

# America

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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## Paying attention to ‘pastoral mystery’

“*Pastoralidad*.” Pope Francis used this word three times in **America’s** exclusive interview with him, published in this issue. We translated it twice as “pastoral dimension” and once as “pastoral care,” but a more literal rendering would be something like “pastorality”—because *pastoralidad* is not a normal word in Spanish any more than pastorality is in English. Yet as soon as you hear it, you know what it means, or at least you think you do. And then you find you are still thinking about it weeks later.

Friends, family members and colleagues here at **America** all asked me what it was like to meet Pope Francis. I think they expected, and to some degree I did too, some kind of notable spiritual consolation or a rush of feeling in response to meeting the successor of Peter. That was, however, not the case. As my colleague Kerry Weber wrote in her online article describing the “behind the scenes” of the interview (Nov. 28), the most surprising thing about meeting Francis was how normal being with him feels.

This is not to say that meeting the pope and talking with him was not consoling and profound; of course it was. The thing that came across in person, though—the thing that I have realized I have been missing in all the reports I have read over the years about what Francis has said—was not some overall aura of saintliness, but rather a quality of attention and focus, a glimpse of where Francis himself is conscious of holy mystery.

And that is why I have been thinking about *pastoralidad* for the past two weeks. After we left the interview, I checked with friends and colleagues whose Spanish is fluent. I wondered whether Spanish simply had a word for “pastorality” that

English could only approximate, but it turns out that Francis was reaching for the word even in his native Spanish. I realized that I had some sense of this even during the interview—because in speaking of *pastoralidad*, and more broadly when speaking of the work of pastors, Francis has an intensity and a reverence that a transcript cannot capture.

It is similar to hearing a friend try to describe a powerful experience in prayer. Or to hearing someone try to express the feeling of a sacrament. Even though the words cannot fully carry the feeling, and the feeling is anyway only pointing at a greater reality, there is still something powerfully holy, something that calls for reverence, in hearing someone try to name it.

That is what it felt like when Pope Francis spoke about *pastoralidad*.

Pastoral considerations can often be treated as secondary—a layer of accommodation to practical constraints and limits after the real theological work is done at a higher level. And such practical adaptations are necessary and vital. But the “pastoral dimension,” however we might translate it, is far more than that.

Francis has spoken frequently about a triad that he refers to as “God’s style”: “closeness, compassion and tenderness.” He means that it is God who pastors first; the Father draws close to our humanity in the gift of the Son and the Holy Spirit draws us into their love. That is the model—or even better, the mystery—that *pastoralidad* attempts, haltingly, to name. Rather than practical considerations “limiting” otherwise absolute theological truths, God’s own pastoral closeness to us and our call to embody such compassion ourselves is the central theological truth Pope

Francis keeps returning to.

Theology uses the word “mystery” to name truths whose richness is beyond human comprehension, springs that do not run dry no matter how much water flows from them. And Francis is constantly reminding the church that there is such a “pastoral mystery,” a depth of God’s tender and compassionate closeness to us that we *will never be done* exploring.

But it is difficult to sustain such attention. Even in this interview, Francis himself does not always stay grounded in pastoral response. In his response to a question about what he would say to a woman who feels called to the priesthood, he spoke about Petrine and Marian principles in the church. I wish his attention had been more concretely pastoral, focused as much on accompanying a woman in that experience as on setting out a theological framework for understanding it. Not because I assume such accompaniment would necessarily lead to a different theological answer—but because deep pastoral attention to the person leads us closer to God.

And Francis is always calling us to draw closer to God by paying attention to how God works with us. In his answer on polarization, Francis said that the Spirit “does not reduce everything to one value,” but rather “harmonizes differences.” His attention to and reverence for pastoral realities helped me see that the Spirit does not make such harmony by writing out the full sheet music ahead of time, but instead by having us sing together.

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Sam Sawyer, S.J.  
Twitter: @SSawyerSJ



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Antonello Nuccia/America Media

Pope Francis speaks with representatives of America Media at his residence at Casa Santa Marta at the Vatican, Nov. 22. Elisabetta Piqué, seated at the pope's right, served as translator.

Cover image: Pope Francis at Casa Santa Marta, Nov. 22.

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## *Is the Latin Mass more reverent?*

Kerry Weber's "Stop saying the Latin Mass is more reverent" (Short Take, online Nov. 17) received more than 150 comments from our readers. Her story was in part a response to a recent article in The New York Times, which reported that enthusiasts for the Latin Mass describe it as a "more reverent form of worship." Ms. Weber wrote, "The Latin Mass may help many people feel closer to God, but whatever reverence it inspires need not be framed in relation to other styles of worship."

Thank you so much for putting into words exactly how I feel. I would never go back to the Latin Mass myself but can understand how some people do feel that it brings them closer to God. That is how I always felt about a good "folk Mass." It would be nice to have both in harmony, as opposed to disharmony.

**Judi Harmon**

Aren't different words useful? Reverence means deep respect, usually expressed formally. It places the emphasis on God's transcendence and eternity. Devotion: self-giving love, more of a personal expression. Goes with joy, which has to do with consciousness of God's presence. Charity: love for God and others. All Catholics and Masses should have all these. Still, I don't see anything uncharitable about saying that the traditional Latin Mass emphasizes reverence, or that the Harlem or Uganda Masses emphasize joy and devotion.

**Jay Brian**

"Amen." I say that as if I were at a "Gospel" Mass. Having been a teenager during Vatican II, I prefer hearing the words of the Mass in my native language rather than spending much of my time seeing if the priest has just said the Latin word (which I do not understand) on the opposite page of my Missal from where I am currently reading. I also prefer to enthusiastically sing or say my responses during the Mass with the song in my heart and not a droning old hymn. My faith is my joy!

**Louise Johnson**

What Kerry Weber fails to understand is that these people are having a spotlight shone on them and are being asked to justify their form of worship. "Traditionis Custodes" has forced Latin Mass goers into this position. Latin Mass goers have to talk about the Latin Mass in relation to Novus Ordo due to "Traditionis Custodes" and through no fault of their own. If they are being asked to move away from one to the other then obviously they have to explain why they don't want to do that. Without "Traditionis Custodes," we

wouldn't be having this conversation and there would be no division. Surely all sides can agree to let everyone use whichever form they wish and respect it?

**Seán Paul Gaughan**

I've had the good fortune to attend Mass all over the world, in many countries and languages. In very few cases have I felt the Mass to be irreverent. And yes, I do love the Latin Mass, in the new rite, which we attended recently at St. Peter's during the World Meeting of Families. The holy Mass is beautiful in Latin, English, Spanish, French, Tamil, Hindi, Kinyarwanda, Swahili, etc. The faith of priests and Catholics all over the world and the music that they make is a wonderful thing to behold. I'm scandalized and fatigued by people who cannot see the reverence in this worship.

**Christauria Welland**

I love this article. Holding that one style of liturgy is reverent and others are not is at the seat of the division over Mass. If the music enhances the prayer, it is reverent. That's its purpose, whether an ancient Latin hymn or guitars and drums.

**Margaret Luke-Jones**

Don't get me wrong, a sung Latin Mass is beautiful. But I don't speak Latin. I find reverence needs attention; a language I don't speak limits that.

**Trent Shannon**

The Latin Mass is more formal, certainly, but reverence comes from your heart, not from whatever variety of outward expression you use. Any Mass is as reverential as you make it. You can't see the reverence of others.

**Seth Peterson**

Isn't reverence a gift of the Holy Spirit...who also gave the gift of speaking in tongues? Reverence isn't so much in the liturgy as it is in the people, and a gift is a gift. I'm going to pray for more of it.

**June Melchior**

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## The False Freedom of Canada's Euthanasia Regime

Casual observers may understandably believe that the law the Canadian government euphemistically refers to as “medical assistance in dying,” or MAID, is reserved for patients who have a terminal diagnosis and are experiencing unbearable suffering. But they would be mistaken.

In August, The Associated Press reported the story of Alan Nichols, a 61-year-old man with a history of depression who in 2019 was briefly hospitalized because it was thought he might be suicidal. Within a month of his hospital stay, he requested euthanasia and was killed despite protests from family members, who said he was not taking his medications and did not have the capacity to make the decision to die. “His application for euthanasia listed only one health condition as the reason for his request to die,” The A.P. reported: “hearing loss.”

Since Canada amended its criminal code in 2016 to legalize assisted suicide and medical assistance in dying, which the code previously recognized as “culpable homicide,” eligibility for the procedure has been expanded. The original law required natural death to be “reasonably foreseeable” and for the patient’s medical condition to be “grievous and irremediable.” In 2021 the requirement that death be reasonably foreseeable was dropped. Today, anyone over the age of 18 with a serious illness, disease or disability, even if they are otherwise healthy, can be euthanized. (Whether “mature minors” can consent to be killed is currently under consideration.)

Next year, Canada’s medicalized killing regime, already one of the most permissive in the world, is set to expand again. On March 17, 2023, euthanasia will be available to individuals suffer-

ing from mental illness, a move that critics warn will have disastrous consequences for Canada’s most vulnerable citizens. In 2020 a group of 50 religious leaders, including the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, warned: “Offering euthanasia or assisted suicide to those living with a disability or chronic illness, but who are not dying, suggests that living with a disability or illness is a fate worse than death. This will create certain pressures to accept such lethal procedures, putting the lives of these Canadians at greater risk in what is now a new regime that sees certain lives can be ended.”

But it is not only people of faith who object to the expansion of this “right” to those who do not face imminent death. In 2021 three human rights experts from the United Nations sent a formal letter to the Canadian government warning that the move would “potentially subject persons with disabilities to discrimination on account of such disability.” Tim Stainton, the director of the Canadian Institute for Inclusion and Citizenship at the University of British Columbia, has called MAID “the biggest existential threat to disabled people since the Nazis’ program in Germany in the 1930s.”

Madeline Li, a psychiatrist who has administered euthanasia and helped shape MAID protocols in Toronto, has told lawmakers that given the lack of standards for assessing mentally ill patients for euthanasia, and indeed the impossibility of knowing whether a psychiatric diagnosis is irremediable, it will be up to doctors—with their unconscious biases and imperfect value judgments—to decide which lives are worth living.

As the disturbing case of Mr. Nichols demonstrates, we will not have to

wait until March to see if the worst fears of those who have warned of euthanasia’s slippery slope will materialize. Already, doctors report hearing from low-income disabled or chronically ill patients who are seeking euthanasia because they cannot afford housing or adequate treatment with the social assistance they receive from the government. Patients with disabilities say that doctors have presented euthanasia as an option unprompted and in what can feel like a coercive manner, especially in the context of conversations about the cost of care. In all, 10,000 Canadians were euthanized in 2021, up from about 1,000 in 2016 and representing 3.3 percent of all deaths in the country that year.

There is a reason the Catholic Church often speaks of abortion and euthanasia together as life issues. Both are rooted in the same lie that human dignity is so conditioned upon personal autonomy that profound dependence on others for basic needs can make a life less valuable. The only way to make death “dignified” is to recognize the incalculable dignity of those who die by caring for their needs and accompanying them in their suffering. Every death, whether sudden or long expected, peaceful or accompanied by great suffering, is the end of a unique and precious life. It will come for us all, but, in the words of Pope Francis, “Life is a right, not death, which must be welcomed, not administered.”

As we have learned over the past year following the Supreme Court decision in the Dobbs case to overturn the Roe v. Wade decision, changing the law is only a first step and an insufficient response to the tragedy of abortion. The reason the language of “personal choice” is so effective, in debates over

both abortion and euthanasia, is that millions of our brothers and sisters feel trapped by their circumstances or are experiencing inescapable suffering.

But if a mother feels she has no choice but to end the life of her unborn child, that is not freedom. It is a failure of family, friends, neighbors, government and society to give her and her child both the material and relational support they need. If people suffering with anorexia or deep depression, or if grandparents living in isolation and poverty believe the world would be better off without them, choosing to end their lives is not freedom. It is a manifestation of a throwaway culture that would rather discard those who suffer than accompany them. Such a choice aims more to avoid the need to face the reality of suffering ourselves than to offer mercy to others.

In Canada, where the cost of living is rising faster than welfare spending and the health care system has been crippled by the Covid-19 pandemic, some may be tempted to see euthanasia, like many things that come from the evil spirit, as a solution to a seemingly intractable problem—and thus be distracted from or ignore the harder task of investing in palliative care, affordable housing and the mental health care system. But no individual or society gets a free pass when it comes to caring for our fellow citizens, especially the most vulnerable among us. How high must the death toll rise before Canada reconsiders the cost of its so-called compassion?

*If you are having thoughts of suicide, call the U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) or Talk Suicide Canada at 1-833-456-4566.*

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## A convert comments on the eucharistic revival

“I don’t know how to take the Eucharist as seriously as the church wants me to, when I don’t see the church taking it all that seriously.” These words were spoken to me by a man who entered the church last Pentecost. He belonged to one of several new families my parish welcomed into the Catholic Church that day. They were raised evangelical, and their coming into the church had nothing to do with me; they just showed up.

As friends together, believers in the Lord, they examined the Catholic faith for themselves. Their faith was real, is real; it is sober and informed.

That is why I was halted, haunted in a good way, by the comment put to me by this new brother in faith. He was talking about the Eucharist, the U.S. bishops’ eucharistic revival and all the Catholic chatter, good and bad, surrounding it. He was talking about the obvious-to-him widespread lack of spiritual preparation; the lackadaisical reception of Communion; politicians and others, both left and right, treating the Eucharist like it is theirs by right. He was talking about clergy, again both left and right, excusing that behavior; he was talking about how so often eucharistic sentimentality trumps eucharistic discipline.

We should reflect deeply on these pointed observations. We should listen. If our first instinct is to look down on this new Catholic, to patronizingly help him understand or to explain his concerns away, then we are obstinately not listening.

These new eyes have a lot to show us if only we will open ours. Of course, such concerns are not the end of the conversation, but they certainly should not be dismissed. When I speak to outsiders or newcomers, of-

ten their view of Catholic behavior is quite challenging. Which is good; we should be challenged. But sometimes I think we prefer to play the arrogant older sibling.

This is foolish. Given that so many converts come into the church precisely because they have discovered the Eucharist, it seems sensible we should listen to them especially. They have discovered the Eucharist biblically, something not many cradle Catholics can say. We shouldn’t too quickly call their observations naïve or latently Protestant, for it seems to me that the concerns many new Catholics have stem from the fact that their understanding of the Eucharist is more biblical and less cultural. They see what the Bible says. They see what we do. And they can tell the difference.

New converts to Catholicism can help the rest of us rediscover the Eucharist. I have often said the eucharistic revival is really just about whether we will let St. John and the Apostle Paul bother our Catholicism again. Biblically literate converts can help us read with fresh eyes and un-sentimental joy John’s Gospel and the First Letter to the Corinthians. They can help us find the fuller, biblical, moral meaning of the Eucharist. That is, if we’ll listen.

But veteran Catholics can return the favor, showing us the wisdom of their constancy. Of course, cradle Catholics love the Eucharist no less beautifully; often, though, they love it differently. For the religion of cradle Catholics is, more often than not, beautiful and deeply attractive.

As a convert myself, discovering the power of the faith of cradle Catholics has been for me one the church’s greatest gifts. It is what you find in

such Catholics, woven deeply into the generations of families, at moments of crisis or joy—by the hospital bed, at the graveside, at weddings, at baptisms. I tell you, we converts see that, and it impresses us, and we want that deep faith for ourselves and our children.

The point is we have something to give each other, converts and veteran Catholics. But we must listen to one another. Maybe that is another thing this eucharistic revival is about: whether we will let the Eucharist remind us we belong to each other. These ethical questions of discipline and eucharistic seriousness, among other matters, must be wrestled with. If we understand anything biblical at all about the Eucharist, we must admit they are real issues. The bishops raising these concerns are not wrong; it is just that they may need to learn how right they are.

Which, really, is all I am asking: that we remember to take new Catholics seriously, resisting the pull of a know-it-all Catholicism, even when they make uncomfortable comments, and perhaps especially then; and that we remember to listen to the stubborn wisdom of that Catholicism woven into the genes of those born and raised in the church, who speak of the faith the way they speak of themselves. Because that is the church: all of us, whether we like it or not.

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*The Rev. Joshua J. Whitfield is a priest of the Diocese of Dallas and pastoral administrator of St. Rita Catholic Community in Dallas, Tex. He is also a regular contributor to The Dallas Morning News. Twitter: @frjoshTX.*

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## As crisis in Haiti continues, is the Biden administration ready with a humane response?

By Kevin Clarke

A handful of barely seaworthy vessels were intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard off the coast of Florida over the Thanksgiving holiday. By the end of the weekend, the Coast Guard reported repatriating or diverting hundreds of Haitian migrants who had been seeking to reach the United States.

They were the first such interceptions at sea in weeks, but they could portend a wave of attempted crossings to the United States now that fuel deliveries in Haiti have been restored. In September, a criminal gang coalition known as G9 seized the Varreux Fuel Terminal in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, blocking fuel shipments and bringing the already embattled local economy to a standstill. The interruption in fuel deliveries also rendered asylum seekers, as well as human traffickers, unable to launch from Haitian ports.

But G9 finally relinquished control of the terminal on Nov. 4, and tanker trucks were quickly making deliveries of gasoline and diesel fuel again.

Jean Denis Saint-Félix, S.J., the Jesuit regional superior in Haiti, confirmed by email that gas stations in the capital have reopened. “It is not clear how it really happened,” he said. “According to many sources, some arrangements were made, as usual, between the government and the gangs.”

Although common people struggle to pay a fourfold leap in gas prices, Father Saint-Félix believes many are ready to leave. “The problem of insecurity is increasing,” he said. “Kidnapping and assassinations continue to rise.

“People are fishing for opportunities so that they can flee from the country,” Father Saint-Félix said. “This is the crisis within the crisis—professionals, students and families are leaving the country.”

### ‘Total Breakdown’

Haitians have good reason to escape their homeland in its



A Coast Guard boat crew follows an overloaded sailing vessel off Rodriguez Key, Fla., on Nov. 21. Rescue crews battled six to ten foot seas and 25 miles per hour winds to safely remove the people from the vessel.

U.S. Coast Guard photo by Lt. Robert Collins

current state. Bill Canny, the executive director of the U.S. bishops’ Department of Migration and Refugee Services, lived in Haiti for four years as the country director for Catholic Relief Services and has been regularly following conditions there. He describes what he is witnessing today as a “total breakdown...this is the worst it’s ever been.”

Volker Türk, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, told reporters on Nov. 3 that Haiti was experiencing the worst human rights and humanitarian conditions in decades. “People are being killed by firearms; they are dying because they do not have access to safe drinking water, food, health care; women are being gang raped with impunity,” Mr. Türk said.

Cholera, first introduced by United Nations troops sent into Haiti in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake in 2010, has returned. Many slum dwellers, trapped by gang violence, are forced to use tainted water sources. According to the United Nations, a record 4.7 million people in Haiti—nearly half of the population—face acute hunger.

Mr. Canny believes the humanitarian need is grave enough this time to transcend bipartisan squabbles in Congress.

“We’re committed to looking for nonpartisan solutions...to our immigrant issues,” he said. “I think that at times immigrants are being used as a political football.... We need to make sure we’re focused on these people as human beings who have the same rights as all of us.”

He said the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and its domestic humanitarian arm, Catholic Charities USA, were standing by ready to assist migrants at the Mexico border, where Haitian asylum seekers have been frequently turning up, and in resettlement offices around the country.

Because of the crisis conditions in Haiti, the United Nations has urged states receiving Haitian migrants and asy-



U.S. Coast Guard photo by Lt. Robert Collins

A Coast Guard Cutter *Escanaba* crew member feeds a child rescued off an overloaded sailing vessel near Rodriguez Key, Fla., on Nov. 21.

lum seekers not to repatriate them. “Haiti is on the verge of an abyss,” Mr. Türk said. “In this context, it is clear that the systematic violations of rights in Haiti do not currently allow for the safe, dignified and sustainable return of Haitians to the country.”

### Return to Guantánamo?

With gasoline and diesel flowing again, migrant advocates expect a new flotilla of Haitians desperate to reach the Florida coast or migrant trails in Mexico. Media reports detailing contingency planning by the Biden administration suggest that third-party states in the Caribbean and the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, may once again be put to use as “lily pads” for Haitian asylum seekers intercepted at sea.

Speaking for the U.S.C.C.B., Mr. Canny said the conference did not support the idea of any asylum seekers from Haiti—whether they land on U.S. shores or are intercepted at sea—“brought in and warehoused in congregate situations” like a camp at Guantánamo.

He said international and U.S. law requires that asylum claims be respected and applications quickly evaluated. He suspects that most migrants will be found to have legitimate claims based on Haiti’s disintegrating security conditions.

A spokesperson for the National Security Council declined in an email to **America** to confirm the possible use of U.S. facilities in Cuba to detain Haitian migrants. But, he said, “the U.S. government always does contingency planning out of an abundance of caution and for a wide range of potential scenarios. These contingencies for migration existed long before the Biden-Harris Administration.”

“We have not seen an increase in Haitian maritime migration, and no decisions have been made,” he added.

With more than 300,000 residents of Haitian descent, the Archdiocese of Miami hosts the largest Haitian community in the United States, and its archbishop, Thomas Wenski, has been especially attentive to the plight of Hai-

tian immigrants. In an email response to questions from **America**, he said: “I think first and foremost, we must follow the law of the land and implement screenings to ensure that individuals facing persecution in Haiti will not be returned summarily,” adding, “A short- or long-term stay in Guantánamo does not address in any positive way the rights or the dignity of the Haitian people.”

According to Archbishop Wenski, Haitian asylum seekers have historically faced a double standard in trying to make their claim for refugee protection. “This protection should be provided in a safe environment,” he said, “on our shores, where there is adequate access to legal representation and to family and/or community support systems.”

### A Way Forward?

Archbishop Wenski urged that new arrivals from Haiti should be quickly afforded the right to work. Providing work authorization, he said, is a win “for our own economy, which desperately needs workers,” a win “for the asylum seekers, who want nothing more than the ability to sustain themselves and contribute to the economy” and a win “for controlled migration as an economically stable Haitian community here in the U.S. sends remittances home to their family in Haiti, reducing the need to migrate.”

“This last point, which seeks to address the root causes of migration, is the way forward,” Archbishop Wenski said. “The issues in Haiti must be addressed in a sensitive but meaningful way to rebuild Haiti and allow for a functioning government which can adequately address the gangs who now run civil society.”

Haiti may need help from U.N. or other multilateral forces to do so, according to Father Saint-Félix.

