he had only recently heard "Shchedryk" performed.

Though he had a copy of the music, there was no way his students were going to be able to sing the song in Ukrainian. The song reminded him of bells, so he set out to write new lyrics along those lines. "Hark! How the bells," the song begins, and in three verses imagines bells pealing all across the land, announcing "Christmas is here/bringing good cheer."

After the radio show performance, Wilhousky received so many requests for the music that he published it, in 1936, under the title "Carol of the Bells. Ukrainian Carol," with attribution to himself and Leontovych.

In music, an ostinato is a phrase—a set of notes—that gets passed around among different instruments. Leontovych and Wilhousky never knew each other, perhaps never even knew anything about one another. Yet their lives, like an ostinato, echo with similarities. So, too, did their hopes for "Shchedryk." "Throw cares away," Wilhousky writes, to an audience enduring the Great Depression. "Bountiful, bountiful," Leontovych's swallow promises listeners at the conclusion of "Shchedryk," at a time when Ukrainians wondered if they would ever be able to have a nation of their own.

If you visit the website for the nation of Ukraine, you will find a statue of a man holding a cross standing

high above the Dnipro River. The man is Volodymyr the Great, otherwise known as St. Volodymyr, who first consolidated the region into a state of its own and made it a Christian nation. There is snow on the statue and the trees around it, but that has nothing to do with the winter season we are approaching. "On February 24, 2022," the homepage reads, "The ordinary life in Ukraine stopped.... Ukrainians 'froze' at the end of winter on that terrifying February morning."

And spring, the site goes on, "has not come to Ukraine yet."

No doubt we will hear "Carol of the Bells" in our parishes this year, and on the radio, and probably in a million commercials, too. Though the words we hear will speak of bells, perhaps as we listen we can cast a thought back to this beautiful, haunting song's origins, and send the people of Ukraine our prayers that they may soon know spring, new life and peace.

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

# Hark!

To hear more about  
"Carol of the Bells" and other  
Christmas carols, check out our  
podcast "Hark!" Available wherever  
you listen to podcasts or on our website:



[americamagazine.org/hark-podcasts](http://americamagazine.org/hark-podcasts)  
— Starting November 27th —

## A MASTER CLASS IN APOLOGETICS

In his classic 1949 book *Jesus and the Disinherited*, the African American preacher, mystic and theologian Howard Thurman sets out a pattern for reflection on the significance of Jesus, especially for those in society “with their backs against the wall,” that, to my mind, remains unsurpassed.

Thurman opens the book by relating a life-altering conversation he had with a devout Hindu man while sojourning in India. The man asked Thurman how he, a Black man, could justify adhering to Christianity, a religion that for so long had been used to subjugate and deny the dignity of African Americans, and indeed all “the darker peoples of the earth.” The abrupt sincerity of the question set the two men to talking for many hours. *Jesus and the Disinherited* represents Thurman’s attempt to respond in a more systematic way to the man’s challenge. “What does the religion of Jesus offer to those in society who stand with their backs against the wall?”

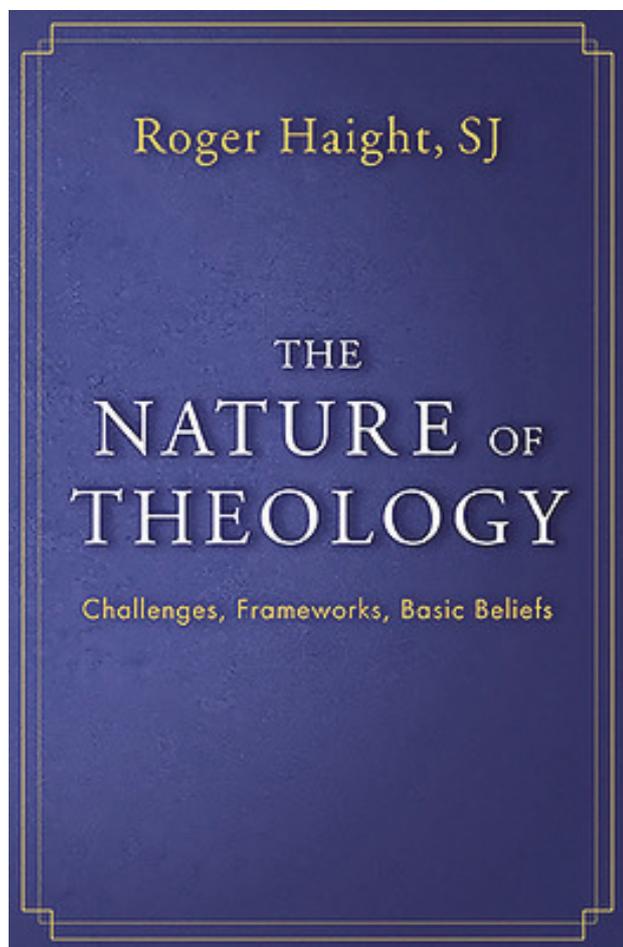
The structure of Thurman’s book is telling. The first chapter describes the social, political and religious context of Jesus’ life and ministry. To understand Jesus, insists Thurman, we must begin with the fact that Jesus was “body and soul” a Jew, one of society’s “disinherited,” holding no social status or protection under Roman occupation. In the final chapter on “Love,” Thurman suggests that Jesus’ witness to love of neighbor in the face of oppression and even physical death represents the apogee of spiritual freedom for those with their backs against the wall.

Yet Thurman does not attempt to address the “love ethic of Jesus” before he lays out, in the book’s middle three chapters, the deep and often intractable obstacles to love, what he calls the three “Hounds of Hell” that overshadow the lives of the disinherited: fear, deception and hate. One cannot take Jesus’ love commandment seriously until one first confronts the powers of fear, deception and hate as positive means of survival among the disinherited.

Thurman’s analysis of Jesus and why the Gospel remains a source of liberating good news, above all for the oppressed, is a master class in Christian apologetics. It remains unsurpassed because Thurman deals so directly and honestly with the psychological forces in human beings that resist the liberating power of love that Jesus embodies, often for good reasons having to do with survival in the face of societal oppression.

