

America

JULY/AUGUST 2023

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

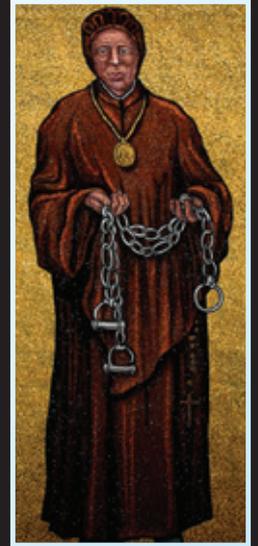


THE PATH OF HOLINESS

What I've learned from a life writing about the saints

Robert Ellsberg

p36



Why Are Latinos Leaving the Church?
p18

Imagining a Different Future for L.G.B.T. Catholics
p28

Euthanasia Comes to Canada
p48



INTRODUCING 'PREACH'

A new podcast on the art of Catholic preaching



Listen and subscribe at americamagazine.org/podcasts

SAVE THE DATE POETS OF PRESENCE: FAITH, FORM, & FORGING COMMUNITY

In-Person Conference and Workshop October 27-29

Loyola University Chicago,
Water Tower Campus

Keynote Speaker, **Christian Wiman**
(10/28 Zoom option for keynote available)

This event is co-sponsored by *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry* and The Francis and Ann Curran Center for American Catholic Studies at Fordham University



All are invited to join the *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry Conference*.

Presence is a community of writers who recognize Catholicism as

fertile ground for the flourishing of contemporary poetry. The October conference will consist of a series of panels and workshops that will explore how poetry navigates the intersection of matter and spirit, depicts the struggle between belief and doubt, and engages faith-- precisely by being surprised by it, taking joy in it, and even finding humor in it.



SAVE THE DATE ANNUAL TEILHARD LECTURE

“The Subject of Public Religion”

November 9, 2023

In-Person or Zoom



**The Hank Center
congratulates**

Rev. Patrick Gilger, S.J. on his appointment as the 2023 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. Fellow in Catholic Studies at Loyola University Chicago.

The Teilhard de Chardin, SJ Fellowship in Catholic Studies invites scholars from across disciplines and from around the world whose work intersects with the rich intellectual, artistic, and historical tradition of Roman Catholicism. More information and a list of prior fellows here:



“Love is the only force which can make things one without destroying them. ... Some day, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”

- Teilhard de Chardin, S.J (1936)



LEARN MORE ABOUT
OUR PROGRAMMING HERE:
WWW.LUC.EDU/CCIH/



LOYOLA
UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives



The Joan & Bill
Hank Center
FOR CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE

The Tension of Catholic Journalism

Home to the first diocese in the United States (1789), and later the first archdiocese (1808), Baltimore is a city brimming with Catholic history. And so it felt fitting that over 300 members of the Catholic Media Association gathered there in June for our annual convention. The Catholic Media Conference brings together journalists and communications professionals to share best practices, new ideas, encouragement and community. After three years of Covid-conscious, mostly virtual events, the strong showing at this year's conference made it feel like a homecoming.

Home, to me at least, is a place where you can rest for a moment, where you can be yourself and be honest. It is a place where you can recharge before heading back out into the world with fresh perspectives. The C.M.A. conference seeks to offer these fresh perspectives and support. And Catholic journalists need this support.

As local newspapers close and newsrooms shrink around the United States, strong local Catholic journalism is increasingly crucial. We are part of a struggling industry, but the Catholic corner of the journalism world faces additional challenges. From culture wars to liturgy wars, the U.S. church is hurting.

There are as many reasons people struggle with their relationship to the church as there are people struggling. It does not help that ours is a church with self-inflicted wounds from the sexual abuse crisis. The crisis and the mishandling of the church's response continue to drive people away: A poll found in 2019 that 37 percent of Catholics surveyed said that recent news of the abuse

crisis had caused them to consider leaving the church, an increase of 15 percentage points from 2002.

Catholic journalists are immersed in these painful stories as a matter of course. Reporting on them can be exhausting, though the pain does not compare to that of people who have been harmed by the church firsthand. Still, it can take a toll.

"Catholic communicators tell the church's story, but the church's story is not always easy to tell because it is not always good news," Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of the Diocese of Crookston, Minn., said during his plenary address at the conference on June 9. "Sometimes you have to tell the hard truth or try to help the hierarchy tell the truth."

It is not easy to hold both the sins of the church and its sacred beauty—and by this I mean first the faithful and the charitable works, though I mean the churches and art, too—in tension all the time. It can be hard not to be overcome by despair or to turn a blind eye to its problems. But journalism is always about truth. And the truth is that the church has both inflicted pain and relieved it. Catholic journalists must bring both types of stories into the light.

I am reminded of this when I read work like J.D. Long-García's story in this issue about why Latinos are leaving Catholicism for Protestant churches. And in Eve Tushnet's article about her efforts to build a more effective, more inclusive curriculum about the church's teachings on L.G.B.T. people. And in Robert Ellsberg's reflections on the meaning and power of sainthood. Today's church includes all these unique moments of pain and of hope—and it is more than any one of them. Part of

the role of a Catholic journalist is to hold all this in tension.

"Catholic journalists have a great challenge before them," Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington said in his homily at the C.M.A. memorial Mass on June 9. "You must adhere to the highest principles of your profession. You must be diligent in research, honest in your editorial policy, competent in your use of the modern means of communication, but always motivated by the truth of Christ that is all too often only whispered in locked rooms or spoken in darkness."

Being together at the conference with colleagues from across the county was a good reminder of our need to support one another in our shared mission. In its best moments, Catholic media helps people encounter Christ, whether through stories of work done in his name or through the revealing of evils that seek to tear it down. At its worst, Catholic media can fuel those divisions that can distract us from the work of the Gospel, the work of truth. Seeing people face to face helps to break down those divisions.

At one panel, conference presenters discussed the ways in which polarization drives deep wedges between us. But I was heartened to see that they were speaking to a crowd that included representatives and reporters from a wide variety of Catholic publications, all of us there to learn and to listen. All of us hopeful that, together, our work might help build a church that challenges and loves and invites people to feel at home.