Haitian police are “unable to tackle the security crisis,” he said, without “good and sincere” international assistance. But two months after the Biden administration first proposed the deployment of a rapid reaction military force to Haiti, diplomatic momentum for the plan to intercede in Haiti against its heavily armed gangs is fading.

Haitians are hoping for a return to something closer to normalcy, but Father Saint-Félix finds himself wondering how the government will prevent gangs from taking over fuel terminals again. How long will the gas stations stay open this time?

“People are tired, hopeless,” Father Saint-Félix said, “but they want to live, they are eager to be able to renew their activities and provide for their families.”

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

## How Pope Francis might track progress against global poverty

In 2015 Pope Francis addressed the United Nations about global poverty, a cause that would come to define his papacy. He called for both material and spiritual support for the world's poor, meeting people's survival needs while empowering them to become leaders and changemakers.

"To enable these real men and women to escape from extreme poverty, we must allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny," he said. "Integral human development and the full exercise of human dignity cannot be imposed."

The seven areas that Francis called the world to improve on—access to the material demands of food, water, shelter and employment, as well as the spiritual demands of education, civil liberties and religious freedom—caught the attention of Henry Schwalbenberg, director of Fordham University's Department of International Political Economy and Development. Together with his students, he asked: How is the world doing on those seven fronts?

"What we did is get together to figure out how we can measure this and aggregate it, and [we came] up with a measurement of human well-being," Mr. Schwalbenberg told **America**.

Thus began the Fordham Francis Index, now in its sixth year of comprehensively documenting material and spiritual poverty around the world. The F.F.I. for 2022 was released on Nov. 11 during a United Nations event marking the World Day of the Poor.

This year Mr. Schwalbenberg and his team calculated the highest poverty score since the study began, finding that 26 percent of the world population lives in poverty. Increased rates of malnourishment, greater discrimination against women and widening restrictions on religious freedom contributed to the higher rate of material and spiritual poverty.

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The hands of a homeless man are disinfected as meals are distributed in Rio de Janeiro in April 2020.

CNS photo/Lucas Landau, Reuters

### Pandemic in 2020 thwarts years of progress on absolute poverty

Graph shows number of people (in millions) making less than \$3.20 per day



### THE 2022 FORDHAM FRANCIS INDEX FOUND THAT:

**10 PERCENT** OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION, ABOUT 787 MILLION, COULD NOT ACCESS CLEAN WATER.

**9 PERCENT**, ABOUT 710 MILLION PEOPLE, WERE MALNOURISHED.

**17 PERCENT**, ABOUT 1.3 BILLION PEOPLE, LIVED IN SUBSTANDARD HOUSING.

**13 PERCENT** OF THE WORLD'S ADULT POPULATION, ABOUT 776 MILLION PEOPLE, WERE ILLITERATE.

**23 PERCENT** OF THE WORLD'S LABOR FORCE, ABOUT 804 MILLION PEOPLE, WERE WITHOUT WORK OR WERE EMPLOYED AT A WAGE LOWER THAN \$3.20 PER DAY.

**51 PERCENT** OF WOMEN IN THE SURVEYED COUNTRIES FACED DISCRIMINATION.

**59 PERCENT** OF THE WORLD—NEARLY 4.5 BILLION PEOPLE—LIVED IN COUNTRIES "WHERE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS SEVERELY RESTRICTED."

Source: Fordham's Pope Francis Global Poverty Index ([fordham.edu/info/26662/fordham\\_francis\\_index](http://fordham.edu/info/26662/fordham_francis_index)).

## How much 'loss and damage' can Africa take?

*A new fund finally promises to deliver compensation for climate change disasters*

Summer heat waves in Africa's north have caused massive economic losses. Drought in East Africa has precipitated the region's worst food crisis in a generation, while flooding has wreaked havoc in western and southern Africa. Increasing demands on Africa's water resources and their growing unpredictability have fueled regional conflict and migration.

All that misery and disruption encouraged African leaders to become more assertive about mitigation and assistance commitments made by Western states in their discussions at the United Nations' latest Conference of the Parties of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. COP27 was convened in November in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

The big climate summit ended this time with a success for African states and other poor nations around the world that are grappling with the real-time fallout from climate change: the creation of a new fund to account for "loss and damage" because of extreme weather.

It is the first time a mechanism to be funded by the world's wealthy nations has been accepted. It should mean emerging economies, which have contributed the least to the problem of climate change, will receive compensation from affluent nations that have done the most to propel climate change from global warming.

According to the global economic analysis group CDP, China alone produces 23 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions; the United States, 19 percent; and the European Union, 13 percent. Africa accounts for just 3.8 percent of those emissions, the least of any inhabited continent.

Leonard Chiti, S.J., Jesuit provincial for Southern Africa, participated at Sharm El-Sheikh as a member of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund delegation. He welcomed the addition of dialogue around loss and damage to the conference agenda.

"We need a vehicle to mobilize, disburse and account for the money that is now being pledged by developing nations," he told *America*. "We should be clear though that this money is not charity but compensation for the negative impact of climate largely caused by the pollution from developed nations."

In October the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar hosted a series of dialogues in anticipation of COP27. Its members warned then that climate justice cannot be achieved without land justice.

"Natural resources and the ecosystem [are] the main sources of subsistence for the people in Africa," the bishops said, "but many [do] not have access to land due to



Vanessa Nakate, of Uganda, left, joins in a Fridays for Future protest at the COP27 U.N. Climate Summit on Nov. 11 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

perverse commercial relations and ownership." The statement listed multinational companies it said were involved in land grabs in Congo, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, Uganda and Tanzania.

Cardinal Ambongo Besungu, O.F.M. Cap., archbishop of Kinshasa, said that the bishops are "denouncing false solutions [to the climate crisis] that deprive local communities of their livelihoods, their land rights and tenure. We join communities in mobilizing against ill-advised large-scale land acquisition investments and their struggle against land grabs."

A professor of systematic theology and deputy principal of academics at Hekima University College in Nairobi, Kenya, Peter Knox, S.J., noted a "glaring irony" in the discussion conducted among African delegates at COP27. "As African states demand that first world countries pay \$100 billion for climate assistance, Uganda and Tanzania are at the same time going ahead with an East African crude oil pipeline.

"The governments of these countries seem to be trying to have their cake and eat it, too," he said.

In September, European Union officials requested a halt to the project, citing its potential to lead to human rights and ecological abuses. The Ugandan and Tanzanian governments rejected this call. Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, said African states have the right to use their fossil fuel riches to develop their economies just as rich nations have done for decades.

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

## Holy Land Christians contemplate their future as new Netanyahu government takes shape

By the beginning of December, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu was still converting a coalition of religious and conservative hardliners into what could become the most politically and socially extreme government Israel has ever seen.

The former Nazareth city council member Dr. Rana Zaher-Karayanni called the outcome of the November elections in Israel “catastrophic for many segments of Israeli society,” including women, the L.G.B.T. community, immigrants and asylum seekers. Politically, Palestinians inside Israel

and in the Palestinian territories will pay the heaviest price, she said, noting that settler violence and intimidation in Palestinian communities has already increased following the election results.

In addition to his own conservative Likud party, Mr. Netanyahu’s bloc includes ultra-Orthodox religious parties and the Otzma Yehudit and Religious Zionist parties of the far-right politicians Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, respectively. Both men espouse a far-right form of religious nationalism that has raised concerns in Israel and internationally because of their extremist, racist and homophobic views.

Many fear increased tensions and an escalation in violent confrontations as the new government formulates its agenda.

“People are now of two opinions,” said Wadie Abunassar, a prominent Catholic political analyst from Haifa. Some believe that despite the extreme rhetoric, the new government will “dare to do only minor things because of international pressure” and protections offered by Israeli civil law.

Others in Israeli society, he said, are fearful about what the Netanyahu government could mean over the long term. Many of the Knesset members who make it up represent radical right-wing ideologies that seem intent on fanning the flames of future Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “They are



not only frightening Palestinians and Arabs, they are also frightening many Israeli Jews,” Mr. Abunassar said.

Israeli society is already fraught with many political and social divisions. Yet former red lines the presumptive Netanyahu government would be willing to cross, according to Mr. Abunassar, include a change in the status quo at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem—the site of the two biblical Jewish temples that is considered sacred by Muslims and Jews alike—by allowing Jewish prayer at the compound, for example. A decision like that could potentially lead to violent protests from Palestinians and Israeli Arabs.

A recent meeting between the church hierarchy in Jerusalem and members of the diplomatic corps highlighted ongoing concerns among Christians in Israel and the West Bank. They include, according to Joseph Hazboun, regional director at the Pontifical Mission Jerusalem Field Office, acquiring permits and visas for clergy and volunteers, family reunification in marriages between Palestinians living in the territories and those living in Israel and East Jerusalem, and the continuing lack of respect for Christian clergy among some segments of the Jewish population in Jerusalem. These are the issues the Christian community will continue to raise with the new government, he said, whatever its ideological makeup.

“We expect settlement construction, although it has



Itamar Ben-Gvir, an Israeli far-right lawmaker and head of the Jewish Power Party, visits Hatikva Market in Tel Aviv during his campaign.

AP Photo/Oded Balilty, File

never stopped, to pick up its pace in a faster and broader way,” he said. “But the most challenging aspect for us is [receiving] visas for clergy and [Christian] volunteers, which has become more difficult recently.”

The prospect of a new, extreme political reality in Jerusalem, he said, only means the continuation of an already difficult challenge for Christian leaders—convincing Christians to remain steadfast in the Holy Land. Many, especially young people and families, are finding it increasingly difficult to rationalize remaining in Israel, he said.

“It does not look promising for the near future,” Mr. Hazboun said. “To be honest, this is our biggest headache and challenge: to help the Palestinians—especially the Christians—to understand the value of their staying here in the land where Christianity began. That is where our biggest efforts are in terms of programs, not because of the elections, but because of the ongoing political and economic hardships.”

Judith Sudilovsky contributes from Jerusalem. Twitter: @jsudireports.



Gleison De Paula Souza

portalecce.it

## GOODNEWS: Pope Francis appoints a father of two to No. 2 spot at Vatican family office

Pope Francis appointed Gleison De Paula Souza, 38, a husband and father of two children from Brazil, as the new secretary of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life on Nov. 17.

With this appointment, the pope continues to implement the reform of the Roman Curia that he outlined in the constitution “Praedicate Evangelium.” In that text, Francis significantly separated the power of priestly orders from that of governance in the Roman Curia, opening the door for the involvement of laypeople in roles of greater responsibility.

Mr. De Paula Souza becomes the number two official of this Vatican dicastery, where Kevin Farrell, an Irish-born American Cardinal, holds the top position as prefect. The appointment means that now three of the four senior positions in this Vatican office are held by laypeople. In November 2017, Pope Francis appointed two Italian women, who are also mothers, as undersecretaries—Professor Gabriella Gambino and Dr. Linda Ghisoni.

He did so at the proposal of Cardinal Farrell, a longtime advocate for the appointment of laypeople to top positions in this dicastery. Indeed, in an interview on June 20, the cardinal said, “I believe I could be the last cleric in charge of this dicastery.”

Mr. De Paula Souza was born in the Brazilian state of Minas Geiras on May 14, 1984. As a young man, he joined the order of the Sons of Divine Providence in 2005 and came to Rome to study. After gaining a bachelor’s degree in theology from the Pontifical Salesian University in 2015, he decided to leave the order. He was teaching religion at an Italian high school in Galatina, near the city of Lecce, at the time of his appointment to the Vatican dicastery.

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



Pope Francis speaks with the editors and staff of **America**.

All photos by Antonello Nusca/America Media

# 'Polarization is not Catholic'

***In an exclusive interview, Pope Francis discusses the American church, international relations and women in the church***



*Editor's Note: On Nov. 22, 2022, five representatives of America Media interviewed Pope Francis at his residence at Santa Marta at the Vatican. Matt Malone, S.J., the departing editor in chief of America, was joined by Sam Sawyer, S.J., the incoming editor in chief; executive editor Kerry Weber; Gerard O'Connell, America's Vatican correspondent; and Gloria Purvis, host of "The Gloria Purvis Podcast." They discussed a wide range of topics with the pope, including polarization in the U.S. church, racism, the war in Ukraine, the Vatican's relations with China and church teaching on the ordination of women. The interview was conducted in Spanish with the assistance of a translator. A transcript of the Spanish text can be found at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).*

Pope Francis: Thank you for coming!

***Matt Malone, S.J.: Holy Father, America magazine was founded by the Jesuits in 1909, and we've been published continuously since. This is our first opportunity to speak face to face with a pope, and we're very grateful. The first thing that is on the mind of our readers, that surprises them, is that you always seem joyful, happy, even amid crises and troubles. What is it that makes you so joyful, so peaceful and happy in your ministry?***

I didn't know that I am always like that. I am joyful when I am with people—always. One of the things I find most difficult as pope is not being able to walk on the street with the people, because here one cannot go out; it is impossible to walk on the street. But I would not

say that I am happy because I am healthy, or because I eat well, or because I sleep well, or because I pray a great deal. I am happy because I feel happy, God makes me happy. I don't have anything to blame on the Lord, not even when bad things happen to me. Nothing. Throughout my life, he has always guided me on his path, sometimes in difficult moments, but there is always the assurance that one does not walk alone. I have that assurance. He is always at my side. One has one's faults, also one's sins; I go to confession every 15 days—I do not know, that is just how I am.

***Sam Sawyer, S.J.: Holy Father, in your speech to the U.S. Congress seven years ago, you warned against "the simplistic reductionism which sees only good or evil, or the righteous and sinners" and you also called for "a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperating generously for the common good." Yet since your speech to Congress we have seen not only political polarization grow deeper, also polarization within the life of the church. How can the church respond to polarization within its own life and help respond to polarization in society?***

Polarization is not Catholic. A Catholic cannot think either-or (*aut-aut*) and reduce everything to polarization. The essence of what is Catholic is both-and (*et-et*). The Catholic unites the good and the not-so-good. There is only one people of God. When there is polarization, a divisive mentality arises, which privileges some and leaves others behind. The Catholic always harmonizes differences. If we see how the Holy Spirit



Matt Malone, S.J., former editor in chief of **America**, listens to Pope Francis.

acts; it first causes disorder: Think of the morning of Pentecost, and the confusion and mess (*lío*) it created there, and then it brings about harmony. The Holy Spirit in the church does not reduce everything to just one value; rather, it harmonizes opposing differences. That is the Catholic spirit. The more harmony there is between the differences and the opposites the more Catholic it is. The more polarization there is, the more one loses the Catholic spirit and falls into a sectarian spirit. This [saying] is not mine, but I repeat it: what is Catholic is not either-or, but is both-and, combining differences. And this is how we understand the Catholic way of dealing with sin, which is not puritanical: saints and sinners, both together.

It is interesting to search for the roots of what is Catholic in the choices that Jesus made. Jesus had four possibilities: either to be a Pharisee, or to be a Sadducee, or to be an Essene, or to be a Zealot. These were the four parties, the four options at that time. And Jesus was not a Pharisee, nor a Sadducee, nor an Essene, nor a Zealot. He was something different. And if we look at the deviations in the history of the church we can see that they are always on the side of the Pharisees, of the Sadducees, of the Essenes, or the Zealots. Jesus went beyond all this by proposing the Beatitudes, which are also something different.

The temptation in the church was always to follow in these four paths. In the United States you have a Catholi-

cism that is particular to the United States—that is normal. But you also have some ideological Catholic groups.

***Kerry Weber: Holy Father, in 2021, we conducted a survey asking Catholics [in the United States] who they trusted to be their leaders and guides on matters of faith and morals. Of all the groups we listed, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops was found to be the least trustworthy; only 20 percent found it to be “very trustworthy.” Catholics ranked their own local bishop higher; around 29 percent described them as “very trustworthy.” But the majority of Catholics seem to have lost faith in the bishops’ conference’s ability to offer moral guidance. How can the U.S. Catholic bishops regain the trust of American Catholics?***

The question is good because it speaks about the bishops. But I think it is misleading to speak of the relationship between Catholics and the bishops’ conference. The bishops’ conference is not the pastor; the pastor is the bishop. So one runs the risk of diminishing the authority of the bishop when you look only to the bishops’ conference. The bishops’ conference is there to bring together the bishops, to work together, to discuss issues, to make pastoral plans. But each bishop is a pastor. Let us not dissolve the power of the bishop by reducing it to the power of the bishops’ con-



# 'Jesus did not create bishops' conferences. Jesus created bishops, and each bishop is pastor of his people.'

ference. Because at that level, these tendencies compete, more on the right, more on the left, more here, more there, and anyway [the bishops' conference] does not have the flesh-and-blood responsibility like that of a bishop with his people, a pastor with his people.

Jesus did not create bishops' conferences. Jesus created bishops, and each bishop is pastor of his people. On this, I recall a fifth-century author who, in my judgment, has written the best profile of a bishop. It is St. Augustine in his treatise "De Pastoribus."

Therefore, the question is: What is the relation of the bishop with his people? Permit me to mention a bishop about whom I do not know if he is conservative, or if he is progressive, if he is of the right or of the left, but he is a good pastor: [Mark] Seitz, [bishop of El Paso,] on the border with Mexico. He is a man who grasps all the contradictions of that place and carries them forward as a pastor. I do not say the others are not good, but this is one I know. You have some good bishops who are more on the right, some good bishops who are more on the left, but they are more bishops than ideologues; they are more pastors than ideologues. That is the key.

The answer to your question is: The bishops' conference is an organization meant to assist and unite, a symbol of unity. But the grace of Jesus Christ is in the relationship between the bishop and his people, his diocese.

**Gloria Purvis: Holy Father, abortion is a heavily politicized issue in the United States. We know it is wrong.**

*And the United States Supreme Court recently ruled that there is no constitutional right to abortion. However, it still seems to plague the church in the sense that it separates us. Should the bishops prioritize abortion in relation to other social justice issues?*

On abortion, I can tell you these things, which I've said before. In any book of embryology it is said that shortly before one month after conception the organs and the DNA are already delineated in the tiny fetus, before the mother even becomes aware. Therefore, there is a living human being. I do not say a person, because this is debated, but a living human being. And I raise two questions: Is it right to get rid of a human being to resolve a problem? Second question: Is it right to hire a "hit man" to resolve a problem? The problem arises when this reality of killing a human being is transformed into a political question, or when a pastor of the church uses political categories.

Each time a problem loses the pastoral dimension (*pastoralidad*), that problem becomes a political problem and becomes more political than pastoral. I mean, let no one hijack this truth, which is universal. It does not belong to one party or another. It is universal. When I see a problem like this one, which is a crime, become strongly, intensely political, there is a failure of pastoral care in approaching this problem. Whether in this question of abortion, or in other problems, one cannot lose sight of the pastoral dimension: A bishop is a pastor, a diocese is the holy people of God with their pastor. We cannot deal with [abortion] as if it is only a civil matter.

**Gerard O'Connell: The question was if the bishops' conference should present the fight against abortion as the number one problem, while all the rest are secondary.**

My response is that this is a problem the bishops' conference has to resolve within itself. What interests me is the relationship of the bishop with the people, which is sacramental. The other [issue] is organizational, and bishops' conferences at times get it wrong (*equivocan*). It is enough to look at the Second World War and at certain choices that some bishops' conferences made, which were wrong from a political or social viewpoint. Sometimes a majority wins, but maybe the majority is not right.

In other words, let this be clear: A bishops' conference has, ordinarily, to give its opinion on faith and traditions, but above all on diocesan administration and so on. The sacramental part of the pastoral ministry is in the relation-



ship between the pastor and the people of God, between the bishop and his people. And this cannot be delegated to the bishops' conference. The conference helps to organize meetings, and these are very important; but for a bishop, [being] pastor is most important. What is most important, I would say essential, is the sacramental. Obviously, each bishop must seek fraternity with the other bishops, that is important. But what is essential is the relationship with his people.

***Sam Sawyer, S.J.: Holy Father, the sexual abuse crisis has greatly damaged both the church's credibility and its effort at evangelization. Recent revelations of abuse committed by bishops, who have been allowed to retire quietly, have increased concerns about the church's transparency in the handling of abuse cases, especially when it involves bishops. What more can the Vatican do to improve in this aspect of transparency?***

Some history. Until the Boston crisis, when everything was uncovered, the church acted by moving an abuser from his place; covering up, as often happens in families today. The problem of sexual abuse is extremely serious in society. When I held the meeting of the presidents of the bishops'

conferences three and a half years ago, I asked for official statistics and [I learned that] 42 percent to 46 percent of abuses occur in the family home or in the neighborhood. After that in prevalence comes the world of sport, then that of education, and 3 percent [of abusers] are Catholic priests. One could say, "That is good, we are few." No! If there had been only one case, it would have been monstrous. The abuse of minors is one of the most monstrous things. The practice, which is still maintained in some families and institutions today, was to cover it up. The church made the decision to not cover up [anymore]. From there progress was made in judicial processes, the creation of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

Here, a great [example] is Cardinal [Seán] O'Malley of Boston, who had the mindset to institutionalize [the protection of minors] within the church. When honest people see how the church is taking responsibility for this monstrosity, they understand that the church is one thing while the abusers who are being punished by the church are another. The leader in taking these decisions was Benedict XVI. It is a "new" problem in its manifestation, but eternal in that it has always existed. In the pagan world they commonly used children for pleasure. One of the things that most worries me is child pornography. These are filmed

Gerard O'Connell, Kerry Weber, Matt Malone, S.J., Gloria Purvis and Sam Sawyer, S.J., met with Pope Francis in Casa Santa Marta at the Vatican.

live. In which country are these films made? What are the authorities of these countries doing that allows this to happen? It is criminal. Criminal!

The church takes responsibility for its own sin, and we go forward, sinners, trusting in the mercy of God. When I travel, I generally receive a delegation of victims of abuse. An anecdote about this: When I was in Ireland, people who had been abused asked for an audience. There were six or seven of them. At the beginning, they were a little angry, and they were right. I said to them: "Look, let us do something. Tomorrow, I have to give a homily; why don't we prepare it together, about this problem?" And that gave rise to a beautiful phenomenon because what had started as a protest was transformed into something positive and, together, we all created the homily for the next day. That was a positive thing [that happened] in Ireland, one of the most heated situations I have had to face. What should the church do, then? Keep moving forward with seriousness and with shame. Did I answer your question?

***S.S.: The one thing I would follow up on is this: The U.S. church has made a great advance in dealing with abuse when it happens with priests. However, it seems there is less transparency when a bishop is accused, and that is worrying.***

Yes, and here I believe we have to go forward with equal transparency. If there is less transparency, it is a mistake.