The Jesuit theologian Roger Haight’s latest book, *The Nature of Theology*, is likewise a master class in Christian apologetics, for reasons both similar and dissimilar to Thurman’s approach in *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Not unlike the Hindu who challenges Thurman to justify his faith in Jesus, Haight’s study rises from pointed questions put to the believer, and thus to anyone attempting to do theology responsibly, by the prevailing culture of our times, questions that cannot be ignored or wished away.

If Thurman’s book identifies the chief obstacles to love as fear, deception and hate, Haight identifies the three cultural challenges to Christian faith and theology in our times as metaphysical skepticism, relativism and ontic pessimism. These “filters of perception” are ever-present “as questions or suspicions, as doubts or opinions, that resonate in culture and within the critical theologian.” Though Haight does not ascribe to these forces the rhetorical, life-or-death intensity of Thurman’s three “Hounds of Hell,” each represents a serious challenge to a holistic, all-encompassing Christian way of seeing, judging and acting in the world. And like Thurman’s hounds, they arise as strategies for survival from within a horizon of immense human and planetary suffering, alongside a scientific picture of nature and an infinitely receding cosmos that seems indifferent to human beings.



Orbis Books  
184p \$27

Is it still possible to find meaning and hope in the religious “grand narrative” of a God, in Christ and through the Spirit, who sustains all things and loves each person, every creature, infinitely? Many reasonable people today answer no.

The climactic chapters of Haight’s book attempt to meet this question with a positive, though critically informed, yes. How might the contours of Christianity’s central beliefs—God as creator, Jesus Christ as mediator, the Holy Spirit as God who sustains all things and empowers human freedom for love—be articulated in fresh ways that find purchase in the imaginations of contemporary seekers?

Much as Thurman did in his climactic chapter on “Love,” Haight resists a constructive response before first reckoning with the hold that skepticism, relativism and pessimism have on the culture today. The middle three chapters tackle these forces head-on. As in previous books, the rhetorical, life-and-death center of gravity of Haight’s concern is the theodicy question, the challenge to faith and to all God-talk in the face of evil. For Haight, the Hounds of hell traverse the planet relentlessly today in the form of massive human deprivation, poverty and hunger, “focused human hatred, and vast lack of opportunity for natural human development,” forces structured into the fabric of society that cast “a pall over human existence itself.”

With theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez and James Cone as exemplars, Haight makes his most compelling case here for theology as a “practical, humanistic discipline.” If Christian theology “is critical interpretation of the world through the symbols of the Christian community,” then all theology “has to be liberationist to be faithful to the gospel and to be credible as a reflection of the human spirit in the face of cosmic pessimism.”

How, then, to articulate both the interior and outward-facing dynamism of faith before the mystery of God? And how to do so in ways that open up the narrative of salvation as it unfolds not “up there” or “out there”—as a drama that takes place primarily, so to speak, between God and God—but rather as a drama that can be recognized in the very contours of human life and indeed the whole of material creation, life coming into its own full and free participation in the eternal life story of God? The final third of the book takes up this task with an exploration of the central symbols of Christian belief, building from images and ideas that Haight has developed in his previous landmark works in spirituality (*Spirituality Seeking Theology*; *Christian Spirituality for Seekers*) and systematic theology (*Faith and Evolution*; *Jesus Symbol of God*).

Not incidentally, for Haight no less than for Thurman, the revelatory encounter with God for the Christian unfolds not first or foremost in assent to doctrines but in the

personal encounter with a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, a first-century Jew of Palestine, as his life and teachings unfold in the Gospels. “When someone asks, ‘What is God like?’ the Christian responds, ‘God is like Jesus.’”

Not everyone will agree with Haight’s interpretation of the core beliefs of Christianity. His emphasis on the symbol “God as Spirit,” for example, and development of a thoroughgoing Spirit Christology in which God’s presence to Jesus is qualitatively no different than God’s presence to all human beings and within all material creation, has been a much-debated aspect of his work for decades. Yet few theologians have taken so seriously the most pointed questions of our contemporaries, questions that, at the end of the day, are really our own, as followers of Christ who live under the shadow of skepticism, unjust suffering and looming despair.

It is said that Martin Luther King Jr. often carried a copy of *Jesus and the Disinherited* in his pocket, so important was the book to King’s understanding of the heart of Christianity. Haight’s *The Nature of Theology* is not the kind of treatise that many Christians or Catholics today would be inclined to carry around in their pocket. While he describes the book as an introduction to theology that “directs the attention of a critical intellect to the questions that people are actually asking,” Haight’s rhetorical style is more suited to an audience found in a seminary or graduate theology classroom than to participants in public protest or nonviolent civil resistance in the streets.

Nevertheless, the fundamental pattern and liberating thrust of Haight’s inquiry into the nature of theology is akin to Thurman’s classic in striking ways. What are we doing when we dare to do theology? Out of love for a suffering world, we dare to give an account of our enduring hope in the God of creation; in Jesus Christ, who reveals the character of God; and in the Spirit of God, who liberates human freedom and provides the courage to help realize and defend God’s dream for humanity. For Haight’s contributions in this new book, the sum of a lifetime of teaching and writing, and for his many books on the liberating nature of Christian theology and spirituality, I am very grateful.

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Christopher Pramuk is an associate professor of theology and the University Chair of Ignatian Thought and Imagination at Regis University in Denver. He is the author of two award-winning studies of Thomas Merton, as well as *Hope Sings, So Beautiful: Graced Encounters Across the Color Line*.

## CHANGED BY MOTHER TERESA

At age 28, Jim Towey was working as a lawyer and senior advisor to Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon. Senator Hatfield, a Southern Baptist who had become friends with Mother Teresa before she rose to fame, chaired the Senate Appropriations Committee and prioritized helping Vietnamese refugees who had aided the U.S. military.