—
Kerry Weber, executive editor
Twitter: @Kerry_Weber



THE ISSUE

GIVE AND TAKE

6
YOUR TAKE
Readers respond to Bishop John Dolan on the church and mental health

8
OUR TAKE
A healthy democracy does not fear its leaders

10
SHORT TAKE
Why a 'just peace' in Ukraine will require more than defeating Putin
Daniel Philpott

DISPATCHES

12
ONE YEAR AFTER DOBBS
Most voters don't want unlimited abortion, but don't trust their states

GoodNews: Planting trees to combat climate change in Nigeria

In Latin America, a grassroots struggle against mining interests

An Argentine sister brings aid to Ukraine

POEMS

51
SAPPHO
Beth Hinchliffe

65
APOLOGY FOR BELIEF
Alex Mouw

77
LILY, LILY, LILY
Nancy Brewka-Clark

FEATURES

18
THE CHURCH IS LOSING LATINO CATHOLICS
What can be done to welcome them back?
J.D. Long-García

28
BUILDING CATHOLIC FUTURES
Why I'm creating orthodox educational resources for young L.G.B.T. Catholics
Eve Tushnet

36
WALKING THE PATH OF HOLINESS
What I've learned from a lifetime of studying saintly lives
Robert Ellsberg



C5V News photo/Jeffrey Bruno

A Eucharistic procession through New York City to St. Patrick's Cathedral for a Pentecost vigil, May 27.

Cover: Images from the Trinity Dome Mosaic at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Clockwise from top left: Sts. John XXIII, Rose of Lima, Josephine Bakhita, Lorenzo Ruiz, Juan Diego, John Neumann and Marianne Cope.

CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn

FAITH & REASON

44
REJECT THE CULT OF INTELLIGENCE
You're worth more than that.
Guy Consolmagno and Christopher M. Graney

48
A CRISIS IN CANADA
Medical assistance in dying is not what our most vulnerable people need
Noël Simard

FAITH IN FOCUS

52
NERVES, TEARS AND CHANTING
What I saw during the New York Sisters of Charity vote to stop accepting new members
Sherryl A. White

56
I never understood devotion to Mary. Then I had a baby.
Colleen Dulle

58
New technology seeks to halt the aging process. Our faith tells us not to fear death.
Kevin Clarke

IDEAS

62
SEEKING GOD AT BURNING MAN
Where the guiding principle seems to be that fun is spiritual
Bryan McCarthy

BOOKS

66
People Get Ready; Commitment; Memories of a Gay Catholic Boyhood; Tomb of Sand; Black Dignity; Papyrus

THE WORD

78
Reflections for July and August
Victor Cancino

LAST TAKE

82
ANNA ROWLANDS
What has surprised me from working on the Synod on Synodality

How one diocese is taking steps to support mental health

In the June issue of **America**, Bishop John P. Dolan of the Diocese of Phoenix shared how losing family members to suicide led him to found a mental health ministry. “The truth is, when I had to survive some of these losses early in my life, the church was the only place of comfort for me,” he wrote. “But there was a gap between the help they could provide as spiritual leaders and the deeper accompaniment I needed.” Bishop Dolan’s story drew a number of responses from our readers.

Thank you, Bishop Dolan, for such an inspiring and thought-provoking article. What resonated with me was the stated understanding that we are all disordered in one way or another, and that to moralize or make judgments on another is profoundly un-Christlike. Instead, we are called to uphold our brothers and sisters in love and compassion on this pilgrim journey to our heavenly home, where the first will be last and the last first. This reframing will profoundly inform my interactions with others.

D. Healy

I wish Catholicism in general and Christianity as a whole realized that mental illness is not a sin and that, as Bishop Dolan pointed out, it does not cut one off from God. God never promised us freedom from problems on this earth, but he did promise he would be with us when they arose. I have to believe that our Lord must be close to those suffering from mental health issues and those who love them.

Gwen Murtha

I am a chaplain who facilitates spirituality awareness groups for adolescents and adults in a hospital’s behavioral and psychiatric units, and Bishop Dolan’s article touches my soul. The level of accompaniment he describes, down to providing meals and homework help for people who need it, is exactly what Christianity demands: namely, putting into action the words we too often merely say in the prayers of the faithful at Mass.

Martha Rapp

One of the finest articles I have ever read by one of our bishops on the ministry of mental and spiritual health—the bishop articulates the deepest sense of the sanctity of human life in this article. What a blessing to have such a bishop!

Peter Devine

Bishop Dolan, thank you for entrusting to us part of your family’s story. It will be a help for so many who carry deep emotional pain. And who among us, at one time or another, does not?

Ged Ayotte

I am grateful for this ministry and the opportunity to learn more about Bishop Dolan’s vision. As I help a loved one with schizophrenia, I continue to be dismayed by the lack of good spiritual guidance and resources. I believe Catholic involvement is essential to transforming the lives of those affected by mental illness. It’s a daunting task. Knowing Bishop Dolan is dedicated to a ministry to support those who are on this journey is a source of joy and hope.

Margaret Burch

Rarely have I read such a beautiful piece of personal testimony and inspired leadership. Thank you, Bishop Dolan and **America!**

Teresita Scully

Thank you, Bishop Dolan, for sharing your deep personal loss and for creating this ministry of accompaniment for your diocese and parishes. So many of our families have been touched by mental health concerns; I pray that other parishes and dioceses follow your great example.

Michael Brough

I presided at the funeral Mass of one of our students who struggled for many years with depression and other issues. God gave me the privilege to visit him a few weeks before he committed suicide, and I was blessed to have comforted his parents and sisters. Thanks, Bishop Dolan, for what you are doing.

Tony Marti, O.F.M.Cap.



INSTITUTE of PASTORAL STUDIES



In the footsteps of St Ignatius

IGNATIAN WISDOM FELLOWSHIP

HYBRID PROGRAM: ONLINE & PILGRIMAGE



Become Wisdom Leaders

Encore education & cohort learning where zoom sessions are an exploration of critical challenges of aging, age transitions, family dynamics, personal and family spirituality and Jesuit mission integration.



Ignatian Pilgrimage

Loyola University Chicago: Oct 2 to 6, 2023
Learn from faculty and university programs

Kino Border Initiative: February 12 to 16, 2024
Nogales, Mexico. www.kinoborderinitiative.org

Northern Spain and Rome: Nov 2 to 17, 2024
(Loyola, Arantzazu, Xavier Castle, Montserrat, Manresa, Barcelona, & Rome)



Learning, Community & Mission

For those 50 and over considering retirement, or mid-career considering ministry & Loyola Alumni
Cost: \$22,500 (everything included except airfare)



APPLY BY August 15, 2023

For more information please contact Mariana Miller at mmiller60@luc.edu
IPS, Department of Continuing Education

A Healthy Democracy Does Not Fear Its Leaders

Donald J. Trump, former president of the United States, was arraigned in federal court in June on 37 counts related to alleged mishandling of classified documents. Mr. Trump had already been found civilly liable for sexual assault and defamation in one case, and has been charged in another for falsifying records to conceal payments made to hide a scandal during his presidential campaign in 2016. He may yet be charged with an attempt to tamper with the results of the presidential election in Georgia in 2020 and with helping to instigate the insurrection at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Now he is also accused of trying to hold on to documents that included national secrets, for reasons that are unclear, even after federal officials requested their return.