***Gerard O'Connell: Holy Father, about Ukraine: Many in the United States have been confused by your seeming unwillingness to directly criticize Russia for its aggression against Ukraine, preferring instead to speak more generally of the need for an end to war, an end to mercenary activity rather than Russian attacks, and to the traffic in arms. How would you explain your position on this war to Ukrainians, or Americans and others who support Ukraine?***

When I speak about Ukraine, I speak of a people who are martyred. If you have a martyred people, you have someone who martyrs them. When I speak about Ukraine, I speak about the cruelty because I have much information about the cruelty of the troops that come in. Generally, the cruelest are perhaps those who are of Russia but are not of the Russian tradition, such as the Chechens, the Buryati and so on. Certainly, the one who invades is the Russian state. This is very clear. Sometimes I try not to specify so

as not to offend and rather condemn in general, although it is well known whom I am condemning. It is not necessary that I put a name and surname.

On the second day of the war, I went to the Russian embassy [to the Holy See], an unusual gesture because the pope never goes to an embassy. And there I said to the ambassador to tell [Vladimir] Putin that I was willing to travel on condition that he allowed me a tiny window to negotiate. [Sergey] Lavrov, the foreign minister at a high level, replied with a very nice letter from which I understood that for the time being it was not necessary.

I spoke to President Zelensky three times by phone. And I work in general with receiving lists of prisoners, both civilian prisoners and military prisoners, and I have these sent to the Russian government, and the response has always been very positive.

I also thought of traveling, but I made the decision: If I travel, I go to Moscow and to Kyiv, to both, not to one place only. And I never gave the impression that I was covering up the aggression. I received here in this hall, three or four times, a delegation from the Ukrainian government. And we work together.

Why do I not name Putin? Because it is not necessary; it is already known. However, sometimes people latch onto a detail. Everyone knows my stance, with Putin or without Putin, without naming him.

Some cardinals went to Ukraine: Cardinal Czerny went twice; [Archbishop] Gallagher, who is responsible for [relations with] states, spent four days in Ukraine, and I received a report of what he saw; and Cardinal Krajewski went four times. He goes with his van loaded with things and spent last Holy Week in Ukraine. I mean the presence of the Holy See with the cardinals is very strong, and I am in continual contact with people in positions of responsibility.

And I should like to mention that there is in these days the anniversary of the Holodomor, the genocide that Stalin committed against the Ukrainians [in 1932-33]. I believe it is appropriate to mention it as a historical antecedent of the [present] conflict.

The position of the Holy See is to seek peace and to seek an understanding. The diplomacy of the Holy See is moving in this direction and, of course, is always willing to mediate.

***Gloria Purvis: In the history of the church in the United States, Black Catholics have largely been neglected. It is our experience in the church, but we stayed because we believed. Now, a recent survey has shown that a large***



Sam Sawyer, S.J., the editor in chief of *America*, listens to Pope Francis.

***number of Black Catholics are leaving the church. Racism is important to us, but other Catholics do not see it as a priority. After George Floyd's murder more people have left the church because of the neglect within the church around the theme of racism. What would you say now to Black Catholics in the United States who experienced racism and at the same time experience a deafness within the church for calls for racial justice? How can you encourage them?***

I would say to them that I am close to the suffering they are experiencing, which is a racial suffering. And [in this situation], those who should in some way be close to them are the local bishops. The church has bishops of African American descent.

***G.P.: Yes, but most of us go to parishes where the priests are not African American, and most of the other people are not African American, and they appear not to have sensitivity for our suffering. Many times they ignore our suffering. So how can we encourage Black Catholics to stay?***

I believe what is important here is pastoral development, be it of the bishops or of the laity, a mature pastoral development. Yes, we see the discrimination, and I understand that they do not want to go. Sometimes in other countries the same happens in these sorts of situations. But this has a very ancient history, much older than your history [in the

U.S.], and it has not been resolved. The bishops and the pastoral workers have to help to resolve it in an evangelical way.

I would say to African American Catholics that the pope is aware of their suffering, that he loves them very much, and that they should resist and not walk away. Racism is an intolerable sin against God. The church, the pastors and lay people must continue fighting to eradicate it and for a more just world.

I take this opportunity to say that I also love, very much, the Indigenous peoples of the United States. And I do not forget the Latinos, who are very many there now.

***Kerry Weber: Holy Father, as you know, women have contributed and can contribute much to the life of the church. You have appointed many women at the Vatican, which is great. Nevertheless, many women feel pain because they cannot be ordained priests. What would you say to a woman who is already serving in the life of the church, but who still feels called to be a priest?***

It is a theological problem. I think that we amputate the being of the church if we consider only the way of the ministerial dimension (*ministerialidad*) of the life of the church. The way is not only [ordained] ministry. The church is woman. The church is a spouse. We have not developed a theology of women that reflects this. The ministerial dimension, we can say, is that of the Petrine church. I am using a category of theologians. The Petrine principle is that of ministry. But there is another principle that



# 'The Catholic unites the good and the not-so-good. There is only one people of God.'

is still more important, about which we do not speak, that is the Marian principle, which is the principle of femininity (*femineidad*) in the church, of the woman in the church, where the church sees a mirror of herself because she is a woman and a spouse. A church with only the Petrine principle would be a church that one would think is reduced to its ministerial dimension, nothing else. But the church is more than a ministry. It is the whole people of God. The church is woman. The church is a spouse. Therefore, the dignity of women is mirrored in this way.

There is a third way: the administrative way. The ministerial way, the ecclesial way, let us say, Marian, and the administrative way, which is not a theological thing, it is something of normal administration. And, in this aspect, I believe we have to give more space to women. Here in the Vatican, the places where we have put women are functioning better. For example, in the Council for the Economy, where there are six cardinals and six laypersons. Two years ago, I appointed five women among the six laypersons, and that was a revolution. The deputy governor of the Vatican is a woman. When a woman enters politics or manages things, generally she does better. Many economists are women, and they are renewing the economy in a constructive way.

So there are three principles, two theological and one administrative. The Petrine principle, which is the ministerial dimension, but the church cannot function only with that one. The Marian principle, which is that of the spousal church, the church as spouse, the church as woman. And the administrative principle, which is not theological, but is rather that of administration, about what one does.

And why can a woman not enter ordained ministry? It is because the Petrine principle has no place for that. Yes,

one has to be in the Marian principle, which is more important. Woman is more, she looks more like the church, which is mother and spouse. I believe that we have too often failed in our catechesis when explaining these things. We have relied too much on the administrative principle to explain it, which in the long term does not work.

This is an abbreviated explanation, but I wanted to highlight the two theological principles; the Petrine principle and the Marian principle that make up the church. Therefore, that the woman does not enter into the ministerial life is not a deprivation. No. Your place is that which is much more important and which we have yet to develop, the catechesis about women in the way of the Marian principle.

And on this, about the charism of women, allow me [to share] a personal experience. To ordain a priest one asks for information from persons who know the candidate. The best information that I have received, the right information, was either from my brother coadjutor [bishops], or brother laypersons who are not priests, or from women. They have a nose (*olfato*), an ecclesial sense to see if this man is or is not suitable for the priesthood.

Another anecdote: Once I asked for information about a very bright candidate for the priesthood. I asked his professors, companions and also the people in the parish where he went. And [the latter] gave me a very negative report, written by a woman, saying, "He is a danger, this young man won't work out." So, I phoned her and said, "Why do you say that?" And she said: "I don't know why, but if he were my son, I would not let him be ordained; he is lacking something." So I followed her advice and said to the candidate, "Look, this year you won't be ordained. Let's wait." Three months later this man had a crisis and left. The woman is a mother and sees the mystery of the church more clearly than we men. For this reason, the advice of a woman is very important, and the decision of a woman is better.

***Matt Malone, S.J.: In the United States, there are those who interpret your criticisms of market capitalism as criticisms of the United States. There are even some who think you may be a socialist, or they call you a communist, or they call you a Marxist. You, of course, have always said you are following the Gospel. But how do you respond to those who say that what the church and you have to say about economics is not important?***

I always ask myself, where does this labeling come from? For example, when we were returning from Ireland on the

“I am much enlightened by the Beatitudes,” said Pope Francis, “but above all by the standard by which we will be judged: Matthew 25.”



plane, a letter from an American prelate erupted that said all kinds of things about me. I try to follow the Gospel. I am much enlightened by the Beatitudes, but above all by the standard by which we will be judged: Matthew 25. “I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was in prison, and you visited me. I was sick and you cared for me.” Is Jesus a communist, then? The problem that is behind this, that you have rightly touched on, is the socio-political reduction of the Gospel message. If I see the Gospel in a sociological way only, yes, I am a communist, and so too is Jesus. Behind these Beatitudes and Matthew 25 there is a message that is Jesus’ own. And that is to be Christian. The communists stole some of our Christian values. [Laughter.] Some others, they made a disaster out of them.

***Gerard O’Connell: Speaking about communism, you have been criticized over China. You signed an agreement with China on the nomination of bishops. Some people, and you yourself, have said the result is not great, but it is a result. Some people in the church and in politics say you are paying a high price for maintaining***

***silence on human rights [in China].***

It is not a matter of speaking or silence. That is not the reality. The reality is to dialogue or not to dialogue. And one dialogs up to the point that is possible.

For me, the greatest model I find in the modern period of the church is [then-Archbishop] Casaroli. There is a book called *The Martyrdom of Patience* that is all about the work he did in Eastern Europe. The popes—I mean Paul VI and John XXIII—sent him above all to the countries of Central Europe to try to re-establish relations during the period of communism, during the Cold War. And this man dialogued with governments, slowly, and he did what he could and slowly was able to re-establish the Catholic hierarchy in those countries. For example—I think of one case—it was not always possible to appoint the best person as archbishop in the capital, but instead the one that was possible according to the government.

Dialogue is the way of the best diplomacy. With China I have opted for the way of dialogue. It is slow, it has its failures, it has its successes, but I cannot find another way. And



Gerard O'Connell, Gloria Purvis, Kerry Weber, Pope Francis, Matt Malone, S.J., and Sam Sawyer, S.J., stand below an image of Our Lady Undoer of Knots.

I want to underline this: The Chinese people are a people of great wisdom and deserve my respect and my admiration. I take off my hat to them. And for this reason I try to dialogue, because it is not that we are going to conquer people. No! There are Christians there. They have to be cared for, so that they may be good Chinese and good Christians.

There is another beautiful story about how the church carries out this apostolate. It's about the last time Cardinal Casaroli saw John XXIII. He gave a report on how the negotiations were going in these countries. Casaroli used to go on weekends to the prison for minors at Casal del Marmo to visit the young people. At the audience with John XXIII, they spoke about the problem of this country, that country and the other. Difficult decisions had to be taken, for example, to get [Cardinal József] Mindszenty to come to Rome; he was then in the U.S. Embassy in Budapest. It was a problem, a hard decision, but Casaroli had prepared [the transfer]. And when he was about to leave, John XXIII asked him, "Eminence, one small matter: Do you still go on weekends to this prison for minors?" [When Casaroli replied,] 'Yes,' [the pope said,] "Give them my

greetings and do not abandon them!" In the hearts of these two great men, it was as important to go to the prison and visit the young people there as it was to establish relations with Prague, Budapest or with Vienna. These are the great ones. This gives a full picture of them.

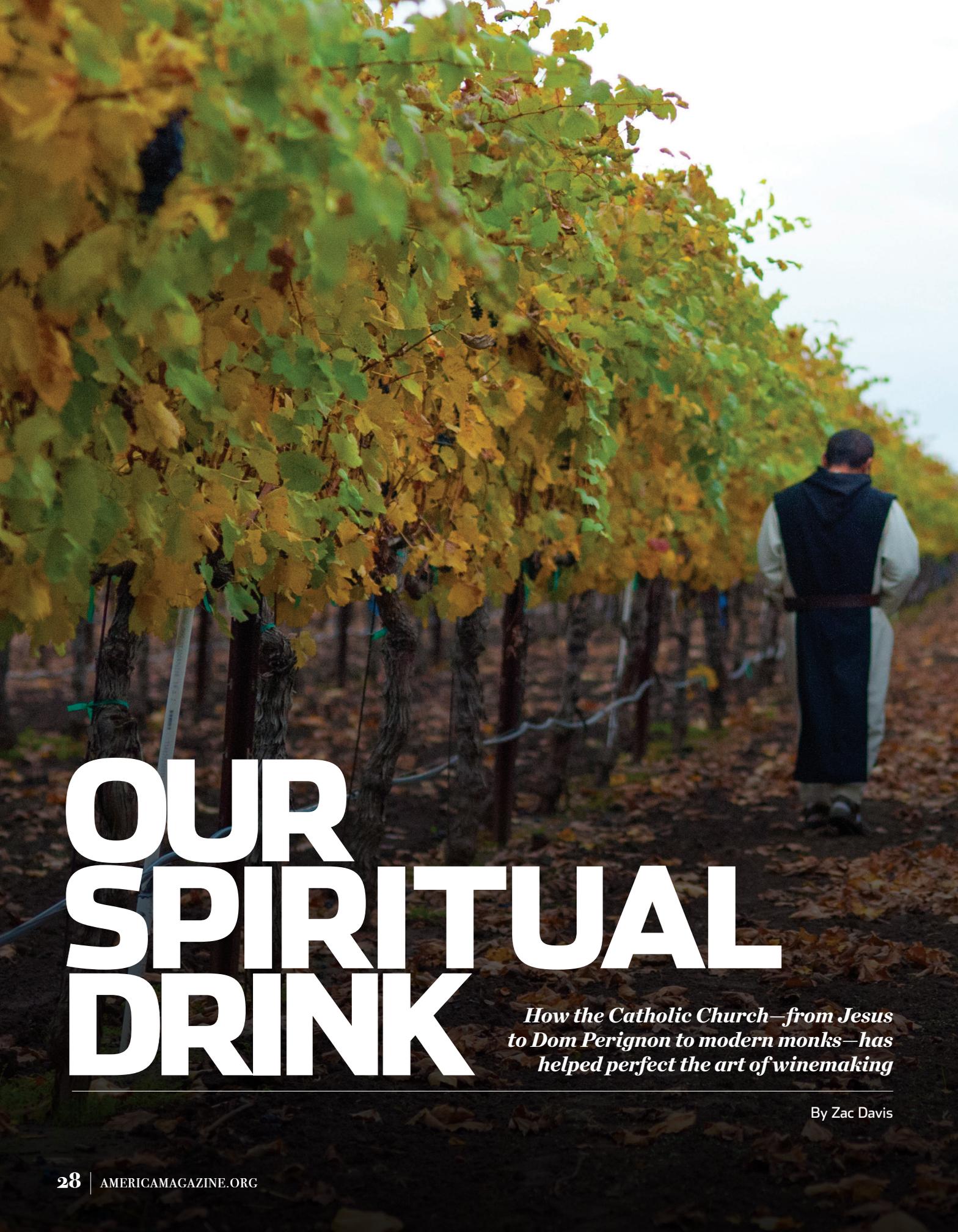
**G.O'C.: Last question. You have now been pope for 10 years.**

Yes! [Laughs.]

**G.O'C.: If you look back, are there three things that you would have done differently, or that you regret?**

All! All! [Said in English, and laughs and laughs.] All differently! However, I did what the Holy Spirit was telling me I had to do. And when I did not do it, I made a mistake.

**A** Listen to Gloria Purvis and Matt Malone, S.J., discuss *America's* interview with Pope Francis on "The Gloria Purvis Podcast," at [americamagazine.org/podcasts](http://americamagazine.org/podcasts).



# OUR SPIRITUAL DRINK

*How the Catholic Church—from Jesus to Dom Perignon to modern monks—has helped perfect the art of winemaking*

By Zac Davis



Photo courtesy of New Clairvaux Vineyard

Trappist-Cistercian monks from the Abbey of Our Lady of New Clairvaux walk the vineyards on the abbey's property in Vina, Calif.

things. But I am certain enough, both as a Catholic and a budding wine hobbyist, that it was an inadequate introduction to the rich relationship between the church and viticulture.

Because here's the thing: The Catholic Church, over and over and over again throughout history, has made critical contributions to winemaking and wine drinking. For reasons that are historical, theological and at times coincidental, the church has been in the mix at nearly every major turning point in the history of wine. And while there has been a resurgence of interest in Catholic beer brewing (the legend of the monk brewmaster forgoing solid food and consuming only beer during his Lenten fast still looms large), the church's contribution to wine culture throughout history often remains a lamp hidden under a bushel basket, a legacy unclaimed.

### **From Cana to Napa**

The Catholic connection to winemaking has its foundations in Scripture. Testaments Old and New are filled with references to vineyards, grapes and wines. One of the first things that Noah does after the flood is get drunk on wine he had made from his vineyard, leading to an awkward

I cannot prove it, but I swear that the wine used at my first Communion was poured from an oversized jug of that Carlo Rossi sweet red wine they sell at the grocery store, but not in the section with the other alcohol because of its lower-than-average alcohol content and, perhaps, its curious self-description as "grape wine with natural flavors."

I will not try to prove it, because I'm not trying to get my hometown parish in trouble. Using that wine as matter for transubstantiation would be *verboden* under Catholic teaching, which is quite specific in its instructions and forbids "wine of unknown provenance," among other



# The Catholic connection to winemaking has its foundations in Scripture.

and embarrassing encounter with his children. But the references are not all negative. On the contrary. The Psalmist writes that God made wine to gladden the hearts of man. In Zechariah, the Lord says he will “bring them back, because I have mercy on them,” and that “their hearts will be cheered as by wine.” In fact, in the Old Testament, only the Book of Ruth is bereft of any reference to wine or vineyards.

In the New Testament, we meet a Jesus Christ whose public ministry is kicked off with the transformation of roughly 180 gallons of water into wine (about 950 bottles). Jesus evidently feasted so much, especially in comparison with John the Baptist’s asceticism, that he was accused of being a “glutton and a drunkard” (Lk 7:34). When Jesus told his followers that he was the vine and they were the branches, it was likely a metaphor that was easy for them to grasp. It relied upon a drink that was common to the culture of first-century Palestine, which recent archeological discoveries have helped confirm. This is all to say: Catholics worship a God who both made (albeit miraculously) and drank wine.

Yet the event that most obviously cements wine’s relationship to Christianity took place the night before Jesus was crucified. At the Last Supper he took the chalice and, giving thanks, gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take this, all of you, and drink from it.” Since the time of the first Christians, wine has been used in the liturgy of the Eucharist in fidelity to this command. And while some of Jesus’ followers have opted for grape juice, the Catholic Church has never allowed a substitution for wine, even when it has proved difficult while evangelizing in places where there were no vineyards. In fact, we see missionaries planting vine-



yards wherever they are sent, including California, Argentina, Chile and Japan.

## A Spiritual Discipline

The Christian interest in wine remained robust in the early church. The desert fathers, in their asceticism, were extremely unlikely to have imbibed much. But the birth of monasticism brought spiritual seekers out from their solitude in the wilderness and together under one roof, and in these early monastic communities tending vineyards and drinking wine (which was safer than water) was often part of daily life.

In the Rule of St. Benedict, the foundational document for structuring Western monastic life, abstaining from drinking wine is written about with the same long view as abstaining from sex. In short: It’s good for the kingdom of God, but probably too difficult for most people. “We believe that a *hermina* of wine a day [that is, 2.5 bottles a week] is sufficient for each,” Benedict instructs. “But those upon whom God bestows the gift of abstinence should know they shall have a special reward.” And while Benedict is quite specific in his quantitative directives, he gives superiors a good amount of flexibility, noting that “if the necessities of the place, or the work, or the heat of the summer should call for more, let it stand within the discretion of the superior to grant more.”

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the many vineyards throughout Europe could have fallen into disrepair. Yet according to Hugh Johnson, the dean of wine history and the author of *From Noah to Now: The Story of Wine*, the church preserved European winemaking: “Saintly bishops are credited with many miracles, but perhaps their greatest was the maintenance of organized agriculture (of which wine growing was an important part) through the three centuries when it must have seemed hell’s legions were massing in the east.”

Hell’s legions did not prevail against the church after the fall of Rome, but the church’s own corruption and spiritual laxity infiltrated monastic life. In *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, Thomas Bokenkot-



“When people come, they know it’s more than just a bottle of wine,” said Abbot Paul Mark Schwan. “It’s as if they’re buying a kind of spirituality in a bottle.”

ter writes that “monasteries fell prey to the same evils and disorders that afflicted secular society during the breakdown of the Carolingian order. Many of them fell into complete decadence and in some cases were hardly more than strongholds of brigands.” Clearly, change was needed, and a reform movement took hold in what would become one of the world’s most famous wine-growing regions: Burgundy, France.

Today, Burgundy’s wines are classified and ranked not according to the producer of the wine, but by the geographical plot of land on which the grapes were grown. There is something very Catholic about this: that a winemaker ought to put aside any sense of personal gain or recognition in favor of becoming a vessel for the fruit of the earth. Every vineyard is ranked by the French government’s appellation control system. But ask any *vigneron* today who first figured out which plots of land produce the best wine, they will not hesitate: It was the monks.

Unhappy with the mediocrity and decadence of medieval monastic life, a new group of monks, led by St. Robert of Molesmes, arrived at Citeaux, a place Bokenkotter calls “a desolate spot in the diocese of Chalons in France.” Yet thanks to the Cistercian fathers, who grew to great influence and power during the 12th century, it slowly became a global wine capital. The Cistercians had the spirit of revolutionaries along with an intense piety. According to Mr. Johnson, they “saw the vineyards of the Côte as their God-given challenge.”

Here is how Mr. Johnson describes the work of the Cistercians: “By their readiness to experiment, their reinvestment



# Jesuits brought their ‘mission’ grapes from Mexico, planting vineyards up the coast of California.

in the land, and their ability to see things on a long time-scale, they slowly but surely moved the ratchet of quality up notch by notch.” People today venture that the Cistercians went so far as to literally taste the soil where they planted their vines. And thanks to their efforts, anyone who has driven through Burgundy in our time will have difficulty describing its vineyard-laden roads and quaint towns as “desolate.”

France is overflowing with other spots where the history of Catholicism and wine blend together. After the Cistercians, another monk made himself a household name across the world, even to this day, for his contributions to viticulture. The legend goes that Dom Perignon invented champagne, calling out to his confreres, “Come quickly, I am tasting the stars!” And while it remains unclear if Dom Perignon actually was the inventor (his abbey’s archives “disappeared” during the French Revolution), we do know that he was a meticulous vineyard manager and winemaker. The treasurer of Dom Perignon’s Hautviller Abbey, Mr. Johnson says, “studied the best vineyards, the best timing, the best techniques, and the best way of preserving the wine to make it as aromatic as possible, silky in texture and long in flavour.”