In 1985, Senator Hatfield sent Towey on a fact-gathering trip to refugee camps in Southeast Asia. The senator wrote Towey a letter of introduction to Mother Teresa, whom Towey visited on a side journey to Kolkata, India (called by its former name, Calcutta, in the book). Having read the book *Something Beautiful for God* by Malcolm Muggeridge, who wrote of Mother Teresa as a manifestation of Christ's love, Towey went to India seeking a mountaintop experience with a living saint.

That trip was the first chapter in a long story of friendship and collaboration that is chronicled in Towey's new

book, *To Love and Be Loved: A Personal Portrait of Mother Teresa*. Towey writes of Mother Teresa's life, mystical experiences and practical service to the poor and sick, as well as of the ways her example of deep faith and devoted work transformed Towey's own spiritual life and continues to influence him a quarter century after her death.

Nine months before Towey's trip, his close friend Jimmy jumped to his death from an overpass. After his friend's suicide, guilt plagued Towey, who had known Jimmy was despairing over his divorce and stalled career.

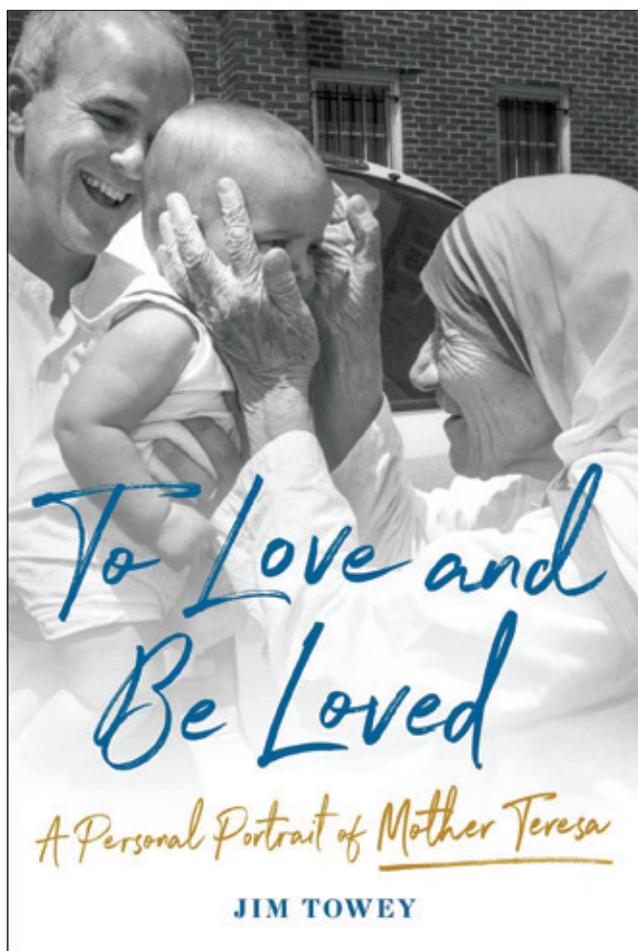
Towey, a lifelong Catholic, had many questions: "How could a loving God let all this happen? Where was He when Jimmy was suffering? Why didn't He send me to the rescue?" He hoped meeting Mother Teresa could assuage his self-remission and direct him toward a deeper reason for living.

After warmly greeting Towey and talking with him briefly, Mother Teresa told him to go to her Kolkata hospice and ask for Sister Luke. That sister shocked Towey when she immediately put him to work cleaning a dying man's scabies. Towey tried in vain to think of a way out of the task, but his pride would not let him admit to Sister Luke that he wanted to avoid it. Despite Towey's initial horror at this volunteer assignment, after he left India for a planned Hawaiian vacation, he discovered that his brief work at the hospice had deeply changed him and would shape his life's path.

"Hawaii was everything it was supposed to be—white sand, palm trees, fruity drinks—but I was as uncomfortable looking at the sheer beauty of Honolulu as I had been with the raw poverty in Calcutta. The paradise that was supposed to be my reward for braving India felt empty. The contrast between the two places was simply too great to reconcile," Towey observes.

Mother Teresa had asked Towey to convey her greetings to her fellow members of the Missionaries of Charity who lived in a Washington convent. One of the nuns invited Towey to volunteer at the soup kitchen run by the sisters; and again he agreed, because he could not come up with a plausible excuse to refuse.

Thus began Towey's increasing involvement with the Missionaries of Charity and Mother Teresa. Serving at the soup kitchen evolved into his leaving his position with Senator Hatfield to move into a Missionaries of Charity Fathers seminary in Tijuana, Mexico. He met with Mother Teresa during her visits to the United States and corresponded with her when she returned to Kolkata. During the last dozen years of Mother Teresa's life, Towey used his experience as a lawyer to address such legal issues as immigration documents for sisters moving to the United States and unauthorized use of her name for fundraising or commercial purposes.



Simon & Schuster  
320p \$28.99

Towey's adoration for Mother Teresa suffuses the book as he recounts the hours she spent daily in deep prayer as well as the cheerfulness and compassion with which she served people in crushing poverty. He notes public highlights, such as her winning the 1973 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion and the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize. He mentions that Mother Teresa counted a 1986 visit from Pope John Paul II as a pinnacle experience.

Towey gives readers a compelling account of Mother Teresa's religious growth and the development of her ministries. Nicknamed "Little Flower" as a girl in what is now North Macedonia, she adopted the name of Thérèse of Lisieux, years later becoming Mother Teresa when she took her final vows in 1937.

While teaching geography and history at St. Mary's Girls' School on the grounds of her convent in Kolkata, she began to take small sets of students out to care for impoverished people in the city. While praying as she traveled through India by train in 1946, Mother Teresa mystically experienced Jesus saying, "I thirst." As she listened further, she understood "a specific appeal to slake Jesus's thirst through works of mercy among the 'poorest of the poor,'" Towey writes. Subsequent visions confirmed this vocation, and she spent two years convincing her superiors to let her leave the convent and work more directly with those Kolkata residents in profound poverty.

At the time of Mother Teresa's death in 1997, her Missionaries of Charity included "3,842 sisters, 363 brothers, and 13 fathers operating more than 650 soup kitchens, health clinics, leprosy centers, and shelters for the desperately poor and sick, in 120 countries, at no charge to those served and with no government funds," Towey writes.