None of this seems to have hurt his popularity among Republican voters: A poll conducted in the aftermath of his arraignment found that more than half of Republican or Republican-leaning voters still supported his nomination for president in 2024.

How can this be? Not since the Watergate scandals of 1973-74 has the country faced such serious charges leveled against a president or former president. Today, there is no national consensus on whether Mr. Trump should face charges—or whether it is proper for him to run for president again while facing them. At this early stage, he is dominating the Republican presidential primary campaign trail, promising “retribution” against not only Democrats but against those in his own party who have sought to hold him accountable for his actions.

The result is a political “Groundhog Day.” The former president’s disdain for democratic norms, which **America’s** editors warned against

before the 2020 election, continues unabated. Far from being sobered by the danger of the political violence he helped instigate on Jan. 6, 2021, Mr. Trump has instead doubled down on his demagoguery about “conspiracies” and “witch hunts” against him and his supporters to deflect from his own electoral failures and legal troubles. His irresponsible and self-serving rhetoric distorts the political process across all three branches of government. How can we have a free and fair election when one candidate’s principal campaign pitch is that any result in which he loses is evidence of nefarious forces arrayed against him?

The answer cannot be fear. If we vote—and our politicians campaign—based on a fear of what might happen, then those democratic norms become irrelevant. Nor should we give in to despair. The Jan. 6 insurrection, after all, was unsuccessful, with many participants brought to justice in the years since. Our civic institutions were bent, but they did not break. And the nation’s economic and social prospects seem much improved from those dark days in many other ways. The Covid-19 pandemic is receding, inflation is slowing down and even some of our international standing, so damaged during the Trump presidency, is being regained.

There are also positives that have emerged in the last few election cycles, including a higher rate of citizen participation in the voting process. We sometimes forget that a generation ago, one of the primary concerns of many pundits was voter apathy and disengagement from the political process. Voter turnout has been higher by historical standards in every election since Donald Trump first announced in 2015 that he was running for pres-

ident. For better or for worse, we are a more engaged electorate in these times.

Nor is the answer to sit on our hands and wait to see what happens with Mr. Trump’s legal troubles. If our national politics are to be healed, the medicine cannot be dependent on any particular outcome regarding Mr. Trump. We are not so fragile that the future of our country depends on the outcome of one trial—or, worse, that our future depends on doing anything possible to avoid the sight of a former leader on trial. At the very least, we should not give in to the self-fulfilling prophecy of *behaving* as if we are that fragile.

Seeking reconciliation does not mean overlooking bad behavior or failing to deal out consequences for that behavior. (Nor should we hinder any investigations of wrongdoing, as in the case of Hunter Biden, by insisting that “the other side is worse.”) In the aftermath of Watergate, President Gerald Ford thought he held the answer: to pardon the disgraced former president Richard M. Nixon so as to bring an end to our “long national nightmare.” That will not work today.

No one should take any pleasure from seeing a political opponent on trial—“lock them up!” is an undemocratic chant no matter which side is using it. Yet it is also dispiriting to surrender to the notion that while we expect other nations to hold their leaders accountable, Americans are so hot-headed and prone to violent tantrums that we must do anything to shield ourselves from the spectacle of a former president on trial. This kind of paternalistic conflict avoidance will only embolden future leaders in both parties to test and even break the law even more brazenly.

What, then, is the answer? Perhaps the most obvious is to steer away from cycles of revenge and retribution, and look to future options for leaders. Both parties—and perhaps political interest groups at every level of governance—need to nurture younger, more dynamic and more creative politicians. Presidential candidates in their 70s and 80s are perhaps by definition not future-oriented; nor are they the most likely to advocate for change. But the electorate is.

Let us look again to the aftermath of Watergate. The country was only beginning to emerge from the ruinous Vietnam War; Mr. Nixon was insisting to the last that he had done nothing wrong; his own vice president had been convicted of bribery; confidence in civic institutions was at an all-time low; and issues that still vex us today—including abortion, immigration policy, racial divides and economic inequality—had come to the forefront of the minds of many. And yet our political process seemed durable and resilient. Gerald Ford's presidency yielded to Jimmy Carter; his then yielded to that of Ronald Reagan. Those election cycles were rancorous in their own way, but they were not dominated by fear.

It is within our capacity to move beyond yet another national nightmare; it is in the best interests of us all to do so.

Editor in Chief Sam Sawyer, S.J.	President Traug Keller
Deputy Editor in Chief Executive Editors	Maurice Timothy Reidy Sebastian Gomes Ashley McKinless Kerry Weber
Editor at Large Production Editor Senior Editors	James Martin, S.J. Robert David Sullivan Kevin Clarke James T. Keane J.D. Long-García
Senior Director of Digital Strategy and Subscriptions Creative Director Poetry Editor Vatican Correspondent National Correspondent Associate Editors	Zachary Davis Shawn Tripoli Joe Hoover, S.J. Gerard O'Connell Michael J. O'Loughlin Colleen Dulle Ricardo da Silva, S.J. Jim McDermott, S.J.
Audio Producer Studio Production Consultant Assistant Editor Contributing Writers	Maggi Van Dorn Kevin Robles Molly Cahill Simcha Fisher Nichole M. Flores Cecilia González-Andrieu Rachel Lu John W. Miller Kaya Oakes Nathan Schneider Valerie Schultz Eve Tushnet
Contributing Editors	Robert C. Collins, S.J. Patrick Gilger, S.J. William McCormick, S.J. Paul McNelis, S.J. Michael R. Simone, S.J. Russell Pollitt, S.J. Jake Martin, S.J. Tucker Redding, S.J. Kevin Spinale, S.J. Christopher Parker
Regional Correspondent Special Contributor Editor, The Jesuit Post Moderator, Catholic Book Club O'Hare Fellows	Jillian Rice Cristobal Spielmann Laura Oldfather Brigid McCabe Adam Bohan, S.J.
Summer Interns	
V.P. of Finance and Operations V.P. of Advancement Executive Office & Advancement Manager Development Manager Senior Director of Business Development and Creative Services Account Manager Advertising Services Manager Vice President of Sales and Marketing Human Resource Consultant Business Operations Staff	Siobhan Ryan Heather Trotta Cynthia Hornblower Alessandra Rose Kenneth Arko Lindsay Chessare Geena Di Camillo Lisa Manico Barbara Meehan Glenda Castro Rashana Francis Jonathan Tavarez Bianca C. Tucker Francis W. Turnbull, S.J. Susan S. Braddock
Editor Emeritus Chair, Board of Directors	