The reasons for the Avignon papacy, when the pope’s primary residence moved from Rome to France for 70 years, are multiple and complex. But at least a minor pull on the pope, Mr. Johnson suggests, might have been that Burgundy’s wine was a bit closer and easier to consume. In 1364, Urban V (the only Avignon pope to be beatified) published a papal bull forbidding the abbot of Cîteaux to send any wine to Rome under pain of excommunication. Today, you can still drink wine that is named



New Clairvaux Vineyard

Ask any *vigneron* today who first figured out which plots of land produce the best wine, they will not hesitate: It was the monks.

for the vineyards that were planted just outside the new papal residence: Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

## Wine Around the World

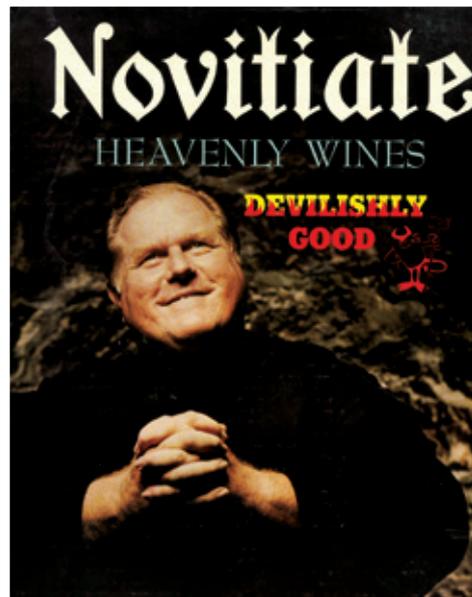
France is certainly among the more dramatic sites of both church and wine history. But throughout the world, the fruit of the vine and the church continued to grow and mature alongside one another.

Closer to home, Jesuits brought their “mission” grapes from Mexico in the 18th century, planting vineyards up the coast of California. And when a wave of religious (and anti-Catholic) zealotry threatened the future of winemaking in the United States, the Catholic Church was there to preserve it for future generations.

While Prohibition restricted the “the manufacture, sale, or transportation” of alcohol in the country, a provision tailored to the church prevented America’s burgeoning wine industry from totally collapsing: Wine for religious ceremonies would be exempt from the prohibition against manufacturing alcohol. In Los Angeles, when nearly all 100 wineries in the area had to close, the arch-



Right: Two advertisements from the historic Novitiate Winery, which the Jesuits operated for 98 years until ceasing operations in 1986.



Photos courtesy of the Jesuit Archives & Research Center

diocese granted Santo Cambianica, a devout Catholic who had named his winery “San Antonio” after his patron saint, permission to make sacramental wine. Today, San Antonio Winery remains the largest supplier of sacramental wine in the country and was named winery of the year by Wine Enthusiast in 2016.

A similar story is told about the Napa Valley. George de Latour, who founded Beaulieu Vineyards in 1900, used his connections with the archbishop of San Francisco to secure exclusive rights to sell sacramental wine after the passage of the Volstead Act. After Prohibition, with the now-famed Napa vineyards still intact, Mr. Latour was looking to increase the commercial quality of his wine. He brought in André Tchelistcheff, a Russian winemaker living in France. Mr. Tchelistcheff would go on to train and work with now-legendary names throughout the wine world, including Mike Grgich, Joseph Heitz and Robert Mondavi.

The numbers speak for themselves. In 1922, the first year that sacramental wine was excluded from Prohibition, 2,139,000 gallons were sold. By 1924, the volume

had risen to 2,944,700. Was the United States undergoing a religious revival? A report from the Department of Research and Education of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in 1925 was not sure: “There is no way of knowing what the legitimate consumption of fermented sacramental wine is but it is clear that the legitimate demand does not increase 800,000 gallons in two years.” Were it not for the jesuitical ingenuity of a few Catholics, it is doubtful we would have the vibrant California wine scene we have today.

### Future Growth

The story of Catholicism and wine is not one of consistent progress. Back in France, the great vineyards that generations of monks had toiled to cultivate were, like many of France’s great cathedrals, victims of fanatics of the French Revolution. “Among the officers whose task it was to tell the abbot of Citeaux that all the abbey’s lands...were being appropriated by the state,” Mr. Johnson writes, “was Napoleon Bonaparte.” Within 100 years they encountered something worse: a plague of phylloxera, a microscopic insect that wiped out almost the entire country’s grape vines.



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# The winemaker and wine drinker are intrinsically connected to the earth, our common home, in a unique way.

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Where vineyards were not seized by revolutions or insects, religious communities began to surrender their vines and land voluntarily. “There are fewer laborers in the vineyard,” is often a euphemism to describe the decline in the number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. But it is also a quite literal explanation for why there are fewer Catholic wineries today. The low numbers of religious vocations has led to a shortage of labor. And with limited resources, religious communities tend to focus on ministries they consider more obviously pastoral or mission-critical.

When the Heublein division of Grand Metropolitan PLC bought Christian Brothers Winery in 1989, it was the largest winery sale in U.S. history. David Brennan, F.S.C., then-president of the Lasallian Christian Brothers, explained the rationale behind the deal at the time: “The decision to sell...was a difficult one, but this action allows the Brothers to give the highest priority to their educational works.”

Even still, there are signs of hope for Catholic winemaking today. In Traverse City, Mich., parishioners at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church began what they called The Sacramental Wine and Vineyard Ministry, through which 2.3 acres of grapes are grown on the parish’s own grounds for sacramental and consumer wine. Religious orders are tending to vines around the world again, from California to Italy. In an example that is inspired by the Catholic imagination, the Diocese of Oakland planted grapevines next to its Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

And in France? In recent decades, five French monasteries have reconnected with winemaking. The French Catholic author Marc Patier profiled them in his book, *Les Vignerons Du Ciel: Les Moines et Le Vin (The Winemakers of Heaven: Monks and Wine)*. “The relationship between

monks and wine, in France, seemed to belong to a definitively gone past,” Mr. Patier writes. “It is to forget that with the monks everything is an eternal beginning.” And it isn’t just the men (nor has it ever been, Mr. Patier is quick to remind): Nuns are well-represented, and in some regions are even in the majority at some monastic winemakers. French consumers can find monastic wines (and other products) in sleekly designed e-commerce sites like Divine Box. While it is difficult to argue that Catholic religious dominate the world’s leading winemakers today, priests, brothers, sisters and laypeople continue to practice what their forerunners in faith have done for thousands of years.

New Clairvaux Vineyard in Northern California is a good example of successful Catholic winemaking today. In 1955, the Abbey of Gethsemani purchased a plot of land to begin a new monastery. The land was purchased from a former governor of California, Leland Stanford, who had established 4,000 acres of grapes and a winery that produced over two million gallons a year prior to Prohibition. Stanford sold off the land in 1919, and the vines were ripped out.

But in 2000, at the prodding of a neighbor, the Cistercian monks pivoted from dairy and orchard farming to plant their first six acres of grape vines on the land. “You know, we—the Cistercians—set the standard for ‘modern’ wine production at Citeaux,” Abbot Paul Mark Schwan reminded me in a conversation by phone of the order’s connection to medieval winemaking. “We’re very much aware of that connection.”

Today, the monks’ primary labor is working in the vineyard, but as in many Catholic apostolates, they partner with lay people, including Aimée Sunseri, a fifth-generation California winemaker.

And while it is heartening to see the church return to building up global wine culture, Abbot Paul Mark sees their efforts as a contribution to the larger mission of the church. He estimates 38,000 people visit the monastery each year. “Now, most people come because they are looking for wine,” he told me, “but it also becomes our way of evangelization. When people come, they know it’s more than just a bottle of wine. It’s as if they’re buying a kind of spirituality in a bottle.”

## A Complex Blend

“The links between wine and worship,” Hugh Johnson writes, “recur so often in [the story of wine] that the storyteller must keep challenging himself: Was it really religion that called the tune again?” In other words, does it matter whether all these winemaking Catholics were motivated



A statue of Dom Perignon outside the winery of Moët & Chandon in Éperney, France.



This detail from a 13th-century manuscript shows that one could do worse than being the cellar master in a monastic community.

by faith or finances? After all, vineyards were extremely economically viable for the Cistercians in Gaul during the Middle Ages, and producing sacramental wine during Prohibition was a convenient loophole. Yet, there is a sacramentality to the winemaking process, from growing to fermenting to drinking, that is likely to always find a home in a Catholic imagination.

Wines, at their best, are beautiful and complex works of art that are “the fruit of the vine and work of human hands,” the comingling of manual labor and God’s providence in the vineyard. A bottle of wine itself invites relationship: It is too much for one person, but it provides the perfect amount for two or three gathered together. Its vintage is a memorial of a moment of time, its appellation transports the imbiber to a specific region and vineyard. The winemaker and wine drinker are intrinsically connected to the earth, our common home, in a unique way.

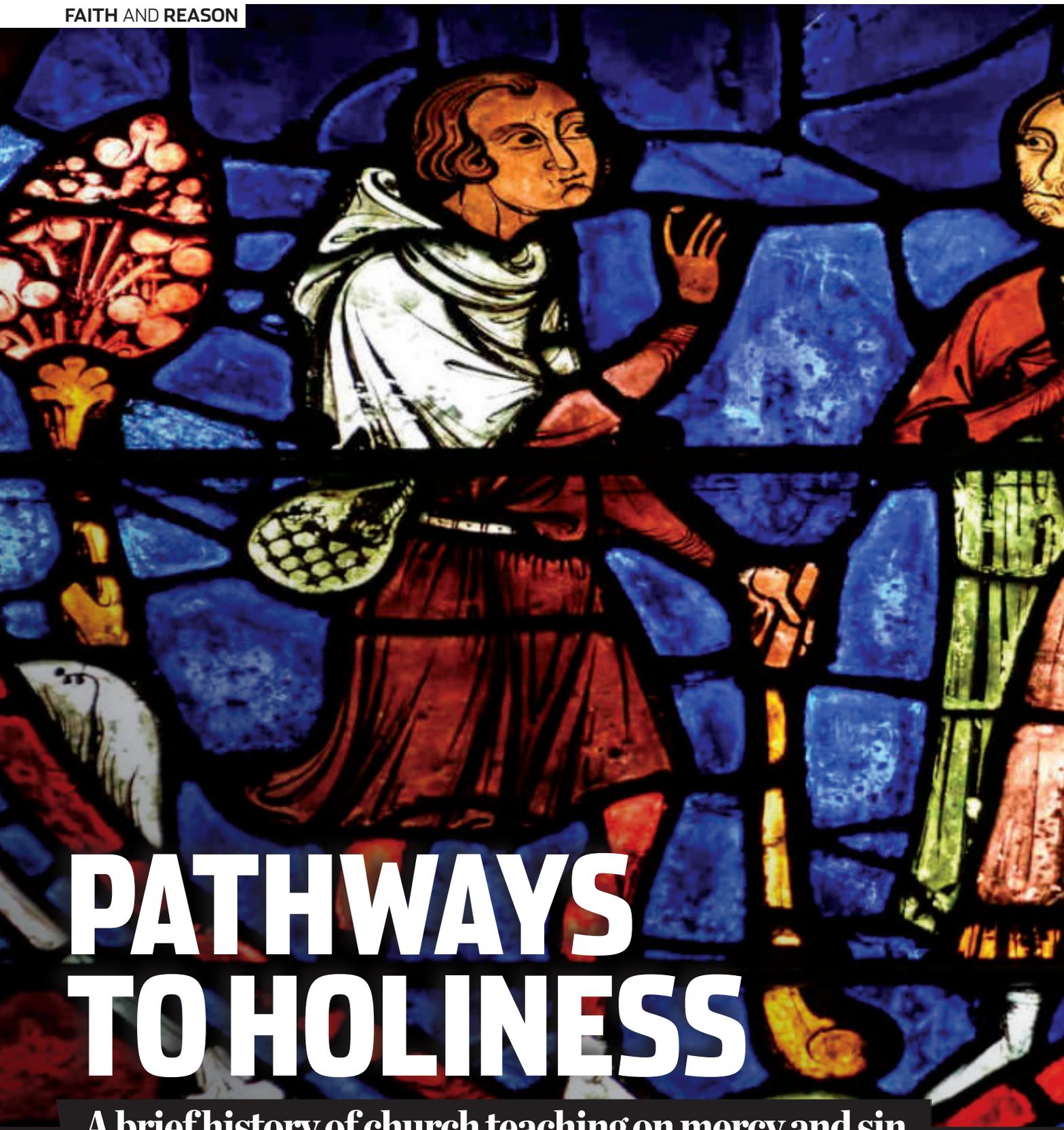
In one view, the sniffing, swirling, savoring, the descriptions of primary and secondary tastes, the naming of obscure aromas in a glass, all comes across as uptight and snobbish. Yet in another light, the careful attention paid to the symphony of tastes and smells, the indulgence in “oh, sure, one more glass,” are the recognition of those small joys that lift us up to participate in the life of the divine. “Wine,” Pope Benedict said in a homily in 2005, “expresses the excellence of creation and gives us the feast in which we go beyond the limits of our daily routine.” The church has long understood that asceticism and fasting

are paths to religious enlightenment—but we also worship a savior who came that we might have life, and have it more *abundantly*.

“On the one hand...we live an austere, simple life,” Abbot Paul Mark mused during our conversation. “On the other hand, we celebrate the fine things of life as well. The best beers, the best liqueurs, the best wines in the world, are usually associated with the Catholic or Christian monastic world. That’s not an accident. It’s a statement of how we live our lives.”

At least in spirit, wine and Catholic life are inextricably linked. And just as we Catholics rightly feel some sense of pride for our contributions to architecture, music and art, our hearts should be gladdened when we walk through a vineyard or into a wine bar, thinking, *our ancestors helped build this*. And we should discern how we can keep building it. Catholics will continue to tend the vines, drink it at our dinner tables and transform it at our altar tables. Wine has been, is now and will continue to become our “spiritual drink.”

Zac Davis is an associate editor and the senior director for digital strategy for America. He also co-hosts the podcast “Jesuitical.”



# PATHWAYS TO HOLINESS

A brief history of church teaching on mercy and sin

By James F. Keenan, S.J.



Wikimedia Commons

Detail from the "Parable of the Prodigal Son," Chartres Cathedral

My mentor in studying moral theology, the Jesuit Josef Fuchs, once noted that "innovation" marked the agenda of most Roman Catholic moral theologians from the 1940s through the end of the 20th century. The innovation was, for the most part, to take moral theology out of the isolating framework of the moral manuals in which it functioned from the beginning of the 17th until the mid-20th century. These manuals were attempts to outline what actions were sinful or evil.

The manualists, as they were called, distinguished themselves from those writing about pursuing the good. Those authors wrote about growing in "perfection" or the ascetical life. In a manner of speaking, for four centuries, moral theologians and ascetical theologians split the first principle of the natural law, to avoid evil and to do good, into two. In the church, all Catholics, at a minimum, were called to avoid evil to be saved; the pursuit of the good was optional.

We see this singular emphasis on the moral life as exclusively being about avoiding sin clearly in the first Roman Catholic moral manual in English, which appeared in 1908: *A Manual of Moral Theology*, by the English Jesuit Thomas Slater (1855-1928).

In its preface, Slater asserts that the manuals "are as technical as the text-books of the lawyer and the doctor. They are not intended for edification, nor do they hold up a high ideal of Christian perfection for the imitation of the faithful. They deal with what is of obligation under pain of sin; they are books of moral pathology."

Slater notes the "very abundant" literature of ascetical theology, but adds that "moral theology proposes to itself the much humbler but still necessary task of defining what is right and what wrong in all the practical relations of the Christian life.... The first step on the right road of conduct is to avoid evil."

A new moral minimalism had arrived

in the manualist tradition, one singularly more anxious over personal damnation than the needs of the neighbor.

### The Need to Reform

From the 1930s through the 1960s, several reforming theologians attempted to change that. One of them took a historical approach: the Benedictine Dom Odon Lottin (1880-1965), who studied the development of scholastic theology from the 12th to the 16th century. Rather than staying fixed in the manualists' demarcated territory of the sinful action, Lottin produced eight enormous volumes that thematically treat the scholastics' positions on the nature of moral agency, moral virtue and moral theology.

Lottin aimed to show that for centuries before the manualists, the scholastics urged Christians to avoid evil precisely as they pursued the good. Moreover, as opposed to the manualists, who highlighted the importance of a moral teaching being historically continuous (i.e., "as we have always taught"), Lottin found that the scholastic theologians were more interested in historical development than longstanding consistency; that is, unlike the manualists, they sought to innovate.

Lottin's work was subsequently complemented by the Jesuit Gérard Gillemann, who proposed in *The Primacy of Charity* a spirituality-based ethics founded on charity, the virtue by which we are in union with God and called to love God, self and neighbor. Gillemann provided a deeper and more dynamic understanding of the moral truth that a person pursues. By re-establishing the primacy of charity whereby moral agents discover within themselves their primary identity of being children of God, Gillemann developed an anthropology that moved from the depths of the human person into expression in virtuous dispositions and actions. This was, of course, the foundation of the scholastics' moral theology.



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# A focus on mercy and hospitality, not an obsession with sin, is the trademark of early Christians.

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These theologians were contending against the manualists' claims. Outside of the manualists, they argued, the moral tradition was about discipleship. But their claims were backed only by the scholastics. What was the rest of the moral tradition? Was it primarily about avoiding sin or pursuing the good? Theologians needed a comprehensive study of the influences that shaped the entire moral tradition. In 1987, the English Jesuit Jack Mahoney provided that study in *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition*.

## **Mahoney's Powerful Impact**

Mahoney's book had a magisterial impact. Though he clearly allied himself with those who wanted to expand the shaping of moral theology, unlike Lottin and Gillemann, Mahoney turned to history in order to find out what was holding it back. For this reason, almost all the reviewers of *The Making of Moral Theology* noted that from Mahoney we learned not about the riches of the tradition, but about its restraining elements. As the British theologian David Brown commented: "What one misses from this liberal Catholic is any sympathetic engagement with the past."

Starting with the Irish penitentials from the sixth to the 10th century, Mahoney opened his work by noting the historic connection between moral theology and the categorization of sin:

To begin a historical study of the making of moral theology with an examination of the influence of auricular confession may appear to some an intriguing, and to others an unattractive prospect; but however one regards it there is no doubt that the development of the practice and of the discipline of moral theology is to be found in the growth and spread of 'confession' in the Church.

Mahoney convincingly narrated from the patristic era through the penitential and later confessional manuals into the moral manuals that the Catholic moral tradition has been fixated with sin or what he called a "spiritual pathology." By examining early councils, the penitential tariffs themselves, the imposition of the "Easter duty" by Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council, the Council of Trent and the subsequent moral textbooks or manuals, Mahoney marshaled the evidence for his indictment of moral theology's obsession with sin. Whereas many moral theologians criticized the manualist era for its emphasis on sin, Mahoney blasted the entire tradition as singularly focused on "man in his moral vulnerability."

"The pessimistic anthropology from which it started," Mahoney wrote, "and which served inevitably to confirm and reinforce itself, particularly when the subject was pursued in growing isolation from the rest of theology and developed as a spiritual arm of the Church's legal system, drove moral theology increasingly to concern itself almost exclusively with the darker and insubordinate side of human existence." He called this "miasma of sin" not only distasteful, "but profoundly disquieting."

Mahoney's work became the foundational text for the reformers. It gave us what we were lacking: an understanding and a critique of the moral tradition.

*The Making of Moral Theology* came out in 1987, the year I finished my dissertation. Like others, I wondered after reading it: Was the tradition so singularly focused on sin? Is that all there really was? Was scholasticism the exception and manualism the norm?

To answer that question, I began teaching courses on the history of Catholic theological ethics. In 2004, I was invited by the editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics* to contribute a piece on Mahoney's text to a section titled "Books that Gave Shape to the Field." I concluded my laudatory assessment by noting that because Mahoney was so critical of the tradition, his *Making* animates us then to articulate another *Making*.

What scholars on the tradition have been reporting since 1987, as I write in my new work *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, proves Lottin and Gillemann were right: In fact, scholasticism and not manualism better conveys the tradition's long-term interests and purpose.

## **Another History of Catholic Theological Ethics**

To highlight how I think the tradition developed, I provide here some vignettes from the early life of the church that might show how recent historians capture the formative influences of the moral tradition. These narrative insights, which I develop in *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*,

prompt me to describe that tradition as leading Christians primarily to pathways of holiness instead of to the confession of sin.

For the longest time, we have thought of the Irish penitentials as evidence that Irish monks and nuns were as obsessed with sin as were the 20th-century manualists. Then the Irish theologian Hugh Connolly investigated the practice. In his study *The Irish Penitentials and Their Significance for the Sacrament of Penance Today*, Connolly noted the originality in the Celtic practice of confessing sins, in that the practice was not used as an instrument for punishment and readmission. Instead, these “confessions were usually made to a spiritual guide known as an *anamchara*, a Gaelic word which literally means a soul-friend, who was recognized within the monastic system.”

Writes Connolly, “An ancient Irish saying comments that ‘anyone without a soul-friend is like a body without a head.’ Every monk was expected to have an *anamchara* to whom he could make a manifestation of his conscience (*manifestatio conscientiae*).”

Connolly’s study dramatically shifted the understanding of the penitentials. It demonstrated that the manuals were effectively aids not for confessors, but for what today we would call “spiritual directors,” people who accompany others not primarily in their avoidance of sin but in their pursuit of the kingdom of God. As these pilgrims discerned their own right pathways to holiness, they acknowledged paths that they should have avoided.

The role of the soul-friend was not, then, a judicial one; rather, the *anamchara* was a guide to accompany the individual through the trials of life. The encounter between the soul-friend and the individual aimed at a dialogue that “was neither contractual nor constraining but which bore testimony, instead, to a God who was always willing to forgive.” The dialogue therefore was a “healing” one. For this reason the *anamchara* was to be hospitable, welcoming the weary nun or monk on her or his journey on the “same pilgrim path.”

The hospitality that the *anamchara* offered was solidarity, so that the pilgrim continued on the journey. The *anamchara*, Connolly writes, was one who “comes through the fire of real suffering and self-sacrifice while at the same time growing ever more open to the saving forgiving grace of Christ, and one who always reserves in his heart a sincere hospitality for the stranger, the fellow-pilgrim, the fellow-sufferer.”

Their confession of sin was then part of a much bigger context: the communal search for holiness through responding to human suffering.

## The Rise of Christianity

In *The Rise of Christianity*, the noted sociologist of religion Rodney Stark argued that “Christianity was an urban movement, and the New Testament was sent down by urbanites.” But those urban areas were dreadful; he describes the conditions as “social chaos and chronic urban misery.” This was in part due to population density: At the end of the first century, Antioch’s population within the city walls was 150,000, or 117 persons per acre. By contrast, New York City has a density of 37 persons per acre overall. Even Manhattan with its high-rise apartments has 100 persons per acre.