The book also deals candidly with a painful aspect of her spiritual experience—how she spent decades feeling estranged from God. Towey refers to journal entries and letters that Mother Teresa did not expect to outlive her, some collected in the 2007 book *Come Be My Light*, by Brian Kolodiejchuk, M.C., to describe her spiritual suffering. In 1959, her confessor advised her to write a letter to Jesus.

"In my soul,' Mother wrote, 'I feel just that terrible pain of loss—of God not wanting me—of God not being God—of God not really existing (Jesus, please forgive my blasphemies—I have been told to write everything).'" Towey's retelling of his beloved friend's persistent dark night of the soul makes the reader want to comfort her. It also reassures believers that even those deeply committed to God's purposes endure such experiences.

Readers familiar with Mother Teresa's biography will find fresh meaning in Towey's account of her impact on his

spiritual journey. Those unfamiliar with her life story will appreciate his accessible and gripping introduction.

Sharlee DiMenichi is a freelance writer and the author of *The Complete Guide to Joining the Peace Corps and Holocaust Rescue Heroes*.

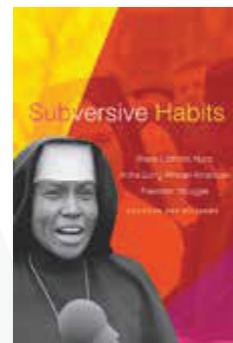
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## BEFORE GOOGLE CALENDAR

What is a week? A single unit that helps keep track of progress through the year—or a shorthand to describe seven distinct days, each with different qualities? An obsolete religious relic—or an intuitive span of time that has wired itself into humanity’s essence? And above all, why is the week the only basic unit of time that has no basis in astronomical rhythms? David M. Henkin, a professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley, explores these questions in *The Week: A History of the Unnatural Rhythms That Made Us Who We Are*. In the process of doing so, he also seeks to understand how the week developed what he considers to be an outsized presence in American history.

Within *The Week*, Henkin’s greatest contribution to the analysis of weekly consciousness is his granular research into the ways in which ordinary people of yesteryear conceptualized time. An entire chapter is dedicated to examining the diaries and correspondence of a diverse cross-section of 19th-century Americans: freed slaves, a

Yankee physician transplanted to the South and even “an elite preteen living in Revolutionary Boston.” With the trove of archival materials that he brings to light, Henkin provides readers with a glimpse into the day-to-day lives of Americans during this time period and tries to illustrate their different attitudes toward weekly timekeeping.

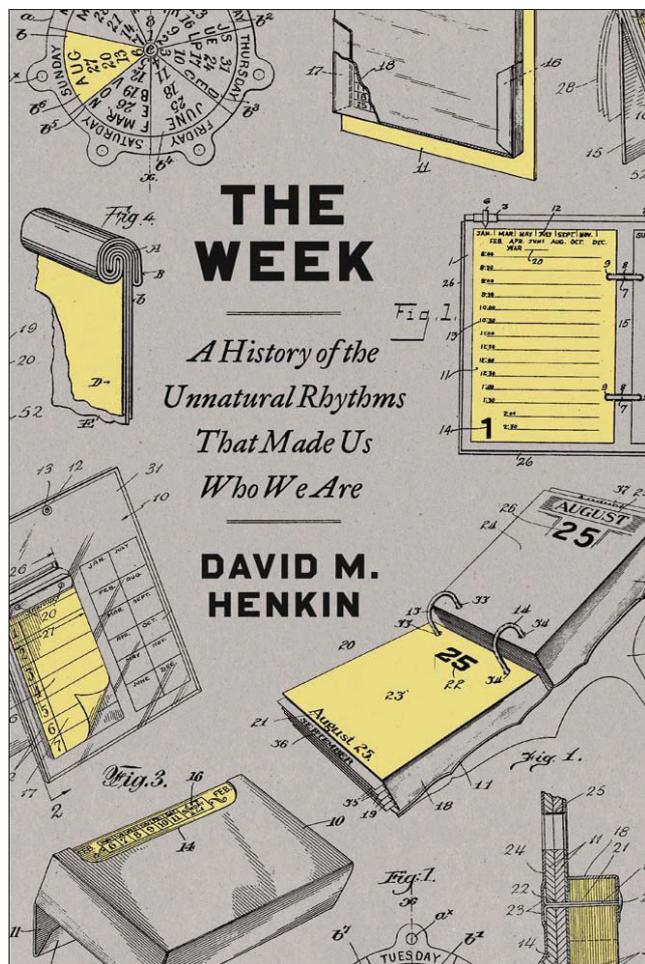
One of Henkin’s most compelling observations is that industrial work played an instrumental role in entrenching the week into American public consciousness. He suggests, for instance, that the introduction of the weekly payday during the Industrial Revolution tightened the relationship between money and time. Using literature from the temperance movement, Henkin demonstrates how workers, after being paid on Saturday, frequently spent much of their newly earned money on drinks; even beyond this sudden rush of spending, as a worker’s available cash levels decreased over the course of a week, it acted as a sort of financial hourglass. Henkin also digs into the ledgers of pawn shops to show how Saturdays were associated with the repaying of debts. The evidence he presents shows that workers would rush over, paycheck in hand, to collect the goods they had pawned the week before in order to get quick cash.

But even more fundamental than the Industrial Revolution, Henkin also proposes that the weekly calendar is so deeply embedded in American culture because of the influence of the Puritans. The settlers of New England thought the Church of England’s abundance of feast days (tied to months and dates) reeked of papism and instead chose to organize their weeks around the weekly observance of the Sabbath. This is not a primary argument of the book, but it is an interesting observation all the same.

Henkin often presents ideas in a way that provides words for the intuitive experiences and knowledge of readers, including those outside of the academy. In this respect, *The Week* exemplifies the best of what scholarship can be.