Why a ‘just peace’ in Ukraine will require more than defeating Putin

As long as there has been a war in Ukraine, people have called for peace. Some propose a peace simply defined as a halt to fighting. They cite the suffering: More than 300,000 Ukrainian and Russian soldiers have been killed or wounded, thousands of civilians have been killed, and more than nine million Ukrainians have been displaced and have become refugees. Sirens, shortages and missiles continuously frighten Ukrainian civilians; trauma and grief pervade. And no end is in sight.

Running through Pope Francis’ more than 100 statements about the war is the leitmotif that war itself is the problem—absurd, a tragedy, a defeat for humanity. More coolly, political realists say that Ukraine does not stand a reasonable chance of rolling back the Russian invasion and that trying to do so risks nuclear war. And in the United States, some politicians call for scaling back a commitment to Ukraine that is expensive and, they say, not in our national interest. All of these voices put forth a minimal peace, prioritizing an end to fighting. The implication is that Ukraine should be coaxed or forced into negotiating.

An end to the war is not true peace, though, if it means an end to Ukraine. Sts. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas held that the purpose of a just war is a just peace. Pope Paul VI echoed this point on the Day of Peace in 1972 with a statement titled “If You Want Peace, Work for Justice.”

A just peace would reverse Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and its bids to control Ukrainian territory since 2014—frontal assaults on the most basic tenet of international law, the integrity of sovereign states. Motivating this aggression is Mr. Putin’s version of peace, a “Pax Russica” that denies Ukraine’s existence as a

nation. But recognizing this manifestly *unjust* peace, Pope Francis has amended his previous neutrality more and more and has condemned Russia’s aggression. Ukraine’s counteroffensive and its allies’ supplying of arms to it, then, are justified.

In a Christian ethic, though, a just peace involves more than defeating aggression. The just war ethic that dominates Christian thought on war and peace took shape during the Middle Ages, when the church adopted a concept of justice from Roman law: the constant will to render another his due. This concept came to dominate modern international law, where it means the rights of nations and people to be independent. Russia’s exit is thus “due” to Ukraine.

The notion of justice as rendering due has occluded the original justice of the Bible, which means comprehensive right relationship, expressed by the Hebrew term *sedeq* and the Greek term *dikaiosisune*. This justice is compatible with rights and law but is wider, also including virtues such as gift-giving and performing mercy. It culminates in God’s reconciliation of the world to himself in the cross and resurrection, which the Apostle Paul describes as God’s justice.

In politics, this justice entails not only the defeat of aggression but also practices that redress the wounds that violence and repression inflict. The past 50 years have seen a global wave of such practices, including truth commissions, international tribunals, reparations, apologies, memorials, new constitutions and local reconciliation forums. Together, these practices make up a peace of reconciliation.

A season of war may not seem to be a time to speak of reconciliation and peacebuilding. These words ex-

ude a symmetry of fault, suggesting that both sides must recognize their own wrongs and embrace each other. Meanwhile, Ukrainians are fighting and dying to secure the freedom of their assaulted nation. Reconciliation, though, is not relativism, nor is peacebuilding moral passivity. Aspiring to restore right relationship, just reconciliation recognizes the balance of injustices in the war.

Precedent for reconciliation after asymmetric injustices can be found in the Federal Republic of Germany, which has addressed the historically unmatched crimes of the Nazi regime through unmatched measures of repair: over \$70 billion of reparations payments, the trial of about 90,000 Nazi leaders and the conviction of about 6,500, apologies by chancellors and presidents, and a national commitment to remember these crimes in its public memorials and school curricula.

Such measures are still in the distant future for Russia and Ukraine. They require a leader other than and very different from Mr. Putin. Still, Ukraine has good reasons to give voice now to a peace of reconciliation, even if such a peace appears remote. It would sharpen Ukraine’s war aims, guide its strategy, cement alliances and, when the moment of settlement comes, help to mitigate rampant revenge and the casting of collective blame against Russians.

Practices of Repair

What practices would contribute to a peace of reconciliation between Ukraine and Russia? The International Criminal Court’s recent indictment of Mr. Putin addresses the wound of impunity, as would a policy of lustration, whereby Russian planners and conductors of the war would be barred



Pope Francis meets Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during a private audience at the Vatican on May 13, 2023.

from office. Such punishment renders what is due and is integral to justice. Yet it leaves untended other wide wounds of war.

Nations from South Africa to Chile, and from Northern Ireland and Timor Leste, have gone further by placing a premium on truth in nurturing nascent democracy and embryonic peace. Truth disables dictators and spoilers, who rely upon lies to regain power and restart violence, and confers recognition on victims, whose suffering is likely to be forgotten or ignored. An international truth commission could tell the whole truth about Russia's invasion and the war crimes committed by either side. Conveyors of truth also include schools, museums, monuments, and journalists and scholars who are enabled by freedom of speech and inquiry. While Mr. Putin represses this freedom in Russia, surrounding countries should advocate for this international human right and support Russian dissenters.

Reparative measures, including political apologies and financial reparations, have also multiplied in global politics. Both can bring repair beyond what is strictly owed by conferring recognition and elevating the dignity of victims. The examples of Canada and

Australia facing up to crimes against their native peoples show that apologies by heads of state and reparations for victims may be conferred justly and be well received.

Forgiveness is the practice that has most distinguished Christian approaches to peace. It does not mean forgoing other practices. At a recent conference in Lviv, Ukraine, on the justice of war, one Ukrainian participant wisely asserted that any talk of forgiveness toward Russians must take an apophatic form, naming first what forgiveness is not: condoning injustice or renouncing a just war of defense, punishment, apology and reparations.