Contrary to earlier assumptions, Greco-Roman cities were not settled places whose inhabitants descended from previous generations. With high infant mortality rates and short life expectancy, these cities required “a constant and substantial stream of newcomers” in order to maintain their population levels. As a result, “the cities were comprised of strangers.”

These strangers were well-treated by Christians who, again contrary to assumptions, were not all poor. Through a variety of ways of caring for newcomers, financially secure Christians welcomed the newly arrived migrants. This welcoming was a new form of incorporation. Stark noted:

Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family.

This new incorporation was distinctive. Certainly, pagan Romans practiced generosity, but their actions stemmed not from their religious traditions but from their own choices. Unlike them, Christians acknowledged that they were commanded to love their neighbor; as a result, the newly arrived were interested not only in the Christians, but even more in their God who gave such commands.

“This was the moral climate in which Christianity taught that mercy is one of the primary virtues—that a merciful God requires humans to be merciful,” Stark concluded:

Moreover, the corollary that *because* God loves humanity, Christians may not please God unless they *love one another* was entirely new. Perhaps



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# All Catholics, at a minimum, were called to avoid evil to be saved; the pursuit of the good was optional.

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even more revolutionary was the principle that Christian love and charity must extend beyond the boundaries of family and tribe, that it must extend to ‘all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 1:2). This was revolutionary stuff. Indeed, it was the cultural basis for the revitalization of a Roman world groaning under a host of miseries.

## Hospitality for the Christian Family

Stark’s claims were effectively developed by others. In *Through the Eye of a Needle*, the historian Peter Brown helped us to see that the practice of hospitality produced an appreciation for the poor as one’s sibling. Brown turned to St. Ambrose to substantiate his claim, noting that Ambrose insisted “that giving to the poor should be based upon a strong sense of solidarity.” Ambrose “did not wish the poor to be seen only as charged outsiders, sent by God to haunt the conscience of the rich,” Brown explains:

The intervention of a preacher such as Ambrose, toward the end of the fourth century, showed that the poor could no longer be spoken of only as “others”—as beggars to whom Christians should reach out across the chasm that divided the rich and the poor. They were also “brothers,” members of the Christian community who could also claim justice and protection.

Thus, collections and hospitable practices were not only provided by the wealthy. As Paul instructs: “On the first day of each week let each of you set something aside privately, storing up what each one can, if he has prospered” (1 Cor 16:2). The practices of hospitality as well as the raising of funds for the missionaries were intended for those with any

income. These practices thus became the work of the whole community: Christians had collections, were prepared for the newly arrived, hosted them in the bishop’s name and recognized them as siblings. Moreover, the Christian practices were ordinary, constant and integral to their own self-identity. The pathways to holiness were for all Christians.

The New Testament scholar Wayne Meeks argued that these highly communal practices were effectively institutionalized. In his landmark work, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*, he made an extraordinarily broad claim about the aim of the New Testament in its relationship to moral agency: “Almost without exception, the documents that eventually became the New Testament and most of the other surviving documents from the same period of Christian beginnings are concerned with the way converts to the movement ought to behave.”

These documents are “addressed not to individuals but to communities, and they have among their primary aims the maintenance and growth of those communities.” The formation of a Christian moral order would lead to the up-building of community. He added a phrase that has been repeated by ethicists time and again: “Making morals means making community.”

This is an extraordinarily important claim: Our happiness depends on our upright communal behavior. A focus on mercy and hospitality, not an obsession with sin, is the trademark of early Christians. Their moral lives were clearly at the service of others whom they identified as siblings.

## Sunday Observance

Nowhere is the interest in incorporating others into the community as siblings of the Lord more in evidence than in the struggles of the early church to encourage communal worship. When we turn to the history of Sunday or “dominical observance,” as it was known, we find the longstanding effort to include others in the eucharistic celebration, in which the breaking of the bread is at once the means and the promise of a community becoming one and holy.

The early church did not prescribe a day of rest or Sabbath. On the contrary, like the frequent instances with which Jesus broke the Sabbath ban on work, early Christians seemed similarly to be a busy lot, not resting in any noticeable way on any Sabbath. Paul, for instance, often refers to his own rejection of laziness and acceptance of work (1 Thes 2:9; 2 Thes 3:10-12; Eph 4:28). The general tendency of early Christians was to work seven days a week.

In his foundational work on the development of the dominical observance, the Redemptorist Louis Vereecke noted that from the very beginning the early church came together on the first day of the week (See 1 Cor 16:1-2; Acts

20:7-12) to celebrate a meal, the supper of the Lord (1 Cor 11:20). They chose to worship on Sunday because it was the day that Christ rose from the dead. On that day, the new creation began. For the first three centuries, Christians simply celebrated Eucharist as a meal on Sunday, without any law—neither a law to rest nor a law to worship.

In 321, Emperor Constantine prohibited civil servants and soldiers from doing public work on Sunday. But he did permit personal as well as agricultural work. As Vereecke noted, the civil law existed to permit soldiers the opportunity to participate in the Eucharist; the law was to free them to worship in the community and had no roots in Sabbath law.

Later, at the end of the fourth century, apocryphal texts from Syria and Alexandria contained “orders of the Lord” to give rest to slaves and to those oppressed by work, so that, again, like Constantine’s soldiers and civil servants, these too could participate in the Eucharist.

At the Council of Orleans (538) the first ban on Sunday work appears. It is a ban on any labor that would keep the masses from the eucharistic celebration. In effect, the poor, like the soldiers and slaves earlier, were freed to worship, and the weight of the law was borne by the masters of the poor who had to release them from this labor. Later, Martin of Braga (d. 580) used for the first time the term “servile work” to designate the work of serfs as prohibited by the Sunday observance.

These laws were designed to free those who did not have the freedom to participate in the Eucharist. Now the poor and enslaved could be brought into the Eucharist, could come and receive the Gospel and enter the community of believers and worshipers. Through the Eucharist, they could pursue as family such pathways to holiness.

### **The Centrality of Mercy**

In *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, I often turn to the works of mercy as they were developed in early Christian communities, the abbeys of the Early Middle Ages, the guilds in the 13th century or the confraternities of the 16th century.

In the early church the most interesting work of mercy is the last. While, as St. Augustine notes, belief in the resurrection is what separates Christians from all others, the Emperor Julian contended that one of the factors favoring the growth of Christianity was the great care Christians took in burying the dead. Though individuals often performed the task, the church as a community assigned it to the deacons. And, as Tertullian tells us, the expenses were assumed by the community.

Lactantius reminds us further that not only did Christians bury the Christian dead, they buried all of the abandoned: “We will not therefore allow the image and workman-

ship of God to lie as prey for beasts and birds, but we shall return it to the earth, whence it sprang.” The significance of burying the dead is thus rooted in the profound respect that Christians have for the way we are related through the human body.

Where does that respect come from? The New Testament reveals not simply who we are in Christ, but who we will be. If our corporeality encompasses our existence and is the basis for our relationality, then the resurrection of our bodies means that in our bodies we will be one with one another in glory. That promise also leads to the hope that we will never be at war within our bodies again.

In his study of the early church, the professor of comparative religion Gedaliahu Stroumsa announced that integrating the divinity and humanity of Christ was the major theological task and accomplishment of the early church. He writes: “The unity of Christ, possessor of two natures but remaining nonetheless one single persona, is, of course, in a nutshell, the main achievement of centuries of Christological and Trinitarian pugnacious investigations.” To follow Christ meant that Christians were called to seek a unified self like Christ’s: As Christ brought divinity and humanity into one, Christians were called to bring body and soul together. Integration became a key task for all early Christians, as Stroumsa noted, to “be an entity of body and soul, a Christ-bearing exemplar.”

Such integration of body and soul was not a pagan task. As Meeks and others note, the self in Greek thought was distinct from the body. For Plato, “to know oneself—the reflexive attitude par excellence—meant to attend to one’s soul, at the exclusion of the body.” Thus when Christianity, on the belief that the human is in God’s image, made integrating the body and soul both a theological expression of humanity’s integrity *and* a normative task, it proposed to the Western world a new claim on the human body. Stroumsa writes: “The discovery of the person as a unified composite of soul and body in late antiquity was indeed a Christian discovery.”

In light of these investigations, in *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, I argue that the moral tradition developed *from its inception* pathways to holiness, embodied pathways that were collective, merciful, hospitable, inclusive, exemplary and grace-filled. Yes, Christians in the past confessed their sins, but they did so not as much out of a fear of damnation as out of a manifest love to become more like the One whom they followed, who called them from being lost into the field of service.

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# Mass, Virtually

The powerful, prayerful experience of being a remote parishioner

By Betty Anne Asaro

It is 9 a.m. on Sunday. I make my coffee and get ready to attend Mass, but I am not rushing out the door to get to a church. Instead, I make myself comfortable in my home and sit in front of my TV. For about a year and a half I have been attending the liturgy at St. Cecilia Catholic Church in Boston, Mass., over livestream on YouTube. But this is not just a casual viewing; I am actively involved with this parish. In fact, I have become a registered remote parishioner. Although I split my time between New York and Florida, St. Cecilia is my parish.

It was not always this way. I was in Florida in January 2020 when news of Covid-19 began to spread. At that time, I was a weekly Massgoer, but the church I attended closed overnight. Participating in the liturgy is an important part of my life, so I was very grateful when I learned from friends that I could attend Mass live on TV or the internet.

In the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, I sat and listened to the Mass and tried to pay attention. I bemoaned the fact I could not receive the Eucharist and did my best to stay focused on prayer. But about a month into the lockdown, my experience of Mass changed again. A friend of mine shared that online there was a particularly engaging, welcoming, energetic and down-to-earth priest at a parish that celebrated the liturgy live each Sunday on YouTube. The church was St. Cecilia in Boston, the priest was the Rev. John Unni.

The first time I attended Mass at St. Cecilia by livestream, my whole world opened up. The warmth, the spirit, the love,

the sense of community and the embracing nature of Father John and his homilies ignited a new flame in me. I became an unofficial worshiper at St. Cecilia Church. As the months and the pandemic progressed, I returned to my home in New York, but I continued to spend my Sunday mornings participating in Mass at St. Cecilia through my screen.

Each Sunday's liturgy became the leaven for more prayer. It sparked discussion with friends and a greater understanding of my faith and a deeper connection to a God who loves me and everyone. I could hardly contain the enthusiasm and excitement I felt at having found such an incredible church where all are welcome. By the summer of 2021, I decided to officially register as a parishioner at the parish—something I had never done, even at a local parish.

Some people might wonder how I felt so connected to others from afar, but there are many ways that I connected with my parish. First, the experience allowed me to feel like I really belonged, even though I was far away. Finding a parish that is alive, welcoming, committed to the equality of all regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality or creed was, for me, a gift.

I also supported the church in traditional ways: with my time and treasure. I donated to the parish and I volunteered. My role as a volunteer monitor of the chat function on the virtual Mass has helped me to build and maintain connections. The chat feature allows people watching the liturgy to greet one another before and after Mass and offer their love, sup-



## On any given Sunday, well over 1,000 people are attending the liturgy over livestream at St. Cecilia.



▲ Betty Anne Asaro has been a virtual parishioner at St. Cecilia Parish in Boston, Mass., since the summer of 2021.



▲ A monitor shows the livestream feed from St. Cecilia Parish in Boston, Mass.

port and gratitude in one place, though we are apart. I am touched by the tender, loving tone that permeates the comments from my fellow parishioners. We have formed a true community of virtual attendees within the larger

church and to God!

Now that Masses have largely returned to the way they were before the pandemic, St. Cecilia remains committed to continuing its livestream liturgy each Sunday. As a member of what now has affectionately become known as the “Far-Flung Flock,” I have had a chance to interact with my fellow Catholics in new ways. Communicating with other remote churchgoers before the liturgy by the livestream chat has enabled people who have never met each other to greet one another, pray for one another and have a connection that is unique. My faith has been enriched and deepened as remote participants have shared their gratitude for finding such a welcoming, non-judgmental group of people of God.

We are living during a time of criticism, questioning and reflecting on the role of the Catholic Church in our world and its importance in people’s lives. Many parishes are struggling to remain open. But on any given Sunday, well over 1,000 people are attending the liturgy over livestream at St. Cecilia. I truly believe that remote participation at Mass has the potential to continue to bring more people back into the church.

Being a remote parishioner has filled a void for me. I do not fear judgment because I am not physically in church. I feel blessed. I feel at home. I feel grateful to be part of the far-flung flock, knowing that as we gather around to participate in the liturgy, the Good Shepherd watches over us all.

Betty Anne Asaro is a retired history teacher. Originally from the Bronx, she currently lives in Cross River, N.Y.

**A** Betty Anne Asaro is featured in the America Media documentary “People of God,” directed by Sebastian Gomes. To watch the documentary, go to [americamagazine.org/peopleofgod](http://americamagazine.org/peopleofgod).

community of the parish. Our virtual attendees include people from all over the globe.

My experience has not been perfect, but no parish experience is. As the pandemic progressed and vaccines became available, Covid-19 precautions were scaled back and churches began to reopen. I faced a number of questions: Should I go back to Mass in person at a local parish? Where would I go? Would Mass at St. Cecilia continue to be livestreamed? What about reception of Communion?

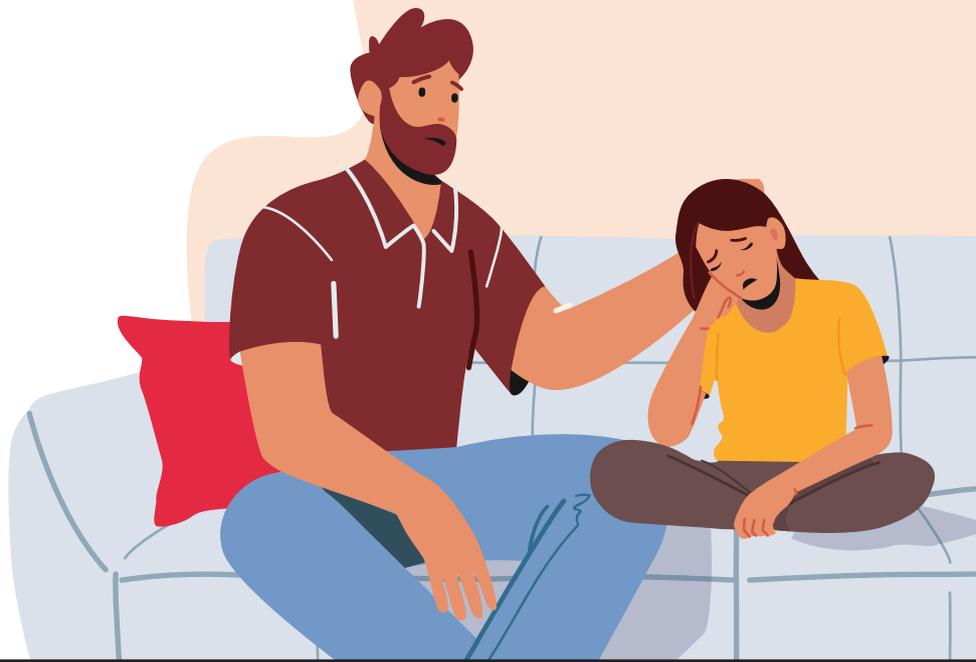
This last question has been the hardest for me. As I watched people receive holy Communion, I felt left out. I felt the loss of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Still, I decided my spiritual nourishment and the deepening and sharing of my faith were best served by remaining a part of the St. Cecilia community. I chose to continue to meet remotely with others and attend the liturgy by livestream. But I also make a point to go to a local church during the week, where I attend Mass and receive the Eucharist.

My virtual parish has in some ways strengthened my local, in-person relationships. I am eager to share my excitement about my virtual parish, and so it has become known to many friends, including those with no religious affiliation. They often ask me, “So how was Father John today?” Two or three friends now even tune in to the Mass or listen to Father John’s homilies from time to time. No one could have predicted this impact. It is safe to say that in my experience, remote livestream liturgy has brought many people back to the

# The Riches of His Grace

## *A father's journey with forgiveness*

By Joe Pagetta



I am on my knees on a Costco anti-fatigue mat in front of our kitchen sink. It's covered in stains from splattered tomato sauce, chicken grease and coffee. I'm holding my 6-year-old daughter in my arms. She has come into the kitchen to tell me she is sorry for giving me a hard time this morning. Her twin sister has Covid-19. It has been a hard day for all of us.

Earlier that morning, I had asked my healthy daughter to put on a mask before going into her sick sister's bedroom. I couldn't find the mask she liked, though, and she refused to wear the one I had. We had a stand-off, which for her means completely shutting down. She freezes, goes silent and lets her hair fall in front of her face. I have learned to remain calm in these situations and let her come around on her own. Most days.

But while stressed out and worried about my daughter with Covid and the potential spread of the disease to my other daughter, my wife and my 78-year-old live-in mother-in-law—I would contract the virus two days later—I lost it. I grabbed my daughter by both arms, stiffly, and screamed, "Put on the friggin' mask!" But I didn't say "friggin'." I walked away and told my wife I couldn't do it. I sat in another room, took deep breaths, and gathered myself.

Not long after, while I was readying breakfast and cleaning dishes, standing on that Costco mat, my daughter came in to apologize. I immediately fell to my knees to hug her and tell her I was the one who was sorry. Sorry for losing my cool and yelling. Sorry for not being more patient. Sorry for taking out my stress on her.

For better or worse, I tell my daughters I am sorry once a day. Or at least it feels that way. Usually for raising my voice or forgetting the one thing they ask of me among the litany of

things I miraculously remember. And then there are the many other mistakes I make, which they like to call my "bad ideas." For a while they had a book and pretended to keep track of them. "Uh, oh, put it in the book," my wife would tell them.

All parents make mistakes, and my own father made his fair share. There was the physical violence, the verbal abuse, the absence of compassion in painful times. Kneeling there in the kitchen, it occurred to me that in the 35 years of my life that my father was alive, I don't recall him ever telling me, my siblings or my mother he was sorry. There was hardly an excuse for any of it, but as he (and we) got older, and the circumstances in which we lived—the financial, psychological and familial challenges—came more into focus, an "I'm sorry" would likely have been met with some compassion and understanding.

My father's understanding of fatherhood and forgiveness was probably shaped by cultural differences, too—he was an Italian immigrant from another generation. For him, apologies, and the very need for forgiveness, was likely a sign of weakness or simply not encouraged in parenting. For me, and many American parents of my generation, the message often has been the opposite. And asking for help in finding our way is O.K., too.

So I set up a meeting with Kathleen Seabolt, Ed.D., the executive director of the Child and Family Center at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn.

Dr. Seabolt added some nuance to my understanding of my interaction with my daughter. She told me, "You were rightly protecting a home from disease, a disease that has killed over one million Americans. You are allowed to make an effort to protect your family. It's our job as parents." But



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she also said that I would be right to make amends: “The repair could be, ‘I know we are both angry right now and I regret the tone of my voice. I regret the words I’ve chosen. I wish I had made better choices. And it’s very important that we all cooperate together to keep Grandma well, to keep everybody healthy.’”

I was struck by Seabolt’s use of the word repair as a key part of reconciliation. Looking at it through a Christian lens, I thought of the gift and role of God’s grace in the process. It reminded me of something Pope Francis had said as part of his apology this past summer to the Indigenous people of Canada.

“Our own efforts are not enough to achieve healing and reconciliation: we need God’s grace,” the pope said. “We need the quiet and powerful wisdom of the Spirit, the tender love of the Comforter.” By no means is what Pope Francis was doing in Canada analogous to my asking my daughters to forgive me for yelling at them in the kitchen, but I appreciate the framework he lays out and emphasis he places on God’s grace.

And it is that grace that gives us the strength to get to the repair. “Love is bolstered by the tender craft of commitment,” wrote the writer and playwright Renée Darline Roden in a reflection in the daily devotional Give Us This Day. “Inspiration is followed by discipline. Healing is accompanied by therapy—physical or mental. And grace is followed by decision.”

If you ask for forgiveness from your daughters (or anyone else), and call upon God’s grace and receive it (and from God, I believe, you always do), you must then decide to take action. To be more patient. To attempt to fix what has been broken. Even when your daughter, a couple of weeks after not wanting to wear a particular mask, decides she does not want

to wear shoes while walking through the airport. But I digress.

“When we have the capacity as humans to take a breath and reflect and then make authentic repairs, I think that’s the strongest practice a parent can model for their child,” Dr. Seabolt said. “We’re showing them how to assess, how to check in with themselves. The acknowledgement of big feelings is not the denial that these big feelings should exist. I would even say in my own personal faith, I believe we were given these feelings and that we were given them for a profound purpose. It’s to understand what the gift of these feelings is and then how to manage them properly so that we are behaving in a way that is kind and considerate of others.”

But Dr. Seabolt also cautioned that the process must be authentic, that such repairs should also help transform our own actions in the future. “If we are trapped in a cycle of ‘I’m sorry,’ those words lose power because there’s no repair attached to the words,” she said. “If a child chooses to parrot language of apology without the proper feelings and process, then we have taught them a magic spell to make bad feelings go away and for them to be able to go on about their business. That is not the process we want.”

I have, at times, felt stuck in just this cycle—not with my children but with my own mother. She suffered from dementia, and I cared for her as the disease progressed throughout her 60s. Her diagnosis, coupled with a mood disorder, often meant that I felt more like the parent than the child, and I sometimes treated her as such.

The indignity of that broke my heart, but according to her geriatric psychiatrist, it was often necessary. She would occasionally do things or say things for which I would scold her. Sometimes I would lose my temper or shout. It was all terribly frustrating, and I was ill-equipped to handle it. Thinking back now, I am not sure the psychiatrist was helpful. But in my moments of anger, my mother would often get very quiet, seemingly embarrassed, look me in the eye and say something she never said to me during my childhood: “I’m sorry, Joey.” My heart would break even more, and I would hate myself after.

It is strange to think that caring for my mother during those years somehow prepared me to care for my children: to continue, despite my mistakes, to go gently where and when I can; to continue to try to do better. None of it has been easy, and at times caring for my mother verged on traumatic—my wife recalls a time I became so distraught with my mother, so frustrated and overwhelmed by her disease, that I blacked



# 'Forgive yourself the way that you always hope to be forgiven by others.'



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out. And some of my daughter's actions could be triggers for my own suppressed pain. But I know this is not intentional, this is not their fault, and I need to allow their actions, however frustrating, to serve as reminders to me, sometimes gentle, sometimes aggressive, of the need to extend and receive grace.