But in many other instances, Henkin’s argumentation could have been clearer, his objectives more explicit and his intellectual itinerary less meandering. It is not clear what central position Henkin sets out to argue in the book, nor is it obvious what intellectual debate the author is participating in. Henkin briefly cites the work of Henri Lefebvre and Eviatar Zerubavel, both sociologists, but he neglects to describe the contours of their studies and, more important, how *The Week* fits into them. By the end of the book, readers might know what “hebdomadal” means, but they are left wondering what to make of the new information about the week’s history in the United States.

And while Henkin’s work of sifting through diaries and other documentary ephemera is impressive, the evidence



Yale University Press  
288p \$30

he marshals from these records only vaguely suggests that 19th-century Americans thought of their time in weeks rather than months. Plus, any notion of argument gets drowned in a morass of quotations and biographical anecdotes.

Henkin yearns to speak more broadly about how people perceive time, beyond just the week. In several instances, Henkin struggles to demonstrate that the week as a unit of time is quite so extraordinary or unique compared with a timekeeping system centered on months and days. Perhaps as a form of overcorrection, Henkin doubles down on the hegemony of the week, pitting it against the month as if the two systems are necessarily in competition to describe the timekeeping mentality of historical Americans. If a diarist seems to have conceptualized time on a weekly basis, according to this view, heaven forbid she also thought of time in months and days.

Some groups or individuals may have subscribed to this type of calendrical dualism. But for many of the historical situations sketched in the book, the dichotomy is artificial and comes across as confirmation bias. Henkin seems to interpret many records in light of his week-centric scholarly framework, rather than drawing conclusions strictly from the evidence.

Toward the end of the book, Henkin writes that for thinkers of the late 1800s, an explanation for the strange phenomenon of the seven-day week was “never thoroughly mastered by philosophical or scholarly inquiry”; even for the shrewdest and most progressive minds of the Gilded Age (including William James, the father of modern psychology), “weeks remained mysterious entities.” While Henkin should be commended for reintroducing the topic to the mainstream of historical conversation, his exhaustive research is still not enough to remove the enigmatic shroud from the week.

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Doug Girardot is an assistant editor at *The Day*, in New London, Conn., and a former O’Hare fellow at *America*. He graduated from Boston College in 2021 with a bachelor’s degree in history.

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## TO RULE THE WORLD (OR NOT)

The Brothers Grimm tell the tale of a fisherman and his wife who encounter a magical, wish-granting fish. The couple wish at first for a nicer home but soon become dissatisfied with the home they are given and wish, instead, for a castle. As the charm of each new wish wears off, the couple's demands grow more and more extreme until, finally, one of them wishes to become like God. With this, the fish loses patience, and the couple are sent back to their little hut.

David McPherson uses this tale in his book, *The Virtues of Limits*, to express the open-endedness of human desire, which culminates in an effort to “play God.” For McPherson, we human beings have a choice between two fundamental attitudes toward life and the world. Are we “appreciative and accepting” or “choosing and controlling”? While both are necessary features of any hu-

man life, McPherson argues, our lives as individuals and communities change radically based on which attitude we deem primary.

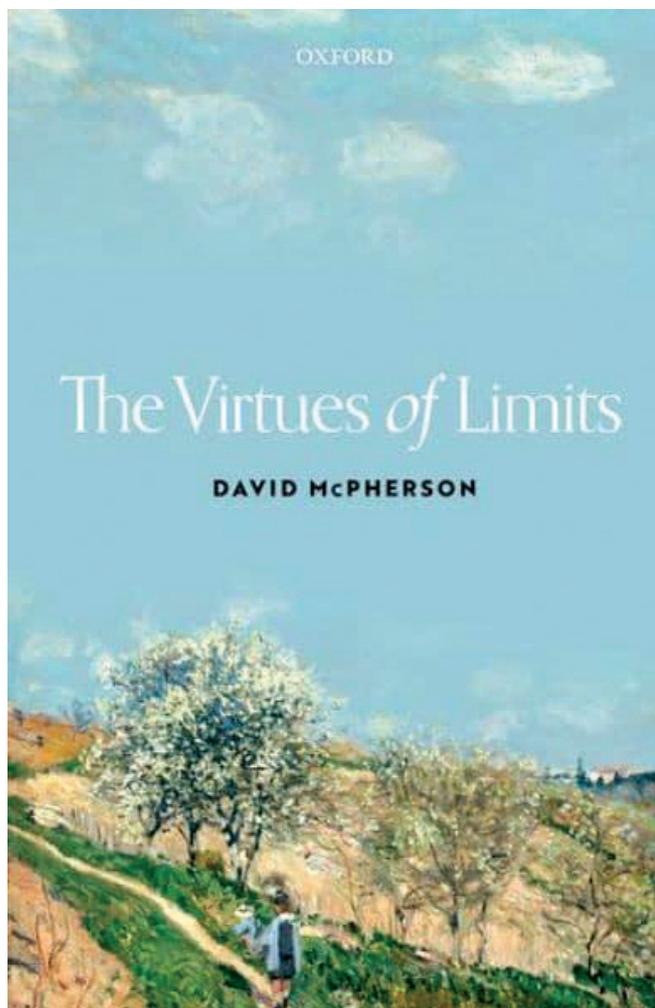
This volume is slim but wide-ranging. At fewer than 160 pages, it touches on existential, political, moral and economic questions. McPherson argues that this “accepting and appreciating” stance has implications for all realms of moral thinking. This proves to be a powerful frame through which to view a host of problems.

The book begins with the distinction between “appreciating” and “controlling.” The first attitude starts with the world and the second starts with my will. The paradigmatic example of this will-based approach for McPherson is Friedrich Nietzsche, who sees the aim of human life as imposing one's will and growing in autonomy. But the Nietzschean view, McPherson argues, is really a non-starter. If there is nothing objectively worthy of willing, why will anything at all? All that is left is to simply go with whatever I happen to desire, but to take these desires as our authentic selves is to risk becoming slaves to passions, lusts, greed, hunger for power and so on.

The task of morality, then, is to place limits on our desires and our wills such that they accord with the given structures of the world and human nature. The master virtue in this regard, it seems, is humility, which recognizes that I did not make myself nor this world that I inhabit. I do not stand in relation to myself or to the world as lord and master, but as one receiving a gift. This leads to the second virtue: gratitude. These two virtues allow us to perceive properly the value of things; just as important, they allow us to feel at home in the world.