Yet forgiveness is different, departing from the justice of what is due. It is not owed but is rather a gift that imitates and is enabled by God's grace. St. John Paul II taught "no justice without forgiveness" and lived out his message by forgiving the assassin who shot him in St. Peter's Square in 1981. On a national level, Christians who have suffered violence have practiced forgiveness in South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, Northern Ireland, the United States and elsewhere. Forgiveness contributes to a peace characterized by the justice of right relationship.

Ukrainians may begin to give

voice to the peace of reconciliation, but all of these practices will continue to seem distant as long as Ukrainians must fight a war to achieve a just peace of national independence and to avoid settling for a minimal peace that accepts Russian occupation.

How might reconciliation germinate? One precedent is the meetings in the years immediately after World War II between French and German politicians and civil society leaders under the auspices of Moral Re-Armament and the Geneva Circle. Held out of public view in Switzerland, these gatherings forged ties between erstwhile enemies that paved the way for the founding of European federalism (eventually the European Union) in 1950, an initiative envisioned by its founders as one of peace and reconciliation.

Meetings of this kind between Russians and Ukrainians would be arduous but over time might begin to bring about mutual acknowledgment of suffering, a common understanding of the truth about the war, repentance, forgiveness and proposals for building peace between their states. Though difficult, always achieved piecemeal and subject to breakdowns, a peace of reconciliation is possible, finds precedent in politics and is amenable to breakthroughs.

*Daniel Philpott is a professor of political science at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Reconciliation (2012)* and has been involved in reconciliation as an activist in Kashmir and in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, as well as in efforts to address the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church.*

One year after Dobbs: Most voters don't want unlimited abortion but do not trust their states to set restrictions

One year after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and allowed states to make their own laws restricting abortion, most polls find a majority of Americans opposed to the Dobbs decision. At the same time, a large majority in a poll released in April also said that abortion should either be banned or limited to the first three months of pregnancy—a restriction that was not possible until *Roe* was overturned.

Regardless of public attitudes toward the Dobbs decision, it did seem to have an effect on the number of abortions performed in the United States. The Society of Family Planning, a pro-choice group, estimated that the number of abortions in the United States per month fell by about 6 percent (an average decline of 5,377 abortions each month) in the six months after the Dobbs decision.

An NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist poll from April found that 59 percent of all U.S. adults opposed the Dobbs decision, but 66 percent said that abortion should be allowed “at most within the first three months” of a pregnancy. The latter figure does not necessarily indicate support for a total ban, however, since 82 percent said abortion should be legal “at any time” to protect the health of the mother, and 70 percent said it should be legal at any time in cases of rape or incest. The poll of 1,291 adults also found that 64 percent opposed a ban on “the use of a prescription pill or a series of pills to end a pregnancy.”



Dobbs did not dictate abortion policy at any level, but in overturning *Roe* after nearly 50 years, the court ruling did restore the right of states to set their own abortion policies. During the past year, dozens of states have enacted restrictions on abortion, and in 14 states abortion is now banned entirely or allowed only in cases of rape or incest. In addition, abortion is now banned after six weeks of pregnancy in Georgia, after 12 weeks in Nebraska and after 15 weeks in Arizona and Florida.

An analysis by the website FiveThirtyEight of polls taken between September 2021 and May 2023 found an average of 44 percent of all Americans in support of a 15-week ban on abortion, with a matching 44 percent opposed to such a ban. An average of 34 percent supported a six-week ban, with 54 percent opposed.

Catholics Mirror the General Population

The NPR poll did not include a breakdown by religious group, but other polls have found that U.S. Catholics come close to mirroring the overall population in their views of abortion. A Gallup poll from February found that 46 percent of U.S. adults wanted abortion laws in the United States to be “less strict,” up from 30 percent who felt that way in January 2022, before the Dobbs decision. Only 15 percent said they wanted abortion laws to be “stricter.” Among Catholics, 38 percent said in February that they



OSV News photo/Dave Hrbacek, Catholic Spirit

Protesters clash at the State Capitol in St. Paul, Minn., on Jan. 27 as legislators consider a proposal to make abortion a protected right.

wanted less strict abortion laws, up from 22 percent early last year; and 15 percent wanted stricter laws, an identical share to the U.S. population overall.

A Pew Research Center poll from April found that 62 percent of all adult Americans, and 61 percent of adult U.S. Catholics, agreed that abortion should be legal in most or all cases; 36 percent of all Americans and 38 percent of Catholics said abortion should be illegal in most or all cases.

And in February, a poll conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute found 64 percent of adult Americans agreeing that abortion should be legal “in most or all cases.” This was up from 55 percent in 2010. Over the same period, the share of Americans saying that abortion should always be illegal dropped from 15 percent to 7 percent. In the latest poll, 62 percent of white Catholics and 61 percent of Hispanic Catholics said abortion should be legal in most or all cases; only 27 percent of white evangelical Protestants agreed with this statement, but 85 percent of those not affiliated with a religion agreed. (Based on its polling, P.R.R.I. estimated that there are only seven states where less than half of residents say abortion should be legal in most or all cases: Arkansas, Idaho, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee and Utah.)

U.S. Catholics also showed similarities with the general population on whether the abortion drug mifepristone should remain legal and available. A federal judge in Texas

ruled on April 7 that the Food and Drug Administration failed to properly vet mifepristone, a drug used in medication abortions in the United States since 2000, but the Supreme Court restored F.D.A. approval while the decision from Texas is being appealed. In a Pew survey from April, 53 percent of all U.S. adults said that “medication abortion” should be legal in their state, while 22 percent said it should be illegal. Among Catholics, 46 percent said it should be legal in their state and 26 percent said it should be illegal. (In 2020, the most recent year with available data, medication abortions accounted for 53 percent of all facility-based abortions in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and reported by Pew.)