Dr. Seabolt agreed that there were some parenting lessons to be learned from my own interactions with my parents, but also acknowledged that "the difference is the direction that journey [with my children] is going."

When we are parenting children, she said, we start that relationship with incredible hope and delight. Even through multiple dirty diapers and sleepless nights, we believe we will overcome the challenges and that our children will successfully grow and develop, and that we will get to experience the wonder and miracle of their development.

"With elder caregiving, we hopefully have an established relationship of love," Dr. Seabolt said. "Our emotional response to our new role is wrapped up in that person who used to take care of us, someone we often, for many of us, placed on a pedestal." She acknowledged that "there is this entanglement of grief because we are not emotionally prepared for what is happening." We're not ready for the diminishment of the person we knew.

"They're just incredibly vulnerable, and so there's something sad about that level of care because we know they're not going to grow out of it," Dr. Seabolt added. It is the type of stressful environment in which it is easy to make mistakes or to say things we don't mean, or say them in a way we don't intend. "We're going to judge ourselves really

harshly on that," she said.

I hope the lessons I learned in caring for my mother, in forgiving my father, help me to forge a better path forward with my children. I know I did my best to care for my mother. I'm proud of the way I reconciled with my father in the years before he died. In retrospect, I think this repair says more about his efforts than my desire to forgive him. And I think I'm a good father.

But I have often wanted to go back and care for my mother all over again with the knowledge I've since acquired about eldercare and dementia. I have wished I could go back to tell my father what a great champion of his adult children and grandchildren he'd become. I have wished I could rewind my daughters' first six years and respond calmly to every challenge that comes our way.

But I know life doesn't work that way. That's where grace comes in. It offers an opportunity, not to restart, but to resume with intent, or, as Pope Francis put it, to see ourselves through the eyes of "the quiet and powerful wisdom of the Spirit, the tender love of the Comforter"; to forgive ourselves and make the decisions and repairs that allow us to move forward.

"Forgive yourself the way that you always hope to be forgiven by others," Dr. Seabolt told me. "Forgive yourself the way that you generously forgive others, because I think it will help us be happier, and help us be better at those jobs."

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Joe Pagetta is a museum communications professional, essayist and arts writer in Nashville, Tenn.

# COALSACK NEBULA

By Laura Reece Hogan

The mystics say to dig, hammer the cloud, day  
and night. That the act of gazing at the long obsidian

robe of God undresses unknowing. I have descended  
one mile underground down a mine shaft

in the back of a pickup and there was no adjusting  
of the eyes, only the coal oblivion of open veins. I

have tracked the dark nebula at the foot of the Crux  
600 light-years from earth and I cannot penetrate

your meaning, swathed in opaque interstellar cloud  
which sweeps light away with dust of loss,

blackness of grief. I cannot pierce  
the absence to find a single ray. I am always imploring

you to tell me, beloved, if you have left me forever?  
I scrabble the seam of your silence. You blot the belly

of earth, hollow the cosmos; you ink the endless empty  
patches, you sharpen my unseeing eyes so I slip

the stars. You hew vast space for yourself in my narrow  
atoms. I dimly carry this sparking quarry which slides

through my sieved soul. I am always asking you to untie  
your sack of stars, all while here there are diamonds.

Laura Reece Hogan is the author of  
Butterfly Nebula (forthcoming 2023),  
the chapbook O Garden-Dweller and the  
spiritual theology book I Live, No Longer I.  
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# The Meaning of Monk Movies

By Eve Tushnet

Catholics love movies about nuns—and we’ve got plenty to choose from. Whether you’re in the mood for a preconciliar classic like “The Bells of St. Mary’s” or a heartfelt indie comedy like “Little Sister,” or just your 15th comfort-watch of “Sister Act 2,” the cinematic sisterhood is there for you. There aren’t quite so many great movies about priests, but there are still enough to fill an Advent calendar, from “Becket” to “I Confess” to “The Exorcist” to “Doubt.”

But what about other niches in the vocational ecology? Try to come up with a list of great films about monks or friars, and at best you’ll be able to scrape together a handful. There are some truly excellent films about monks, with deep insights into the love of God and the nature of sacrifice. But why aren’t there more? And what does this absence cost us?

Of the eight films most relevant to our understanding of cinematic Catholic monks and friars, my own favorites in this strangely small subgenre remain unchanged: “Of Gods and Men” (2010) and “The Flowers of St. Francis” (1950). (For the purposes of this list I excluded movies about Orthodox Christian monks.) Both of these films, like most of the movies in this genre, are hagiographies. “Of Gods and Men,” directed by Xavier Beauvois, depicts the lives of nine Trappist monks in Tibhirine, Algeria, leading up to their kidnapping and murder in 1996 during the Algerian Civil War.

Beauvois shows the monks as part of their local community. They offer medical treatment to the Muslims among whom they live. They experience village life with the awkwardness of outsiders, but show the care and unwavering commitment of community members. One of the film’s most memorable scenes involves a young Muslim woman and an old Catholic monk discussing their experiences of love.

“Of Gods and Men” shows its monks as individuals drawn like awestruck moths to the flame of Christ’s love.



“Of Gods and Men” (2011) shows its monks as individuals drawn like awestruck moths to the flame of Christ’s love.

Beauvois captures the emotional intensity of the monks’ spiritual lives—including the choices that lead them to their deaths. Scenes of Mass in the monastery are hushed and reverent; the scene in which they vote on whether or not to flee, knowing that staying will likely mean death, is electric. In the film’s most moving scene, the monks enjoy a meal together while listening to a cassette tape of “Swan Lake”: secular music, an ordinary dinner, yet transformed into a eucharistic liturgy by their knowledge that violent death is very near.

## An Italian Classic

Roberto Rossellini’s “**Flowers of St. Francis**” is one of a few biopics about the stripped saint of Assisi. Rossellini’s film is set apart from the rest by several characteristics, all of which push the film further from Hollywood conventions. Most of the actors are real Franciscans, including the man who plays St. Francis himself. The friar who played Francis is also not named in the credits, turning his



CNS photo/Sony Pictures Classics

portrayal of humility into an act of humility. “Flowers” is an episodic film about the adventures and misadventures of several of the saint’s early followers. It’s a community portrait—less about Francis the individual, more about the Franciscan way of life.

And it’s funny. (The original Italian title, which translates roughly as “Francis, God’s Jester,” gets closer to the movie’s mood than its English title.) Rossellini’s film is an extended meditation on the paradoxes of the Gospel: the last shall be first, he who humbles himself shall be exalted, self-preservation is loss and self-sacrifice is gain. These paradoxes have become so familiar that it’s easy for us to forget how bizarre they are—how genuinely difficult a challenge they present. So Rossellini opens his film with Francis and his followers splashing through mud in a rainstorm, proclaiming their joy. “May all men recover love’s joy!” Francis cries—and goes galumphing off in a spray of filthy water.

All the Francis films show the saint and his followers choosing discomfort over comfort, ridicule over flattery.

But where the other hagiographic films take these humiliations seriously, even self-seriously, maintaining a lugubrious piety in the face of mud and mockery, “Flowers” is full of punchlines and slapstick. Francis’ commands are unexpected and sometimes basically wrong. When an old man says he can’t wander the world begging in the cape he loves, Francis agrees—and tells him to get rid of both the cape and his shoes! In another episode, Francis tells another friar to trample him as punishment for his pride; the friar apologetically steps on him and quickly steps right back off. The movie’s comic tone gives it a grubby joy and a medieval weirdness that reflects its source material, the 14th-century compilation *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*.

The film’s most slapstick episode is also its most heartfelt. A friar desperately wants to preach instead of staying home cooking for the others. Francis severely says he can preach as long as he starts out by saying, “I talk a lot but I accomplish little!” The obedient friar trots off and promptly gets mixed up in a siege. He preaches to the besiegers,



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# There are some truly excellent films about monks. But why aren't there more?

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who fling him around—they use him as a jump rope!—and are about to kill him when he's rescued by a priest and taken to the warlord Nicolaio, a ridiculous figure trapped in his ornate armor. There's banter among the executioners (“With your aim, you almost cut off the last one's rump!”) and a hilarious moment in which the barely verbal Nicolaio indicates that he has read Aristotle. But the point of all this comedy is the miracle: Brother Ginepro converts the warrior, and the siege is lifted. Peace is accomplished through humiliation and surrender.

“Flowers” is the Francis biopic most concerned with the community, rather than the individual. In the two other Francis films I watched, St. Clare is portrayed as the only woman in Francis' company, whereas in “Flowers” she appears together with other sisters. Perhaps because of this community focus, this is the only one of the three hagiographies in which poor people appear as opinionated individuals rather than an undifferentiated mass of need. One family is happy to dump their “simple” grandfather on Francis, and the old man becomes one of the community's core followers. Everybody's choices matter in this movie, and everybody's soul is up for grabs.

## Other Films About St. Francis

The other two Francis biopics I watched speak to my own spirituality less, but they have strengths Rossellini's masterpiece lacks. Franco Zeffirelli's “**Brother Sun, Sister Moon**” (1972) provided a generation of Catholics with a template for their faith: anti-authoritarian, nature-loving, youthful and idealistic. I mentioned the movie to a friend,

and she sang from memory one of the movie's sweetest songs, a paean to simplicity. She had learned the song, she said, from a Catholic layman who devoted himself to serving people in need: “the person who showed me what unconditional love is.” Zeffirelli emphasizes Francis and Clare's dewy youth, echoing his famous 1968 adaptation of “Romeo and Juliet.” “Brother Sun” is simplistic, and its second half, focusing on Francis' conflicts with church hierarchs, is much weaker than its first half. But it's an unabashedly inspirational film.

Liliana Cavani's “**Francesco**” (1989) suffers from its casting. Mickey Rourke and Helena Bonham Carter, both talented actors, struggle to portray Francesco and Chiara (Clare). Rourke seems tamped-down, as if afraid of setting a foot wrong when playing a saint, and Bonham Carter, an actress with a gift for coquetry and command, gives Chiara a perpetual petulant moue. But in other respects Cavani blends medieval piety and modern concerns more completely than the other two filmmakers. We see the full effects of Francis' military service. He is not just a spoiled rich kid, but a veteran suffering from PTSD. His clash with his merchant father follows a contemporary Pixar-film script in which the parents are always wrong. It is striking to see Francis take a new interest in the material basis of his family's wealth, visiting the dyeing rooms and seeing the impoverished people who work themselves to the bone so he can party. This film interrogates the moral psychology of the conscience-stricken rich, though it shows less interest in the moral or spiritual lives of the poor.

“Francesco,” like most films of its era, mistrusts institutional authority. Rossellini starts by saying Francis won approval from Pope Innocent III; Zeffirelli and Cavani focus more on the clash between Francis' poverty and the church's luxury. Cavani gestures at later controversies in which people seeking to follow Francis veered into heresy, and she gives as much respect to persecuted heretics as to the loyal son of the church at the center of her film. Where Zeffirelli's film shows its spiritual side in the lilting, golden shots of nature, Cavani uses El Greco colors and bleaker light to suggest a more damaged and doubt-ridden world. Francis himself doubts—and his anguished question to God receives an unexpected answer in this movie's most haunting and trusting moment.

“**Dos Monjes (Two Monks)**” is a 1934 melodrama from the Mexican director Juan Bustillo Oro, preserved and highlighted by Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Project. Two men vie for the love of one woman, but when Javier catches Ana in Juan's arms, somebody shoots—and Ana, coming between the two men, dies instead of the intended target. Both men then become monks, neither knowing

Franco Zeffirelli's "Brother Sun, Sister Moon" (1972) provided a generation of Catholics with a template for their faith.



that the other has been tonsured. Their unwanted reunion, and the conflicting versions they give of that fatal encounter with Ana, unfold in gorgeous, Expressionist light and shadow. The monastery is a stage for near-allegorical scenes of guilt, uncertainty and forgiveness: a place of heightened emotion, as private and riven as the human heart.

Pier Paolo Pasolini's "**The Hawks and the Sparrows**" (1966) is a comedy about the depredations of the owning classes on the poor. It follows a Little Tramp-like semi-vagabond and his slow-witted son through time and space, guided by a talking Marxist crow from the far-off country of Ideology. In the extended middle sequence that gives the film its title, father and son are friars ordered by St. Francis to preach to the birds. They suffer greatly in pursuit of this goal and think they've been successful—but the hawks still slaughter the sparrows. Francis rebukes the friars, saying they must preach that "this world must be changed," and that in the future, "a man with blue eyes will bring awareness of class inequality." "Hawks" is a film with as much whimsy and irony as moral conviction, and it wears its Catholic-Marxist fusionism lightly.

"**The Name of the Rose**": This 1986 adaptation of Umberto Eco's novel about heresy, murder and a secret li-

brary in a 14th-century Benedictine abbey was made with great skill. James Horner's eerie music and Dante Ferretti's gargoylicious production design are pure pleasure. Sean Connery portrays a Franciscan detective, allowing the film to play on the difference between mystery as the name of a literary genre in which a crime is solved, and mystery as a theological term exposing the unknowability of God. The movie condemns monks who live off the laypeople but is not able to say much beyond that about Christ's poverty or the possibility of Christian comedy, the film's two stated intellectual concerns. It feels as though the film lacks either faith or atheism, and without those undercurrents, it's just a costume drama.

And last—no tribute to friars on film would be complete without a mention of Friar Tuck, the most-filmed friar of them all. My own favorite Tuck is the plump, sincere badger in Disney's 1973 cartoon "**Robin Hood**."

### **The Meaning of Monks**

Perhaps there are fewer movies about monks and friars because there are fewer of them. The Vatican's numbers for 2019 give 630,099 women religious and 414,336 priests, versus just 50,295 religious brothers. Tim Markatos, an Or-

thodox Christian film critic, suggests that filmmakers may also be limited by the material available to them: “Taking a quick look at my list of faith-related films, I’m seeing a lot of nun movies that are adaptations of books or something similar.... Is there simply more nun [intellectual property] to go around than monk IP? Or is there some other reason why the nun stories get the movie treatment and the monk stories don’t? I don’t have answers, only more questions.”

My own suspicion is that filmmakers just don’t see what kinds of stories monks and friars might be best suited to tell. Movies about Christian vowed religious are often movies about power and trust. Stories about priests sometimes show the priest as the rare good man with power. Perhaps more often, they question whether it is possible to be both respected, with all the power and protection that respect implies, and good. Movies about religious sisters, especially more recent films, often focus on the clash between religious hierarchy and the subordinate individual. In movies where a woman is the spiritual authority, the film often turns on the stark division between spiritual authority and hierarchical power.

Films about monks and friars, by contrast, often depict those who once had the social power of men but have deliberately stripped themselves of it. Where a religious vocation might offer a woman authority she would not be granted in lay life, films about monks and friars could emphasize their newfound submission and powerlessness. We hear a great deal nowadays about empowered women; the idea that there is something beautiful and holy in willingly disempowered men is even more countercultural.

Monks and friars would also offer new ways to tell stories about community. Many movies about nuns and sisters focus on the community as a world set apart: the nun genre overlaps with the “women’s picture,” that beloved genre of films about the trials and shared joys of a group of friends. There is no “men’s picture”; movies about the trials and shared joys of men who love one another are mostly war movies or sports movies. “The Flowers of St. Francis” and “Of Gods and Men” portray men who learn to love one another in loving God. They are “Steel Magnolias” with the stigmata, “The Joy Luck Club” with martyrdom instead of mahjong.

But what stood out to me more than anything else, as I watched these films, was the way they talked about love. Most of the movies about priests and women religious I have seen do not spend much time on love. They may explore the idea of vocation, and they certainly understand that romantic or sexual love might be a temptation, but they are not discourses on the nature of love in the way

that so many of the films mentioned in this essay are.

Chiara in “Francesco” confesses her love for Francesco—and one of the brothers immediately chimes in, “For me it was like an earthquake.” This is a love of Francis that is romantic, and more than romantic. “Brother Sun” talks about love somewhat less, but in portraying Francis and Clare as young lovers united not in marriage but in celibacy, it offers a vision of love in which all our temporal loves point upward as hints about the love God offers us.

“Flowers” does not talk much about love, but it does portray the deep tenderness shown by Francis toward his followers and vice versa. Even “Hawks and Sparrows” strikes its most unresolved note when it has the friars close their preaching to both sets of birds by speaking of “love,” a word the birds take up and repeat as they fly away; we never find out what the birds think it means. It seems that love requires class-consciousness, requires structural change in society, and yet it goes beyond those intelligible demands into some as-yet-unknown mystery. “Hawks” is a comedy more comfortable undercutting ambitions than evoking longings. The repeated cry of the birds, “LOVE. LOVE. LOVE,” is the one exception.

I mentioned the scene in “Of Gods and Men” in which an old monk and a young woman discuss love. This is the most explicit, almost programmatic statement on the nature of love in any of these films, and it fits with the idea of love that they all share. The abbot, Dom Christian, will later explain the monks’ choice to remain in spite of the threat to their lives by saying: “We are martyrs out of love, out of fidelity. If death overtake us, despite ourselves, because up to the end, up to the end we’ll try to avoid it, our mission here is to be brothers to all. Remember that love is eternal hope. Love endures everything.” But the monks’ understanding of love has already been summarized best by the aging Brother Luc, who tells the village girl that he, too, has been in love, as she is in love now: “Several times, yes. And then I encountered another love, even greater. And I answered that love.”

Perhaps this is the unique narrative nexus that stories of monks and friars can provide: the depiction of the romance of surrender, of wilfully losing all for love.

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*Eve Tushnet is the author of several books, most recently **Tenderness: A Gay Christian’s Guide to Unlearning Rejection and Experiencing God’s Extravagant Love.***

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## HOW TO BE HUMAN

In “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” Pope Francis puts forth a curious claim: “Time is greater than space.” James K.A. Smith probably did not write his *How to Inhabit Time: Understanding the Past, Facing the Future, Living Faithfully Now* to help us understand Pope Francis’ statement. And yet his thoughtful meditation on living in time reminded me of Francis’ teaching.

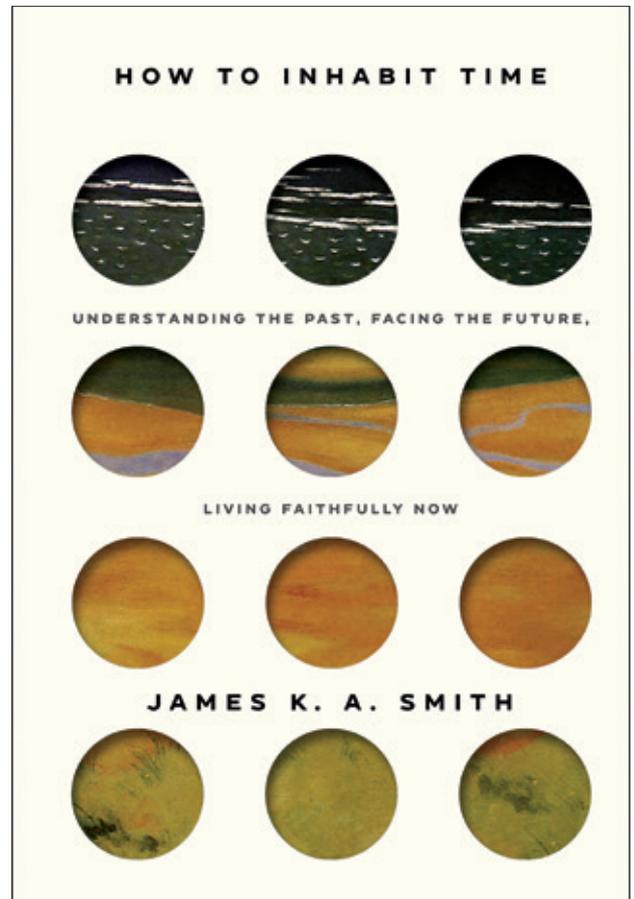
For Francis, prioritizing time means initiating processes, opening possibilities and letting people grow and change over time. Likewise, Smith describes his goal in the book as shifting our attention from the question of “where am I?” to the question of “when am I?” It is not that we need to get with the times; rather, we need to get with our temporality. We need to authentically live our being as becoming, our lives as changing and our existence as being on the way to the God who made time for us.

Amidst the shouts and clamors of contemporary discourse and the griefs and anxiety of our time, Smith has held to a consistent course of writing. He writes to shed a little light, to offer some guidance and to help Christians be Christian. As he puts it, his philosophy is meant to help readers learn “how to live, how to be human.”

He writes in *How to Inhabit Time* that he seeks to reorient us to the reality of human life as temporal. Too many of us are attracted to a “spatial” life because we can control spaces and stop them from changing. Time, even when managed, is always beyond our control. Smith describes spatial prioritization as “nowhen” spirituality. He aims his critical eye toward those who see faithfulness as “a matter of guarding against change.” To recognize our temporality is to see that we cannot control time or stop change. We live now—out of our past and into our future. Wisdom is recognizing this flux and embracing it.

Smith’s book is an exercise in “spiritual timekeeping,” which he describes as “a matter of awakening to our embeddedness in history and attending to our temporality.” Spiritual timekeeping is about how our bodies, souls and communities exist through the retention of the past, attention to the present and anticipation of the future. We cannot escape our past, nor can we hide in it; we cannot live in the future, nor can we refuse the oncoming of it; we cannot avoid living in the present, nor can we exclusively live in it. We exist as extending through our past, present and future.

Smith explores this reality with philosophers like Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl. He also reflects on poetry, paintings and song lyrics while interspersing his text with meditations on the Book of Ecclesiastes and reflections on his own life.



Brazos Press / 208p \$24.99

The philosophical therapy that this book offers depends on its sometimes-rambling nature. Time tends to meander and diverge, and so a book about it should show how we navigate that meandering and diverging. Smith offers us a way of dwelling in our changing and becoming, our birthing and dying. To read him is to find a sense of meaning amidst the meandering.

The real question of time is how we will inhabit time. There is an authentic comportment to temporality that does not seek to hide within one of its modes—past, present or future. Authentic temporality sees the interrelationship of each as essential to our lives. For Christians, this authentic comportment means living between the event of Christ and the promise of his return. In this, Christianity is uniquely temporal, a religion shaped by remembering and awaiting. The question of our lives is how we will live in this history between the Ascension and the Second Coming without negating the sacral importance of the time in between.

This is no easy task. Christians can be tempted by the past (from which we receive our faith) or our future. (Why worry too much about now, when the future is what matters?) But we need to hold both together with the present

in our being in time because we find God in time.