This posture of acceptance does not mean we should not right wrongs or cure ills, but that we should not place our desires above the world as given to us. McPherson illustrates this across a wide variety of domains. In bioethics, for instance, no one would object to a new treatment for cancer; still we should be concerned about the idea of genetically engineering our children. To dismiss any concern would lack a proper stance of humility before the dignity of human life and would invite the treatment of the human person as a consumer good.

In his section “Moral Limits,” McPherson applies his lens of limits to a selection of contemporary ethical debates. Among these is the debate over universalism and particularism, which has relevance for our concerns about globalism and nationalism. Universalism usually means that all people are to be given equal and impartial moral consideration, while particularism argues that our relationships to particular persons affect the nature of our moral obligations. A universalist might say that there is no



Oxford University Press  
208p \$70

reason why the suffering of someone in my town should receive more consideration than that of someone on the other side of the world. After all, both are human. A particularist, on the other hand, would say that naturally I have a greater moral obligation to my actual neighbor than to a random person in another country.

On the extremes, universalism neglects my concrete responsibilities to those near me for abstract humanitarianism, while particularism leads to chauvinism or nationalism. McPherson charts a middle path. He argues that the philosophy of limits recognizes that our sphere of most significant moral responsibility is limited to those who are actually “there” in our lives while still holding that in themselves, all people have equal dignity. This is part of what he terms “humane localism.”

This theme of humane localism runs through the section on “Political Limits,” where McPherson combines this idea of localism with the idea of accepting imperfection. He is especially intent on arguing against utopianism, which in his view risks injuring important human goods in its quest for perfection. An effort to radically equalize economic status, for instance, would potentially impinge on significant and non-negative forms of human freedom. Rather than obliging us to level differences, justice requires that we pursue the humbler goal of ensuring that everyone is sufficiently provided for.

Lest one think that the acceptance of imperfection and inequality makes McPherson merely a proponent of capitalism, the section “Economic Limits” reveals he is just as concerned about the lack of limiting virtues in the market economy as he is about addressing this deficiency in government. Against an ideal of unlimited economic growth and wealth accumulation, he argues for “contentment” as the counter-virtue to the vice of greed. Economic freedom, like human freedom, needs to be oriented to the common good and to a conception of a good human life.

McPherson’s book is guided by the spirit of Wendell Berry, with an argument for an economy that respects the limits placed on us by the health of our environment and the integrity of our ecosystem, as well as by the health of our communities. McPherson suggests a need for “economic decentralization,” where dispersed ownership of resources and capital is necessary for healthy market competition. He, like Berry, wants an economy that is defined more by the flourishing of home and family life than by the profits of a handful of powerful corporations.

The book concludes by making a case for the practice of the sabbath. Just as our moral investigations, our life projects and our work must begin by properly appreciating the world and life that are given to us, they must also end

with appreciation. The goal of our moral, political and economic efforts is in fact a kind of celebration of life lived fully and well. This, and not Nietzsche’s understanding, is the real “yes-saying” to the world; it is the path, as McPherson says, to “being at home in the world.”

Readers may well differ here and there with McPherson on particular questions of economics, justice or government. Still, the value of the lens of “limits” for our moral and philosophical investigations is clear throughout. The book stands as a rebuke to aspects of both the left and right of our political and cultural divides. More important, it offers an attractive alternative in the form of embracing the world as a gift with humility. Doing so, we can hope, might give us a greater respect for persons, the environment and human nature.

*The Virtues of Limits* is written in a way that is accessible to the non-philosopher and will be of interest to many. It will provide much food for reflection and contemplation for any reader engaged in the grander questions of our moral, economic and political life. Some of the arguments he addresses would have done well with further treatment, but, at the same time, the book’s breadth serves to give the reader a sense of the versatility of limits as a lens.

Returning to the story of the magical fish: Joseph Ratzinger, in his *Introduction to Christianity*, writes that the error of Adam and Eve is not that they wanted to be like God, but that they thought to be like God meant merely to become powerful—to become masters of the universe. In fact, to become like God is to be in a relationship of love and self-gift. For Christians, to become like God is even to become humble and a servant to all. This true “becoming like God” is an alternative to the “playing God” that concerns McPherson. Perhaps this is the lesson of the fairy tale.

For Christians, God is the suffering servant, the lover of humankind and the lover of the world. To become like God, then, is not unlike assuming the stance of love and appreciation that defines the sabbath. Those who are not Christian, McPherson argues, can still see the value in this idea of goodness. We might think of the author himself as a philosophical fish trying to remind us, like the couple in the story, that human happiness does not lie in the unlimited fulfillment of our desires, but in our proper relationship to the gift of life.

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Nathan Beacom writes from Chicago, Ill. His writing has previously appeared in *Comment magazine* and *The Des Moines Register*.

## God Is With Us

*Editor's note: Every three years **America** bids farewell to its Word columnist as the cycle of readings ends and another Advent begins. The editors are grateful to Jaime L. Waters, who teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago, for her challenging, incisive commentary. And we welcome Victor Cancino, S.J., to our pages.*

I am soberly excited to begin this journey with you as the next columnist for The Word at America. My mother once questioned my choice to specialize in Sacred Scripture, "Why so much study of the Bible? It has the same stories every few years during Mass; nothing changes." After years of preaching and study from the sacred text, I can now see that the change is in me. Study and prayerful reflection of the Bible has become a kind of slow and meaningful creativity.

December begins with Advent and the start of a new liturgical cycle, Year A, which commences with readings from the prophet Isaiah and the Gospel of Matthew. The word Advent comes from the Latin verb

advenire, which means "to come to." It refers to the solemn time during which we prepare ourselves for the mystery of a God who desires to come to us. We could easily call this the season of Emmanuel, the Hebrew name meaning God-is-with-us.

Similarly, as we come to the Nativity of the Lord, the readings this month speak about the state of our humanity.