Little Confidence in State Legislatures

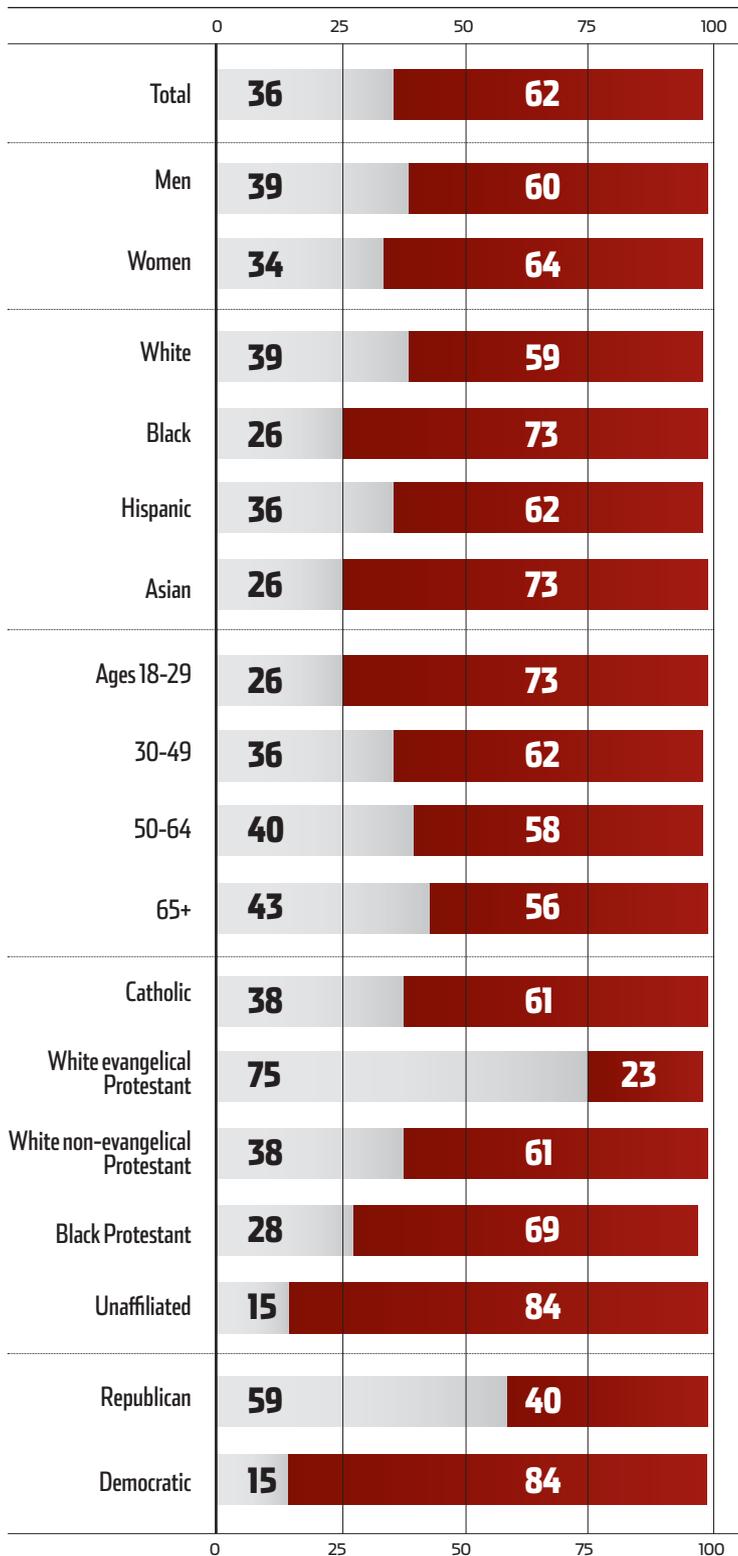
Returning abortion policy to the states may have corrected an overreach by the Supreme Court in *Roe*, but it has raised new concerns about the legitimacy and accountability of state government. An NPR/Ipsos poll from January found that 58 percent of U.S. adults believed that legislators in their state decided abortion policy based on “what their donors and political base wants,” with 36 percent saying that lawmakers passed abortion laws based on “what the majority of the state public wants.” (Those were the only two options; respondents were not asked whether, for example, legislators made decisions on the basis of personal conscience.) But majorities said the same about seven other issues, including taxes, education, guns and public health, suggesting a broad disconnect from state government—perhaps because so many state legislators in gerrymandered districts face no opposition from candidates of another party.

The same poll found that 69 percent favored “your state using a ballot measure or voter referendum to decide abortion rights at the state level.” Support for the referendum process cut across party lines and included 65 percent of Republicans, even though several Republican-controlled states have passed or are considering changes to make it more difficult to decide abortion policy through referendums. In Ohio, for example, voters will decide in August whether to raise the threshold for passing state constitutional amendments from 50 percent to 60 percent; and in November they will likely vote on just such an amendment to guarantee a right to abortion. Last year saw ballot-question defeats for the pro-life movement in Kansas and other states, and the NPR/Ipsos poll found that 54 percent of voters nationwide would vote “in favor of abortion legality” in their state, compared with 27 percent who would vote

Attitudes on abortion in 2023

Percentage saying abortion should be illegal in most or all cases

Percentage saying abortion should be legal in most or all cases



Source: Pew Research Center poll of 5,079 adults taken from March 27 to April 2, 2023

against abortion legality.

The lack of confidence in state legislatures may explain the results of a P.R.R.I. survey from last June, right after the Dobbs decision was handed down. In that poll, 53 percent of U.S. adults favored a national law preserving “a right to abortion,” and another 12 percent favored a national law “banning abortion,” with only 32 percent (but 54 percent of Republicans) saying that abortion policy should be left to the states. There were similar results among both white Catholics and Hispanic Catholics; white evangelical Protestants were the only religious group in which a majority said abortion law should be left to the states.

Party Dissenters

Abortion is one of the strongest matters of disagreement between the country’s two major political parties, and party affiliation mostly lines up with voters’ views on the issue. Still, 14 percent of Democrats in the spring NPR poll said they “mostly” opposed “abortion rights,” while 33 percent of Republicans said they were mostly supportive. (Independents broke 62-35 as mostly supportive of abortion rights.)

A P.R.R.I. analysis from April produced similar numbers. It also found that 29 percent of pro-life Democrats were Hispanic Catholics, though that group accounted for only 13 percent of Democrats overall. Another 21 percent of pro-life Democrats were Black Protestants, though they were only 15 percent of Democrats overall. Among white Catholics, views on abortion lined up more closely with party affiliation: They accounted for 8 percent of pro-life Democrats and 10 percent of Democrats overall. At the same time, according to P.R.R.I.’s data, white Catholics accounted for 21 percent of pro-choice Republicans and 18 percent of Republicans overall.

Robert David Sullivan, *production editor*.

GOODNEWS: Planting trees to combat the effects of climate change in Nigeria

Twice each day, Victor Gbenwe climbs on his motorcycle for a 20-minute ride to his uncle's nursery, where he waters nearly 400 mangrove seedlings. In five months, they will be ready for planting along the shoreline in Bodo, his home community in southern Nigeria's oil-producing Rivers State.