For Smith, this temporal authenticity entails embracing our ephemerality. It is not just that we pass through time, like I might pass through a room. I remain the same and so does the room. Rather, our passing through is our being. In passing through, we are changed with our times. As he writes, “to embrace the ephemeral is to live with such flux, to live gratefully amid change.” Just as it is not incidental to a song that it plays out over time, so too our life must “play on.” Rejecting flux is like stopping the song to preserve the music. Just as stopping the song means ending the music, halting time leads to stasis and stagnation.

While Smith offers us rich opportunities for reflection, his book leans too heavily into the flux. He and I are both students of Augustine. But for Augustine, the eternal is better than the temporal. We need to cling to the former to live well in the latter. To order our temporal loves correctly is to place the eternal before the temporal and the lasting before the ephemeral. Humans are not only time-bound; we are immortal souls in mortal bodies. The eternal is not only above, but also within my temporality.

Likewise, the Christian vocation calls upon us to “stand fast and hold to these traditions we were taught” (2 Th 2:15). Smith offers important critiques of “nowhen Christians” for holding onto the zombies of tradition and claims that “the church is a people of the future.” Unliving traditionalism is a spiritual malady; to be a church is to be a people of hope. However, a Christian life is shaped by fidelity to what we have received and by commitments to what does not change.

My critique here is a matter of emphasis. Smith does not deny tradition or eternity. But he follows Heidegger a little too closely (by overemphasizing flux and ephemerality) and Augustine not closely enough (by downplaying constancy and changelessness).

Despite this, Smith offers a meditative reminder that Christians must get our timing right. We follow a God that “is not allergic to history” and live in a “history already open to the eternal.” Smith’s book is worth your time because he reminds us of this. He reminds us that there is nothing more important than getting our timing right. Christian spiritual timekeeping is best expressed by the season of Advent. The advent of Christ in the past is the promise of the advent of Christ in our present life, which orients us to the advent of Christ at the fulfillment of time. It is time we got that right.

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## SEX WITHOUT RELIGION

Louise Perry’s tour de force, *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*, so thoroughly decimates any case for the sexual revolution that hardly a shred is left standing. Her book also raises a question difficult to answer: Given the fraught situation in which the sexual revolution has left many women and men, where do we go from here?

The London-based Perry, a journalist in her early 30s and a new mother, celebrates the gains of reliable family planning methods and professional opportunity which modernity has delivered to women. Indeed, Perry’s own identification as a non-religious feminist renders her critique of sexual liberation (at least for the heterosexual majority, on whom the book is wholly focused) even more searing. One by one, the lessons about sex that mainstream, secular feminism offers to young, heterosexual women are revealed as lies by her honest gaze.

Perry makes several arguments that are anathema to most of today’s self-identified feminists: first, that the average woman and the average man approach sex differently; second, that sexual liberation has ultimately freed men to prey upon women more than it has freed women to access sexual pleasure; and third, that pornography and sex work exploit women and infantilize men.

Leading the reader through each of these arguments, Perry slays mainstream, secular feminist sacred cow after sacred cow, offering meticulous defenses of her premises in response to nearly all the anticipated objections to her argument.

“But women and men are only as different as we socially construct them to be!” Nope: Evolutionary biology has left the average man far higher than the average woman in the personality trait called “sociosexuality,” which refers to how much sexual variety itself turns a person on. Obviously, there are some men that are low in sociosexuality and some women that are high in it; those are the rare exceptions that prove the overwhelming rule. Therefore, to the extent that mutual monogamy requires repression, it is men more than women who will feel repressed.

“But women are sexually liberated now and enjoying sex just like men always have!” Nope: Women do not achieve sexual pleasure in casual encounters at anything close to the rate that men do. Where do women achieve sexual pleasure with most regularity? In the kinds of committed, monogamous relationships that often comprise co-parenthood and that many single women are seeking.

“But sex work is just work, and pornography broadens the scope of sexual relationships!” Nope: In ad-

dition to its overwhelming exploitation of women, a pornographic culture has inflected sexual relationships between men and women. Women who want to say “no” to sex on a first date, or to the kinds of rough sexual acts that are depicted in today’s most popular pornography, are at a disadvantage in a pornified sexual marketplace. Meanwhile, erectile dysfunction and involuntary celibacy are on the rise among young men, and there is evidence to suggest that abundant consumption of pornography is at least partly to blame.

One of Perry’s most interesting arguments is that our anarchic sexual culture is reproducing a 21st-century version of polygamy, where high-status, desirable men attract many women and are difficult for any individual woman to pin down, while lower-status, less attractive men attract no women and are left without access to sex or partnership. Today, Perry argues, there are many more unmarried 20-something and 30-something women looking for mates than in previous generations, as well as many more young men who report having had sex with zero partners in the past year.

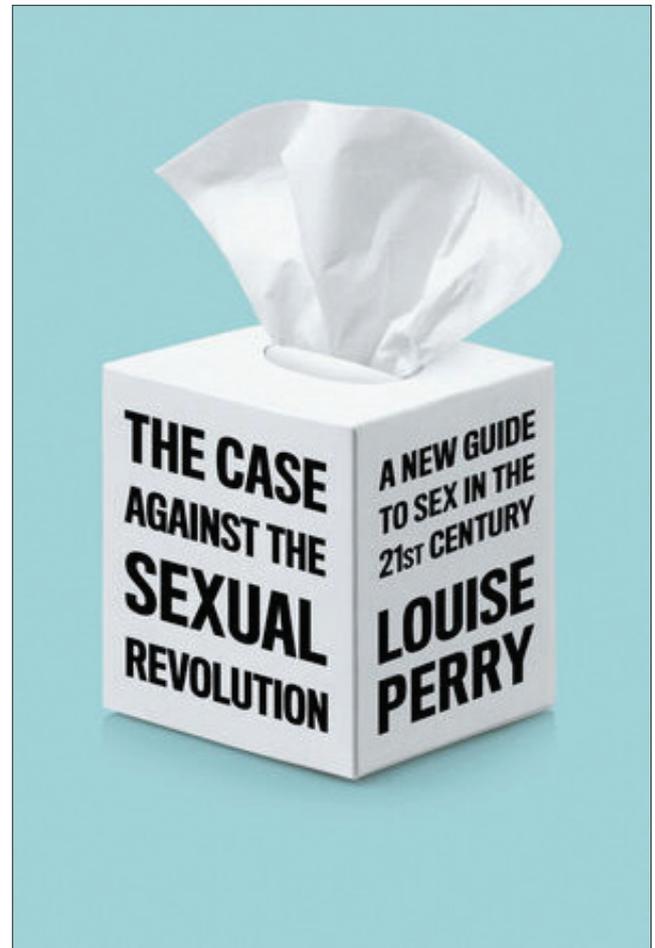
This neo-polygamy is fueled by a few different realities simultaneously—each of which encompasses individual gains but also societal trade-offs.

First, women now pay less of a social price for staying single longer. A 30-something single woman is not considered a “spinster” anymore, and is therefore less likely to settle in her choice of mate. Second, online dating creates the illusion—or reality—of endless choice for both women and men. Finally, Perry explains, polygamy, not monogamy, is the natural state of the human animal as well as the historical rule. Evolution has wired us to maximize the odds of survival by having the most seemingly successful men produce as many children as possible. Polygamy leaves many males out of the reproductive scheme altogether, and necessitates that females share male partners.

The widespread expectation of monogamy that reigned in the West until quite recently was, Perry argues, a kind of “sexual socialism,” in which everyone was expected to get a reasonably equal share of sex and companionship via a primary romantic relationship. The pressure to couple up relatively young meant that, while many people settled for partners that they might have deemed less desirable than the ideal, almost everyone found a partner. Perry contends that a return to that system would benefit most individuals (female and male) as well as society writ large. I wholeheartedly agree.

But how do we get there?

Unfortunately, Perry doesn’t have a real answer. I do,



Polity Books / 200p \$19.95

though. There is only one force with any empirical record (partial and flawed though it is) of achieving the more even sexual playing field that she endorses in a large, free and multiethnic society like our own. That force is explicitly religious morality.

Nature—as in, red in tooth and claw—is brutal. Stronger animals tend to dominate weaker ones if they can. As Perry points out, men tend to be physically larger and stronger than women, and to have much higher sex drives.

Hence, any social system that seeks to prevent among human beings the kind of “objectification of women” that feminists have rightly condemned—not to mention the kind of sexual intercourse by force (i.e., rape) that is quite common among lower animals—will have to do one of two things: police all men every waking moment, or inspire men to police themselves. Since the former is impractical to the point of impossibility, we are left with the latter.

Many men are agreeable enough by nature that typical socialization in basic sympathy is more than enough to keep them from intentionally hurting women, physically or emotionally. “Nice guys” do, however, hurt women un-

intentionally, having unthinkingly (and, yes, self-interestedly) bought the modern feminist canard that most women are no different from most men when it comes to sex. Moreover, as Perry demonstrates and as we all know, brutal nature burns within each of us, whether we acknowledge it or not. We are, after all, animals; and animals are dangerous.

So how we conceptualize the basic regard for others that is supposed to make us behave in pro-social, civilized ways—it matters. It is not enough to know that we should treat other people with dignity. We have to be able to articulate why.

One answer to the question of why others are worthy of our freely given regard and respect (why a man should not use his neighbor for sex, even if he is pretty sure he will suffer no reputational or other damage for doing so) that has both genuine intellectual heft or spiritual depth involves religion.

If women and men are created in the image and likeness of an all-loving, all-knowing God, then using another person for sexual gratification (or for any merely selfish end) is inhumane and evil. But if there is no such God, then why not treat people—sexually and otherwise—however you can get away with? A godless version of the golden rule, in which well-meaning Westerners without an explicitly religious framework tend to instruct their children, is an inherently weak bulwark against the lack of a societal answer to this question.

In arguing against the use of artificial contraception in “*Humanae Vitae*” (1968), Pope Paul VI contended that the decoupling of sex from procreation—in short, the sexual revolution—would cause men to “forget the reverence due to a woman” and to “reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires.”

It is easy to criticize the late pontiff’s argument here, even though he has been proven prophetic. After all, he was blaming the pill for an ostensibly forthcoming reality in which men would treat women badly—but many women had already been treated badly by men throughout history, including during the 1,400 years when Judeo-Christian morality was nominally ubiquitous. Sadly, there has never yet been a society in which some powerful men did not use and abuse many poorer, more vulnerable women—sexually and otherwise.

One solution to that perennial injustice—and the one for which the earliest feminists of the 19th century advocated—could have been to expand the cultural understanding of the “image and likeness of God” to include women of all races and classes, rather than just white women of means.

Instead, the sexual revolution’s decoupling of sex from

traditional religious morality and mores altogether in the West means that any woman of any class is now fair game for objectification, provided she has offered the clinical “consent” that makes her a participant in her own maltreatment. This has been an unmitigated disaster, as Perry courageously makes clear.

It is also the entrenched reality, and untold damage has already been done. Indeed, Perry dedicates her book to “the women that learned the hard way.” I hope that those of us raising sons and daughters today will be honest with our children about the fact that some inculcation in the enduring wisdom of religious morality is the necessary foundation for any easier way.

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## How Catholic Parish Life is Changing in the United States

Directed by Sebastian Gomes

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## A PROPHET OF THE MEDIA AGE

Nick Ripatrazone's new book on Marshall McLuhan arrived in my mailbox the day I presented a play about Marshall McLuhan at a conference on the Catholic imagination in Dallas, Tex. A fitting coincidence, if such things exist.

I began writing the play as part of the Church Communications Ecology program at the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. The program brought together around 30 communications professionals to read, learn and create projects to help the church communicate its message in a digital age. "Communications professionals" was a broadly defined term. Our cohort consisted of college professors, high school teachers, writers, digital media entrepreneurs, seminarians and two artists (myself one of them).

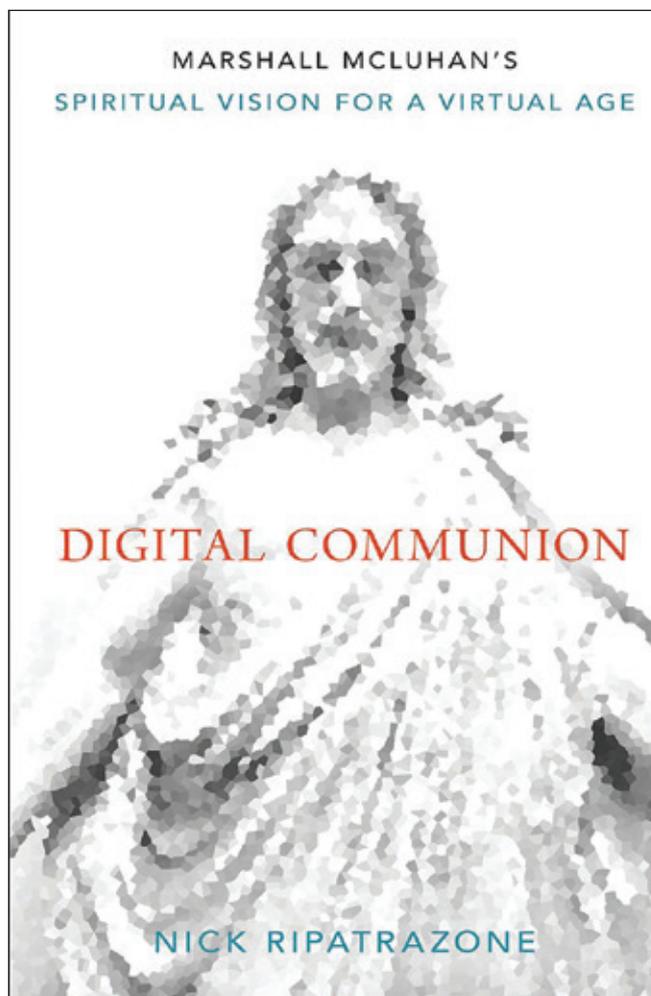
We met via Zoom for two months at the beginning of 2022 to discuss a wide range of readings. We read theology from Bonaventure and Romano Guardini, as well as from ecological thinkers like Rachel Carson. We pondered Andy Warhol's imagination and learned the communication theory behind Fred Rogers's television neighborhood. We watched Bo Burnham's "Inside," discussed the phenomenon of Wordle on our class message boards and consumed media theorists Walter Ong, S.J., and Marshall McLuhan.

Nick Ripatrazone, author of *Digital Communion*, a new book about Marshall McLuhan, visited one of these Zoom classes. In our class, he spoke about his new book and shared its thesis: "McLuhan's Catholicism is not a footnote but rather a foundation of his media theories." For a thinker like McLuhan, who is not as widely celebrated as other 20th-century American Catholic thinkers, this simple thesis is a surprisingly radical new paradigm.

Born in Alberta, Canada, in 1911, McLuhan converted to Catholicism in 1937 while at Cambridge writing his dissertation. He became a professor at St. Michael's College in Toronto, and his first books, *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) and *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) skyrocketed him to public intellectual fame in the television age.

Ripatrazone's *Digital Communion* opens with a pericope describing the first televised papal Mass in the United States—in Yankee Stadium on Oct. 4, 1965—a story that introduces the dramatic tensions between technology and faith. And perhaps a story that shows the Catholic Church is unprepared, as it was with the advent of the printing press, for the seismic shifts a new medium like television will cause.

After this opening anecdote, the book cuts to McLuhan's appointment to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. McLuhan, Ripatrazone argues in multiple chapters, was perhaps ahead of his time. In the 1960s,



Fortress Press / 145p \$26.99

McLuhan already saw the internet on the horizon when the rest of the world was falling in love with broadcast television. Now that we are streaming television shows in the palm of our hand around the clock, we are ready for McLuhan's prophecies of the digital age.

Ripatrazone's style in this spiritual biography and light theological exegesis of McLuhan's thought echoes McLuhan's own mosaic style. The author fills the pages with McLuhan's own words, which is easy to do since McLuhan is an infectious coiner of aphorisms. McLuhan's idiosyncratic formulations are always striking and original, making it difficult to resist quoting him verbatim.

Ripatrazone dives into McLuhan's singularly personal life, phraseology and his core beliefs, excavating the Catholic thread running through each. He tells the story of McLuhan's conversion at Cambridge. McLuhan's love of Gerard Manley Hopkins and James Joyce led him to Catholicism and inspired his media theory. Ripatrazone also delves into McLuhan's skepticism of Gutenberg and his printing press, the shrinking and uniting effects of print and digital media and the concept of the global village.

Print itself is a more mechanical intervention than perhaps we digital natives realize. We are so used to virtual environments that communication outside of screens seems more natural and organic. But, McLuhan notes, Gutenberg's printing press was the first media invention to make the world small.

Gutenberg's print alphabet, McLuhan believed, contributed to the Reformation. The repeated type, printed over and over again, with no individuality, more quickly produced than a manuscript, creates an industrialization of knowledge and an individualized access to it. It divides the world into small, accessible corners. McLuhan sees print as an individualizing and fragmentary medium. And the digital world, for McLuhan, brings us back into communion.

Which brings us to the concept of the global village, the situation we find ourselves in today. We find communion made difficult, ironically, by the hyper-connectivity of the internet. We are too wildly plugged into "a little bit of everything all of the time," as Bo Burnham describes the internet. Patricia Lockwood dubs the World Wide Web: "The portal you enter only when you needed to be everywhere." And if you are everywhere, you are, of course, nowhere.

We cannot escape our environment—we live in a particular climate zone, in a particular state, in a particular city, in a particular neighborhood. And digital media is part of that environment—the global village crashing into our city street.

But we can choose to engage with questions of how we will engage with our environment: What kind of global villager will we be? What sort of neighbor? How will we care for the world around us? How can we interact with the devices that are our media in our own terms, not in the terms they set, which, as McLuhan says, turn us into "servo-mechanisms."

Many artists and other malcontents (like myself) who pick up on the poison in our environment see the content or individual technologies as the villains. McLuhan has reminded me, as Ripatrazone does, that the effort of digital communion and liturgy in the digital age is not so much a fault of an iPhone or a Zoom screen or a camera observing Mass, but it is environmental. The digital world creates an environment that forms us into habits of being: inattention, distraction, scrolling. But we can resist those environmental habits and reactions.

In fact, perhaps it is the task of the artist, McLuhan suggests, to draw attention to our environment, to the ground of our being-together, and the habits it forms. "The present is always invisible because it's environmental and saturates the whole field of attention so overwhelmingly,"

wrote McLuhan, "thus everyone but the artist, the man of integral awareness, is alive in an earlier day." The artist, McLuhan suggests, is the member of society who clearly sees the present, not the past.

The play I presented in Dallas, "Is the Internet in Color?" tells the story of a woman with Alzheimer's disease who befriends a young journalist. A woman who holds the past in her body finds the present slipping away from her grasp. Her memory loss means the only reality for her will soon be the memories stored in her head. Borne back ceaselessly into the past has a violently literal meaning.

With theological and poetic interjections by Michael Murphy of the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage at Loyola Chicago University and McLuhan-esque riffs by Brett Robinson, of the McGrath Institute for Church Life, we created a dialogue of sorts between the characters of the play and the ideas contained within the story of Nancy's struggle with Alzheimer's.

The woman, Nancy, meets a young man—a paradigmatic zoomer—whose journalistic job it is to record the memories of a collective body, a public. His industry is dying, as the internet is slowly killing local journalism as we once knew it. Does the internet force us to live in the past, like Nancy? Is it the preserved instantaneous, insignificant moments like having oatmeal for lunch, a latte featuring a heart made of foam, or drinks with the girls in Cabo that live forever on a timeline? Are we stuck in the past or in the present? "The present / is too much for the senses," writes the poet Robert Frost, "too present to imagine." Such a sentiment could also be said of the World Wide Web.

The gift of the artist, McLuhan said, is to draw a new awareness or attention to something in an environment. "The artist's role is not to stress himself or his own point of view, but to let things sing and talk, to release the forms within them," said McLuhan in a 1959 talk to seminarians.

The artist—at least the playwright—creates art that demands the participation of the audience. Unlike a television segment, a play is something created with the audience viewing it: their temperament, their reactions, their questions. It is a true liturgical act of participation, something the television age never quite captured.

Despite the connectivity of the digital age, we find ourselves increasingly alone. A play is one of those rare liturgies that helps us make meaning together. A play, like a print book about McLuhan, like the prophetic, pencil-wielding professor himself, is perhaps an artifact and medium of culture that can and will persist. Because it contains in itself something essential to our human nature.

Nature finds a way of sneaking into our perfectly curated environments. We find friction even when the digital

environment is designed to be frictionless. We grow impatient when the internet is frozen, when Facebook's servers go down, when Instagram can't load and when our iPhone screen gets cracked. We find our global village is not an isolated community but part of a creation, part of a cosmos.

Although McLuhan agreed with his Jesuit influences that God is in all things, including the electronic light of the internet, he also understood that a society who had fundamentally remade its media had shaken its metaphors for our mediated God. Letters are no longer ink but pixelation, books are no longer calfskin but PDFs. If Christ is the *logos*, the Word, how do we imagine Christ now that words themselves have changed their form?

So here is the question McLuhan sets for Catholics in the 21st century: How do we enflesh God in a new age, in a new environment, when our understanding of language, communication and reality has been transformed? And, although the technological changes of the past century feel new, that question is as old as the apostles.

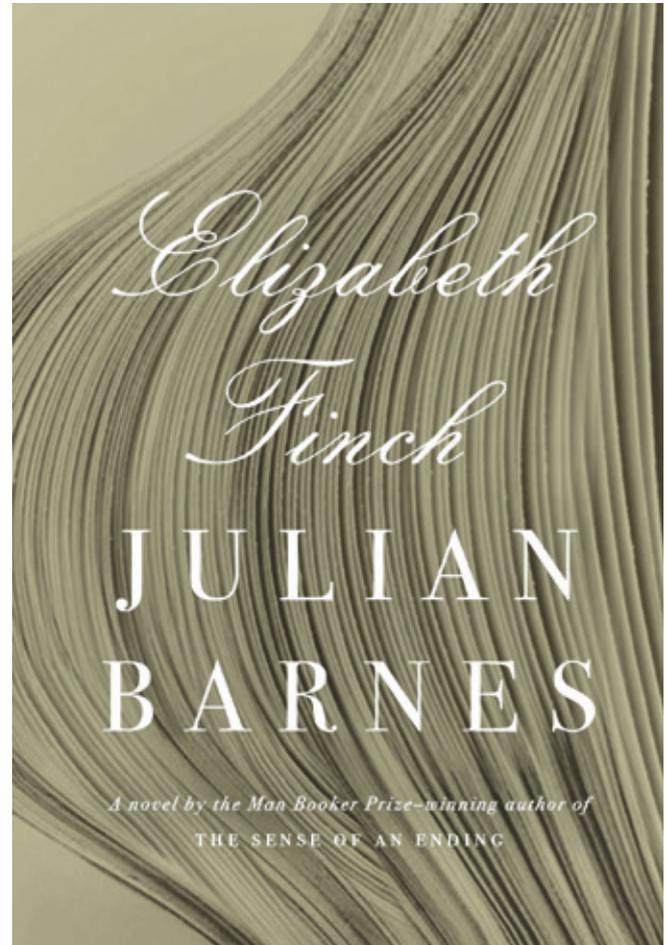
Perhaps we can follow the wisdom of McLuhan, who, rather than moralizing about changes, thought it profound enough to observe them. And observation begins with our attention. Our attention: Where do we put that each day? And what will we see when we attend not just to the digital world but to the whole world around us: lovely, radiating, resistant to our scrolling fingers? Perhaps we can then begin to see more clearly who we are when we are consumed in the glowing digital globe we hold in our hands.