Humanity, in the biblical authors' imagination, reaches critical points throughout history. These include the great flood in the days of Noah, the disaster of the Babylonian Exile (586-39 B.C.E.) and the times of crisis and renewal described in detail by prophets like Isaiah or John the Baptist. The Gospel passages in the weeks ahead, along with readings from Isaiah, provide an unapologetically hopeful vision of humanity in the aftermath of historic catastrophe.

Our readings for this Advent season thus help us to look beyond despair and toward a vulnerable child born in a manger. Christmas is genuinely about us. Advent prepares the way.



Victor M. Cancino, S.J., lives on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana and is the pastor-delegate for St. Ignatius Mission. He studied Sacred Scripture at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.

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### FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (A), NOV. 27, 2022

Glimpses both then and now of humanity

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### SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (A), DEC. 4, 2022

Challenges to an expansive vision of humanity

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### THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (A), DEC. 11, 2022

A poetic vision of humanity

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### FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (A), DEC. 18, 2022

A dream for humanity

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### THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD, DEC. 25, 2022

God is with us



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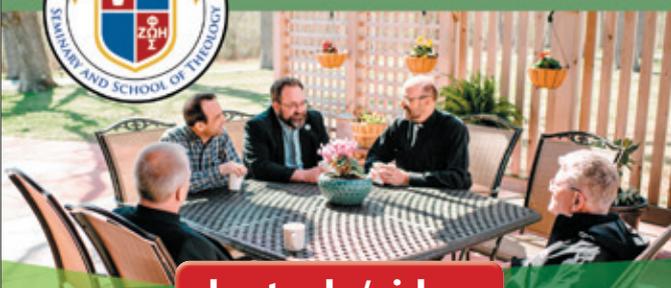
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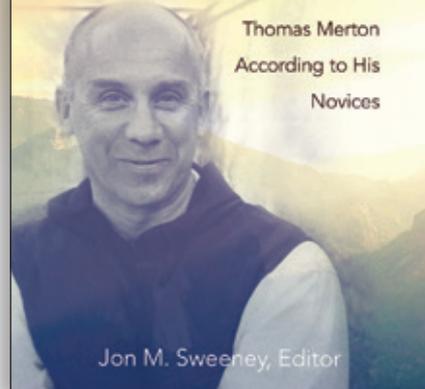


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# Mary's Search for Shelter

## The posada lets us feel the plight of the Holy Family

By Elaine Ayala



One of the best posadas I ever attended was in a San Antonio working-class neighborhood near a busy intersection peppered with popular taquerias. The people who lived in the cul-de-sac were longtime neighbors, and the Christmas-time sing-along and re-enactment of the Holy Family's quest for lodging, or posada, was an annual event.

It involved people inside several homes singing the parts of innkeepers, refusing them lodging. Mary and Joseph led a group of peregrinos, or pilgrims, asking for shelter through song. That year the teen playing Joseph called in sick, and an unsuspecting boy soon found himself in a shepherd-like robe standing next to Mary. She was played by the posada organizer's aunt, and the 80-something-year-old couldn't have been more excited about landing a role she'd long coveted.

Across the Southwest, Mexican Americans may be the major group re-enacting posadas, especially in places where they make up the largest segment of the Latino population. But other Latino groups as well as non-Latinos throughout the United States have mounted and participated in them. When organized by parishes, posadas can be elaborate, staged programs with practiced choral groups. Outside the church, they are largely unrehearsed affairs but nonetheless joyous.

Usually re-enacted between Dec. 16 and Dec. 24, posadas have been kept alive by parents, grandparents, madrinas and padrinos, as well as cultural and civic organizations, and even an upscale shopping complex in San Antonio

called the Historic Pearl. They can also incorporate current social justice issues. The Archdiocese of Chicago, for example, hosts a Posada for Immigration Reform.

In simple terms, a posada is a Nativity play but without wise men, shepherds or mangers.

It zeroes in on the Holy Family's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill a Roman-mandated census. In sing-along form, one innkeeper after another denies the weary couple a place to rest. Mary, Joseph and the pilgrims are the "outside singers," and the innkeepers serve as "inside singers."

The Spanish verses reflect the Holy Family's hardships. For example, Joseph and the pilgrims sing, "En el nombre del cielo, os pido posada, pues no puede andar, mi esposa amada." ("In the name of heaven, I ask of you shelter, for my beloved wife can go no farther.")

Posada groups often receive printed copies of the villancicos, or carols, that they sing along the way. "Noche de Paz," or "Silent Night" will be heard. They also most likely sing a version of "Pidiendo Posada," or "Asking for Shelter."

Because organizers are not likely to know who will show up, posadas are usually unrehearsed, prompting one of my friends, Alicia Reyes-Barriénte, to describe her own family's tradition as a "beautiful mess."

"My grandma sang out of tune," said Ms. Reyes-Barriénte, an assistant professor of political science at Texas A&M University, San Antonio, who attended her grandmother's posadas in

South Texas. "It always seemed that half of the people knew the songs and half didn't." But posadas ultimately end with invitations for everyone to come inside, and "that's all that matters."

That is when posada becomes a party, with foods of the Christmas season. For Mexican Americans that means tamales, fried dough treats called buñuelos and champurrado, a chocolate drink made with cornmeal. Children may also take turns swinging at a piñata, usually made in the shape of a star and filled with candy.