"I really like what I do at the nursery," Mr. Gbenwe said. He describes it as an effort "to protect my community from floods and storms."

Mr. Gbenwe, 35, was trained in mangrove caretaking by the Nigerian Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development. Nenibarini Zabbey, its coordinator, said the training offered to Mr. Gbenwe and other planters is part of the center's plan to counter the impact of climate change in the region.

Flooding is a global problem that accounts for about 47 percent of all weather-related disasters around the world. Nigeria experienced its worst flooding in a decade in 2022. More than 600 people died and more than 2.8 million people were affected.

Nigeria faces a number of major challenges to flood adaptation, including lack of institutional coordination and early warning systems. The nation's extreme poverty adds to the vulnerability. About 40 percent of the Nigerian population lives below the national poverty line. That means households do not have the resources to respond to climate-related shocks or mitigate their risks.

Experts agree that the global phenomenon of climate change is exacerbating the problem of flooding in Nigeria. Researchers at the World Weather Attribution group say devastating floods in Nigeria are now 80 times more likely because of the climate crisis.

Catholic institutions and parishioners in Nigeria are working to prevent future floods. In February, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria launched a campaign that aims to plant 5.5 million trees over the next five years to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Mr. Zabbey and his team are planting mangrove seedlings in coastal intertidal zones like the Niger Delta. Mangrove forests are an important natural solution to the interconnected problems of flooding and climate change. The forests store carbon that would otherwise contribute to rising temperatures, of course, but they also prevent coastal erosion and act as shoreline barriers against floods.

"Mangroves are a very unique ecosystem because they provide a lot of [ecological] services in addition to shoreline protection," Mr. Zabbey said. "They are breeding and



Houses are submerged in flood waters in Lokoja, Nigeria, on Oct. 13, 2022.

nursery grounds for commercial fishes, and they also serve as maintenance of water quality" by filtering pollutants from the water, he added.

Mr. Zabbey is a professor of biomonitoring and ecology. He described mangrove forests as a "major carbon sink; they sequester carbon [per equivalent area] five times more than a tropical rainforest." This is because most of the carbon stored in the mangrove ecosystem is in the soil, not in above-ground plant materials as with tropical forests.

So far, the center has sponsored the planting of mangrove seedlings in eight communities in Bayelsa and Rivers States. But even as these restoration efforts continue, existing mangrove forests remain under threat.

Mr. Zabbey said the mangrove ecosystem in the Niger Delta still faces overharvesting and vulnerability to more oil spills. And mangrove forests have been used for illicit garbage dumping that often includes plastic products that do not biodegrade. As that material accumulates, it can hinder tidal flow in and out of a mangrove swamp, reducing the ecosystem's diversity and vitality.

And "when mangroves are lost, the stability of the land is lost, and the land becomes vulnerable to flooding and erosion," Mr. Zabbey warned.

Mr. Zabbey is encouraged by the progress the center has achieved despite ongoing threats. Meanwhile, Mr. Gbenwe is attempting to raise community awareness of the fragility of mangrove habitats and train other community members on how to manage mangrove seedlings.

"We live very close to the sea in my community, so there is a need to lay more emphasis on mangrove [conservation]. That is why I want to train others in my community, so they will have the knowledge about the mangrove and...its importance to the environment," he said. "If they have the knowledge, they will protect the mangrove."

Ekpali Saint contributes from Nigeria. Twitter: @EkpaliS.

In Latin America, a church network joins grassroots struggles against mining interests

In April dead fish and mud washed down the river that flows past Coata, the community where Félix Suasaca lives on the shore of Lake Titicaca, high in the Andes Mountains of Peru. Mr. Suasaca and other community leaders say acid runoff from a mine upstream fouled the wetlands where their cattle and sheep graze and flowed into the lake, which is also contaminated by mercury and other metals draining from other poorly regulated mines in the watershed.

“We’re drinking water that is contaminated by heavy metals,” Mr. Suasaca said. Coata is just one of hundreds of communities in Latin America where residents are affected by pollution from mining or face conflicts over mining concessions in their territories. Increasingly, faith groups are accompanying these communities in their quest for environmental justice. In Latin America, some representatives of these affected communities came together in 2013 at a meeting that gave rise to the Churches and Mining Network.

“The network was born out of the concern for responding to the cry of victims in mining areas,” said Rosa del Valle, who belongs to a lay faith community that has been accompanying communities affected by mining in northern Argentina since the 1990s and joined the Churches and Mining Network in 2014.

The network’s efforts, she says, are rooted in an eco-spirituality “that tries to emphasize the cause or the root of resistance—to understand what is the spirituality that gives people the strength to fight against a monster that puts them in the position of David against Goliath.”

Mining remains a major source of revenue for Latin American countries. Mexico—once a colonial center of silver and mercury mining—is the world’s largest silver-producing country, with Peru, Chile, Bolivia and Argentina also in the top 10. Chile leads the world in copper production, followed by Peru, while Peru ranks seventh in the world for gold production, with Mexico in eighth place.

And with global demand for lithium climbing, international companies increasingly eye the “lithium triangle,” a region of salt flats in the Andes Mountains where Chile, Argentina and Bolivia converge. Lithium production there is water-intensive, and in the Argentine province of Cata-



marca, the diversion of water for a lithium mine dried up a stretch of river.

People have lived in that arid region for thousands of years, carefully managing the scarce water supply for their crops and livestock, Ms. del Valle said, but the new demands on the water resources created by mining set off a cascade of consequences.

Concerns about water—both its scarcity and potential contamination—have been key issues in protests against mining interests on both the Argentine and Chilean sides of the lithium triangle. Similar worries echo in Central America, in an area known as La Puya, northeast of Guatemala City.

For more than a decade, local communities accompanied by Catholic Church workers have resisted a gold mine, despite efforts by government security forces to evict them. The communities argued that they were not consulted about the project, and a court ruling in their favor resulted in suspension of permits for the mine.

César Espinoza, C.M.F., has seen similar scenarios play out in Panama, Honduras and his native Guatemala, where he now lives.



CNS photo/Luis Gonzalez, Reuters

Indigenous people camp on the property of the Chinese-owned Las Bambas copper mine in Peru on April 26, 2022.

“The story is the same,” he said. “Only the players and the places change. In some cases, the people are campesinos, in others they’re Indigenous. In some cases, the mining companies are international, in others they are domestic.”