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## A TRIBUTE TO A TEACHER



Knopf / 192p \$26.00

Much of Julian Barnes's award-winning fiction has successfully and magically hybridized history, fiction and memoir. His latest, *Elizabeth Finch*, is a short three-part hybrid that has some merit as Christian world history but disappoints as fiction.

His best novel, *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), won the Man Booker Prize; three of his previous works, *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), *England, England* (1998) and *Arthur & George* (2005), were shortlisted for the same prize. He has written more than 25 books, including several memoirs and esteemed story and essay collections—and even a few pseudonymous novels as Dan Kavanagh.

In *Elizabeth Finch*, Neil, a twice-divorced occasional actor, narrates this three-part tribute of Platonic love to his former teacher, whom he calls EF. In part one, Neil is in his mid-30s when he meets EF while taking an adult education course called "Culture and Civilisation." It seems a bit heavy for a typical adult education course, since it primarily concerns philosophy, theology and his-

tory. But it is not too heavy for Neil, who is so enamored by EF, who says he “can’t remember what she taught us in that first lesson. But I knew obscurely that, for once in my life, I had arrived at the right place.”

EF’s method of teaching, like that of the Greeks, is collaborative, and although she admits that she is no Socrates, and her class is no bunch of Platos, they would have a dialogue. The class would be rigorous, but fun. “Rigorous fun.” The students, between their late 20s and early 40s, respond to EF as if they were kids back in school. While some are irritated by her, to most she’s a puzzle, as mysterious as any new teacher might be to a class. Yet to Neil, an occasionally unreliable and biased narrator, “she had no ‘mysteriousness’ about her.”

EF’s manner is as Stoic as that of her favorite philosopher, Epictetus, whose maxim, “Some things are up to us and some are not up to us,” she loved to quote. She discusses Christianity versus paganism, specifically Hellenism; and the church and the Roman Empire, especially Julian the Apostate, whom she calls “the last pagan emperor of Rome, who attempted to turn back the disastrous flood tide of Christianity.” Neil loves her, but that love is never romantic. After the course is over, Neil sees EF on and off for lunch for around 20 years. “Her intellectual interests were timeless,” Neil writes, wryly adding, “And she always paid for lunch.”

Julian Barnes was a good friend of the art historian and novelist Anita Brookner, whose obituary he wrote for *The Guardian* in 2016. When Barnes first met Brookner, they were about the same age as Neil and EF at their first meeting. There are quite a few other similarities, major and minor, between Finch and Brookner. One of the most prominent is their stoicism. In the Brookner obituary, Barnes writes, “She was, in her deepest self, a stoic,” while Neil writes of EF, “I never knew anyone with less self-pity than Elizabeth Finch.” EF and Brookner have both read Stefan Zweig’s *Beware of Pity*, which Barnes calls “that most Brooknerianly-titled novel” in his obituary of Brookner; EF refers to the book in her journals. Both EF and Brookner are smokers, and he notes that neither ever spent more than 75 minutes at lunch with Neil or Barnes, respectively.

When EF dies, she leaves her books, notebooks and papers to Neil. He wants to please her, not honor her, he says, for “in honouring the dead we somehow make them even more dead.” So to “please the dead,” which Neil says “brings them to life again,” he decides to write

the essay he failed to write for class. The reader can safely assume Barnes wants, also, to honor his friend Brookner with this novel.

Part two of the novel is Neil’s long essay, about Julian the Apostate. More than 50 pages long, it is dry writing that makes for slow reading. For example: “Julian was a Roman emperor who never set foot in Rome. He was an accidental emperor—though accidents led to imperial power more often in those days.” Or, later: “Julian was a prolific writer, who dictated so fast that his tachygraphers were often unable to keep up. What has survived fills three volumes in the Loeb edition: Letters, Orations, Panegyrics, Satires, Epigrams and Fragments.”

Unless you are a history lover with a zeal for reading about the church and the early Roman Empire, Neil’s essay creeps along in a petty pace until the last syllable of part two. This may be rigorous, but is it fun?

Early in the book, Barnes allows Neil to hint at a scandal in EF’s professional and personal life: “a public shaming (which we’ll come to in due course).” That hint of scandal could have added an element of suspense that at least would have made the reader want to keep turning the page. But it turns out that “due course” only comes after around 100 more pages—once we get through the anemic second part of the novel.

Only later, in Part Three, do we learn that the scandal sprouts from a talk by Elizabeth, which is criticized in print—wherein EF’s “sober facts and speculations” are “turned into scandalous matter.” Still, the suspense here is akin to the dining room chair with a bomb underneath it whose long fuse fizzles out before the spark even gets near the room. Although part three returns to the actual story of EF, with revelations about her from her friends and relatives, it comes too late.

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## WHEN FRANCE INVADED MEXICO

It was the greatest challenge to the Monroe Doctrine until the Cuban missile crisis exactly 100 years later. In 1862, taking advantage of the United States' preoccupation with its own civil war, France invaded Mexico and sought to impose on it a Catholic monarchy. And to rule this new Mexican monarchy, the French placed a Hapsburg prince on the throne. It sounds bizarre. But it's a true story, recounted brilliantly by the British historian Edward Shawcross in *The Last Emperor of Mexico*.

The titular character is Maximilian I. Born in Vienna, at the invitation of Napoleon III and exiled Mexican conservatives he chose to become emperor of Mexico, a country he had never seen. His only serious claim to the throne was that his Hapsburg ancestor was the king of Spain when Cortez conquered the Aztecs. Even more problematic, Mexico had long since embraced a republican system of government. Independent Mexico's only previous monarch had been executed shortly after Mexico gained its independence from Spain.

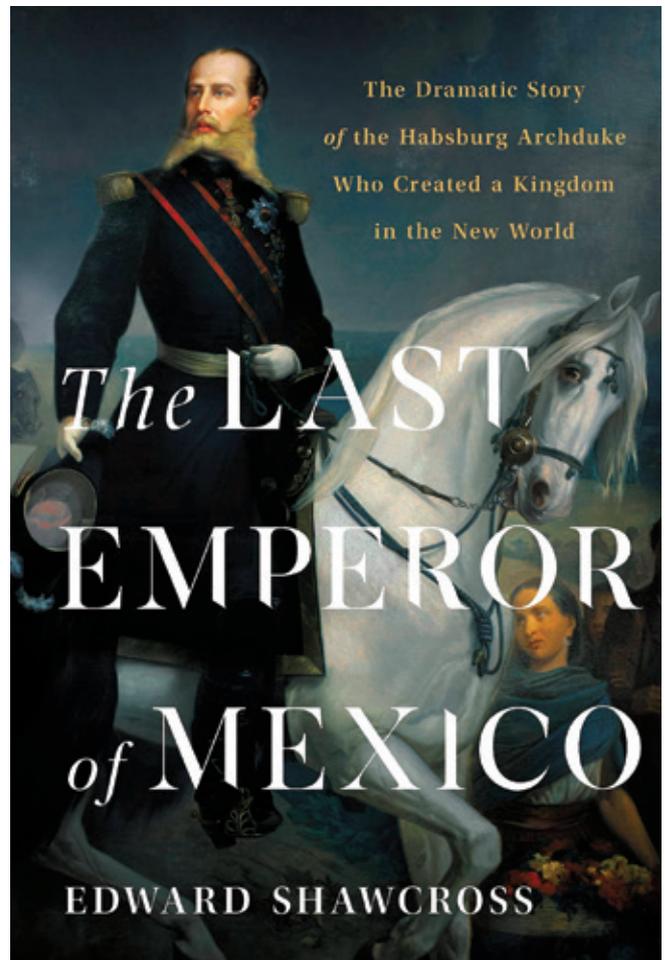
Spoiler alert: Maximilian will also be executed. What happens in between Maximilian's arrival and his execution would almost inevitably make for exciting reading, but Shawcross tells the story in a particularly readable way.

Much of my enjoyment of the book stems from its fantastical juxtaposition of places and cultures. Hungarian hussars are ambushed by Mexican peasants. Belgian and Austrian royalty dine with Indigenous chiefs, trying pulque and mole. And there can be no greater juxtaposition than the titular character, an Austrian prince born into luxury, with his rival Benito Juárez, Mexico's legitimate president and a Oaxacan man born into poverty.

If 19th-century geopolitics and Latin American literature were put in a blender together, something like this book would emerge. It all feels like a novel from a time gone by. And this is a tale of another world—of violent Wild West frontier towns like Brownsville in Texas and Matamoros across the river in Mexico, of European empires trying to paint more of the map their color and of a monarch more concerned with remodeling his castle than governing, even as his empire begins to collapse around him.

But the truth is, this whole Mexican Hapsburg affair marks not only the passing of an old world, but the start of ours. Beyond the farce and the violence, the deeper significance of Maximilian's execution in Mexico is that it marks the victory of democracy over monarchy, modernity over tradition, state over church and the Americas over Europe.

After the industrialized North's victory over the feudal, slaveholding South in the U.S. Civil War, the battle-hard-



Oxford University Press / 208p \$70

ened Union armies needed only threaten war for France to withdraw and abandon Maximilian to his fate. Threats by the United States also forced Maximilian's own brother-in-law, the King of Belgium, and his brother, the Emperor of Austria, to withdraw their support for Maximilian. If ever there was a single moment that marked the arrival of the United States as a truly global power, capable of intimidating the European empires into submission, it was this one. Rather than re-establish European dominance in the Americas, France's misadventure in Mexico served as an overture to the American century.

Maximilian's defeat also represented the final breaking of the earthly power of the Catholic Church in Mexico. A civil war had been provoked by Juárez's decision to seize church property (which was a good chunk of Mexico's land at the time). The church and conservative elites fought back, and only when Juárez defeated them did they go abroad to seek the aid of the French.

The tragedy of Maximilian's life might be that he was simply too liberal for the fundamentally reactionary project he was asked to lead. Strategically, one of Maximilian's

greatest mistakes was deciding that his empire would uphold Juárez's signature law redistributing church property. This was a noble decision, attesting to Maximilian's genuine concern for Mexico's poor. Yet he acted against the express wishes of the Vatican and the conservative Mexican elites on whose support Maximilian relied. Maximilian even toyed with the idea of asking Juárez to be his prime minister in a constitutional monarchy (Juárez, for his part, rejected any notion that he would participate in a government imposed by a foreign force).

Maximilian was clearly not a man suited to be the figurehead of a reactionary effort, and he ultimately alienated many of his own supporters. Meanwhile, his reliance on a foreign occupation and pretensions to title and privilege ensured he would never win over Juárez's liberal and nationalist supporters.

Ultimately, Europe's last explicitly colonial and monarchical project in the Americas was just too reactionary for an age of revolution, too weak to counteract the growing power of the United States and too foreign to extinguish heroic Mexican resistance. The greatest of statesmen could not have overcome these obstacles and would probably have seen that from the get-go. Sadly for him, Maximilian was decidedly not a great statesman.

Abandoned by his French allies, Maximilian still chose to stay with a dwindling number of Austrian volunteers, ex-Confederate mercenaries and Mexican supporters to face off against Juárez's growing armies of U.S.-armed and funded troops. While clearly a bad call for his personal survival, Maximilian's decision to stay is romantic in an antiquated way—and so dumb as to be almost heroic. He bet it all on glory and power in Mexico. He at least had the decency not to sulk off to European palaces after losing. He stayed and fought in what he called "his country." Maximilian's last words before the firing squad were "Viva Mexico."

As the son of Mexican immigrants, I am well schooled in the myths of Mexican nationalism. As a child, my grandmother (like Benito Juárez, a Oaxacan) taught me to see Maximilian as a foreign invader and his execution as a happy ending. Maximilian learned a lesson that would be learned by the United States in Vietnam and Afghanistan—you cannot impose even the most progressive governance by the force of foreign arms.

There is a lesson in Maximilian's story for the

church too: Refusing any compromise with the modern world, especially to defend the clergy's privilege and power, more likely leads to a total defeat than to even a partial victory.

On the big questions of the age, still relevant today—the sovereignty of independent states, democracy in Latin America, the separation of church and state—Maximilian was ultimately on the wrong side. But after reading this book, I have a newfound, grudging respect for the man. There is something gallant about him: a Don Quixote tilting at the windmills of modernity. His contribution to promoting indigenous rights in Mexico and recognizing the achievements of Mexico's pre-Columbian civilizations, which the Catholic Church and Maximilian's own Hapsburg ancestors did so much to destroy, are genuine accomplishments. Despite preferring goulash to mole, Maximilian considered himself a Mexican. Though no Mexican should ever recognize him (or anyone else) as a monarch, Mr. Shawcross has convinced me to concede to Maximilian a better, more honorable and dignified title than "Emperor." I am convinced now to grant Maximilian the title of Mexican. There could be no higher honor.

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Antonio De Loera-Brust is a former Joseph A. O'Hare fellow at America Media who has written about politics, history, sports and film. A graduate of Loyola Marymount University's School of Film and Television, he has worked in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Department of State.

# ST. TERESA'S PILLOW

By Laura Reece Hogan

splintered block of wood      grooved, now behind glass  
in the Avila monastery      what dreams  
if she could sleep      did she lie supine      or turn to press  
her skull, ear painful      to listen  
for what is rigid, immobile      I am thinking of the slender neck  
ossifying at that angle      sometimes it hurts  
too much to move ourselves      God tossed her  
like a ragdoll from a horse into seven inches of muck  
*if this is how you treat your friends*      (she could get sassy  
with her love)      *then no wonder you have so few*  
but he knows what he's about      knows  
when to throw us hard  
when to carve away the comfort of ruts      bolt us      jolt  
us like Jacob      to wrangle  
the dark dazzling weight of an angel      your unbearable  
finger      thrusts  
unhinges my contending hip      (what did you think  
this rising      from the mud would look like?)  
of the stone pillow      we make an altar      pour oil  
if we dream, painful      hear the new name

Laura Reece Hogan is the author of *Butterfly Nebula* (forthcoming 2023), the chapbook *O Garden-Dweller and the spiritual theology book I Live, No Longer I*. [laurarecehogan.com](http://laurarecehogan.com)



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## Beholding and Beholden

We begin the new year with narratives that bespeak a longing to witness something great. The Gospel reading for the first Sunday of January speaks of shepherds that move in haste to find Mary, Joseph and the child in a manger (Lk 2:16-21). In the following Sunday's Gospel reading, the Magi personify the wider world's desire for Jesus (Mt 2:1-12). By mid-month we hear John the Baptist proclaim with power, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29-34). This triptych of narratives from three different Gospels reveals a single deeper message: Behold the anointed one and act on this moment in time!

As the month continues, the readings guide us from universal longings to specific realities. Continuing Mat-

thew's Gospel through liturgical Year A, the narrative begins Jesus' public life with his urgent proclamation, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Mt 4:17). This is a plea to pay attention to the present moment: What is God saying?

Matthew's famous beatitudes, which are the Gospel reading for the last Sunday of January (Mt 5:1-12), are the opening lines of a divine love letter to the whole world. The first recipients of this message are the people of Galilee, the Jewish and Gentile communities of Jesus' daily world. These last two Sundays of January follow Jesus as he carries his public proclamation to the region of Galilee along the Jordan.

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### SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD (A), JAN. 1, 2023

An ancient blessing for a new year

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### THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD (A), JAN. 8, 2023

A new beginning from four cardinal directions

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### SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JAN. 15, 2023

Beholding and beholden from within our longing

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### THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JAN. 22, 2023

A moment to reconsider...everything

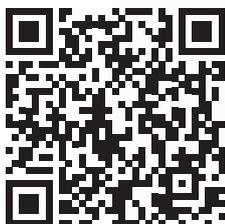
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### FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JAN. 29, 2023

A love letter to the people: Blessed are the poor in spirit!



*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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# America | CLASSIFIEDS MARKETPLACE

## **Revelation and Healing:**

A Father and Son Reunion recounts the author's slow journey from an adoption that left him longing for his biological parents and wondering if he had any Black blood. He was assured he did not. Discovering, while in high school, his mother's identity, years later he found that of his biological father, Lionel Durand (1920-1961), a Black man born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Suddenly the author realized the source of his own immediate empathy as a boy with Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement he led. The author shares the often-shocking details of his adoption and the grounding therapies which facilitated self-acceptance. With filial admiration, the author traces the life of his beloved father, Lionel Durand, friends with Jean Cocteau and Picasso, an internationally acclaimed newsman and journalist, who fought in the French Resistance during World War II, twice imprisoned, twice escaped. Welcome to this reading journey and its wondrous surprises.



Lionel Durand's cover painting of his mixed-race daughter, Barbara. Same Black father as the author, a different White mom.



Lionel Durand broadcasting for Voice of America

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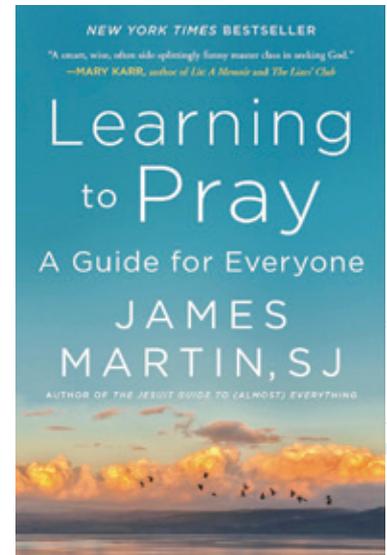


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# A Post-Roe Field Hospital

## We need to lead a revolution of mercy—and truth

By Kathryn Jean Lopez



What have we done? *Roe v. Wade* was consigned to history on the solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus last June. And thanks be to God for that. It was bad law, bad history, bad science and—well, it was evil. Abortion is the human rights issue of our lives, and it is justice that this Supreme Court precedent was undone. Not only has this allowed states to act to protect innocent unborn babies and their mothers, but it has also given a fresh perspective on abortion in America.

Most people who consider themselves pro-choice want to know that a scared girl has options. How about we pro-lifers do a better job letting people know what those options are? How about we demonstrate with our lives that we are about helping women and not condemning?

When our politics debates abortion, it often sounds like most of the women having abortions are upper middle-class and exercising empowerment, simply making another career choice. But abortion in America all too often involves Black and Hispanic girls whom Planned Parenthood has targeted since the beginning. If you're a Black or Hispanic young woman in New York City, for example, medical professionals are all too often on a search-and-destroy mission, even after you have actively chosen against abortion. *Why would you do this to yourself? You're not ready. Do the responsible thing and make an appointment to terminate.*

And what message will they get

from people of faith? One of my greatest fears is that a pregnant woman will walk into a Catholic Church or knock on the door of a rectory and no one will know what to say to her, where to bring her, and, more fundamentally, no one will look her in the eye with a gaze of love. There are beautiful efforts out there—the Walking With Moms in Need initiative is one important step—but the end of *Roe* needs to light a Pentecost-like fire of urgency under those who are pro-life to help reach moms and babies who are not necessarily in our churches and who need us the most.

Today, an eighth-grader or high-school student in America all too often has no idea what love is. She has no concept of who God the Father is because she probably doesn't know what fatherhood looks like. And if there had been men around the house, they might have looked at her wanting to use her. Maybe one did. Maybe more than one did. We all were horrified about the story of the Ohio girl post-*Roe*. Why was she pregnant in the first place? Because there was a man in her house who was not her father who raped her.

There are cycles of abuse and poverty—well beyond the material kind—that play into abortion in America. And the use and abuse of sex cannot be overlooked. “*Humanae Vitae*” and “*Evangelium Vitae*” told us so. The culture says more contraception. It says fertility is a problem to be suppressed. But sex actually makes more

sense in marriage, and every girl and woman deserves to be loved, deserves a commitment. It's often a struggle in the best of circumstances for a woman to believe that about herself.

Now that *Roe* is gone, we have to be that field hospital Pope Francis talks about—to love those who have been hurt by abortion and those who have no idea what they are worth, boys and girls, men and women, all. It's not just the unborn babies who need to be saved. There are so many suffering under the lies of the sexual revolution that have become all too often the norm.

What have we done? We've ignored or abandoned the prophetic words of Paul VI and John Paul II, to name two saints. What we can do is realize that we have a treasure to share and mend some wounds by living the Gospel of Life in renewed ways. Agree to disagree on some things. But make sure that women know what they are capable of, that they are empowered to seek men in their lives who are in awe of them, who will walk alongside them and learn with them what love is, for perhaps the first time in their lives. The revolution of mercy begins when women know they are truly loved.

*Kathryn Jean Lopez is senior fellow at the National Review Institute, where she directs the Center for Religion, Culture, and Civil Society, and is an editor-at-large at National Review.*

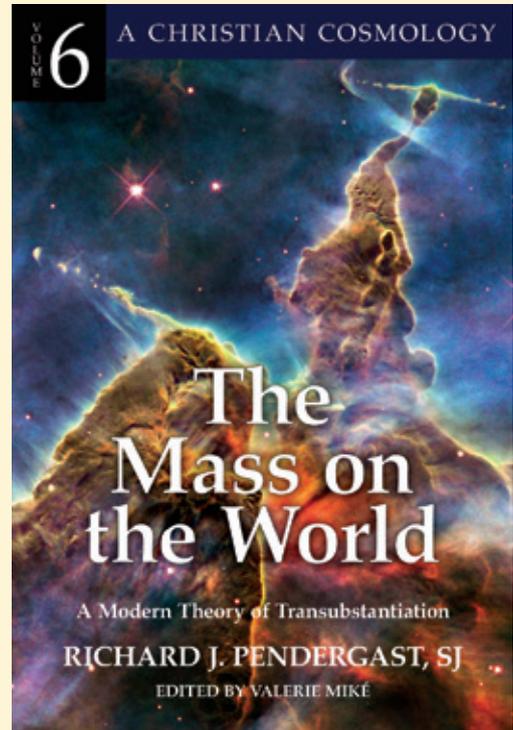
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