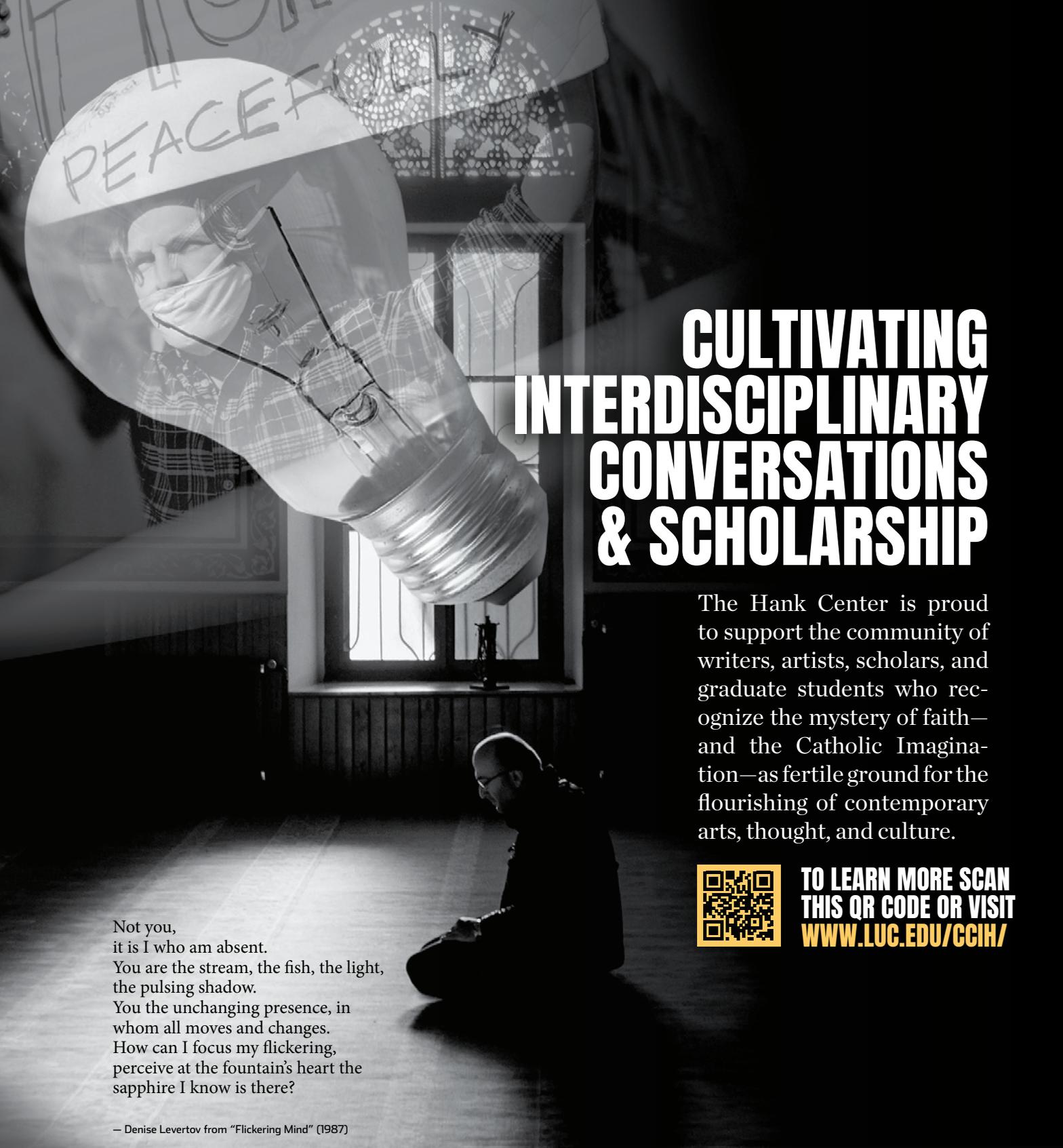
Through the re-enactment of the difficult journey Mary and Joseph undertook, everyone in a posada participates in a story that teaches empathy for the poor, the stranger and the migrant.

"When the peregrinos reached my grandma's house, they found a place of rest after being rejected by many people," Ms. Reyes-Barriénte said. The lesson of the posada is that we don't want to be like those innkeepers who turned Mary and Joseph away. We want to act as humanely as my friend Alicia's grandmother did.

That is why the posada remains relevant.

"Are we doing what God has called us to do?" Ms. Reyes-Barriénte said. If we open our hearts and wallets during the season of giving, what about the other 11 months of the year?

Elaine Ayala is a writer based in San Antonio, Tex.



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— Denise Levertov from "Flickering Mind" (1987)



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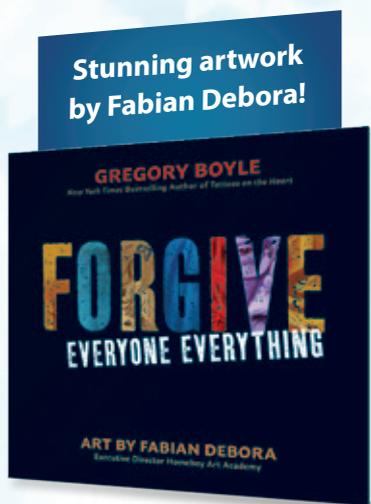
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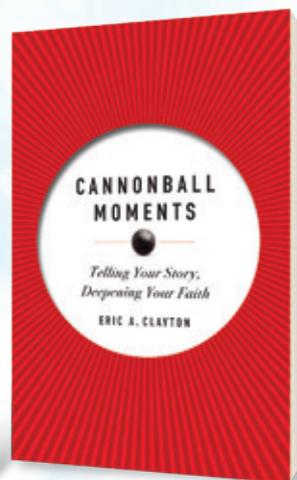
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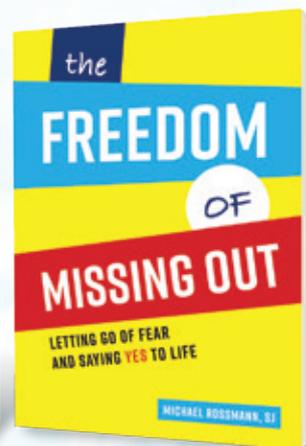
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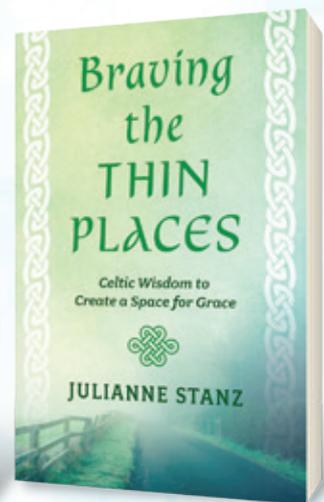
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