Some priests and religious who are members of the Churches and Mining Network are urging their congregations to divest from investments in mining companies, an effort also supported by the network. But while religious groups have been at the forefront of the movement to divest from fossil fuels, the campaign to divest from mining is moving more slowly, says Carlos Ferrada, S.V.D., who heads his community’s office of justice, peace and integrity of creation and coordinates the divestment campaign in Rome.

“It’s more complex,” he said. “We need mining, but it must be sustainable and responsible.”

Barbara Fraser contributes from Lima, Peru. Twitter: @Barbara_Fraser.



Sister Lucia Caram with Pope Francis on May 24, 2023

Photo courtesy of Sister Lucia Caram

An Argentine sister brings aid to Ukraine

The world has increased its supply of weapons to Ukraine, but it is failing to send the badly needed humanitarian aid in equal measure, according to Lucía Caram, O.P., an Argentine sister living in Spain, who has made 18 journeys to the war-torn country over the past 15 months. Sister Lucía set out on her 19th journey to Ukraine on June 9.

“I always say I was wounded by the war on that first trip, seeing what it was like, seeing people fleeing across the [Romanian] border [from Ukraine],” she said on May 24 in Rome.

Sister Lucía’s Santa Clara Convent Foundation has taken in 1,000 people, “mainly mothers with children,” over the past 15 months, she said.

She recalled that at the beginning of the war there was “a compulsive rush” to provide humanitarian aid, but that is no longer the case. “Maybe it is because of media fatigue, tiredness or whatever, but [in Ukraine] they tell me that humanitarian aid has decreased by 80 percent.” And yet, she said, “I believe the situation is worse now than it was then.”

Sister Lucía is working with her network of volunteers to respond to that need for aid, particularly in the health field. She has delivered 92 ambulances and claims “every ambulance saves more than 100 lives.” She said the network has also provided a bus with eight bunk beds to move the wounded from the attacked zones.

She is now seeking to provide at least three mobile field hospitals to Ukraine, the kind that can be assembled or dismantled in half an hour, “to bring operating rooms and intensive care units closer to the battlefield or to the places of attacks,” so as “to minimize the number of deaths and minimize amputations or irreversible losses.”

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

Latino Catholics Are Leaving the Church

What can be done
to welcome them back?

By J.D. Long-García





The Rev. Joe Calloway of the nondenominational Grace Walk Church in Phoenix leads his congregation in a celebration of Easter.

All photos by J.D. Long-García

Before its Easter Sunday service, Grace Walk Church in Phoenix was humming. Volunteers at the nondenominational church staffed the coffee bar, and ushers with warm smiles greeted early arrivals. In the parking lot, members wearing orange shirts directed traffic. The founding pastor, the Rev. Joe Calloway, wore jeans, a black hat and a white shirt with an American flag on the front and the word *FREEDOM* on the back.

The service began without a procession. Instead, it kicked off with live music and dancing led by Reggie Holmes, the worship director, and a pre-recorded video with a voice-over and images about the death and resurrection of Jesus. No one seemed to mind when people arrived late; and the service ended on time, just under an hour after it began.

Before his turn to speak, Pastor Calloway sat with the congregation, sipping coffee. Rather than refer to the day as Easter, he prefers to call it Resurrection Sunday, in an effort to disassociate the celebration from pagan fertility traditions. (The word *Easter* shares its etymology with the fertility goddess Eostre.) “What I want you to know is that God is real,” he said during his sermon.

A little over 20 years ago, alfalfa grew on the spot where the church now stands. Phoenix continues to be one of the fastest growing cities in the country, attracting residents from other states and from Latin America.

The congregation at Grace Walk is growing too. Among the new attendees are a significant number of former Catholics, many of whom are Latino, according to the Rev. Michael Penn, executive pastor of Grace Walk. This shift of Latino Catholics to Protestantism is not unique to Grace Walk. In April, the Pew Research Center released a study documenting the steady decline of Catholicism among U.S. Latinos. Approximately 43 percent of Latinos are Catholic, a chasmic drop from 67 percent in 2010.

Pastor Penn says he is interested not so much in attracting people away from Catholicism as in directing people toward Jesus. “Everything about our church is really trying to reach people,” he told **America**. “We’re not in competition with any other church. Our competition is everything else that people have that can take their time and attention away from living a life pursuing Christ.”

But this shift of Latinos away from Catholicism has many Catholic leaders and ministers concerned and wondering: Why are so many leaving the Catholic Church? Where are they going, and do any ever come back?

Searching for a Spiritual Home

Rogelio García is a former Catholic. On Resurrection Sunday at Grace Walk, he was one of the volunteers helping di-

Rogelio García, who was raised Catholic, struggled with drug addiction. A Protestant group helped him and inspired him to embrace his Christian faith. ▶

rect traffic in the parking lot. Growing up, Mr. García said, his family members would go to Mass on Sundays but otherwise would not observe the tenets of the Catholic faith.

“Thirty-seven years of my life, I was lost out there in the world,” Mr. García said. “I was a drug addict. I was a thief. In 2005, I was trying to get out of this world, but nobody would kill me.”

That is when he went to a Christian men’s home. They were there for him, he said, and he found Jesus. Today he is married, has a house and runs his own remodeling business. “[God] has done so much for me, and all I can do is show him how much I love him by seeking him every day,” Mr. García said.

“When I gave my life to the Lord, then everybody [in my family] gave their life to the church,” he said. “Because I was so bad, the things I did. But when they saw God change me, they were all, like, ‘Whoa! There is a God.’”

Unlike Catholics, over the last decade Protestants have maintained a relatively steady percentage of the Latino population—around 20 percent. Overall, evangelical Protestant groups have grown, according to Besheer Mohamed, a senior researcher at Pew. In fact, the recent study suggests evangelical Latinos are more engaged with their faith than Latino Catholics.

Pew found, for example, that 58 percent of evangelical Latinos attend religious services weekly, compared with the 22 percent of Latino Catholics who attend Sunday Mass. Further, evangelical Latinos are more likely than Latino Catholics to pray at least daily—72 percent versus 52 percent.

The reasons why Latinos leave the church are as complex as the community itself. Catholic leaders I interviewed suggested a number of causes, including cultural tensions, a lack of leadership opportunities and a shortage of Latino priests. But most agreed that the church should emphasize connections and deeper relationships going forward.

“I don’t think that young [Hispanics] are leaving because the Catholic Church believes this or that or the other,” said Alejandro Aguilera-Titus, assistant director of Hispanic affairs for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. “I think it’s a matter of relationality. ‘Do I feel at home in the parish? Do I have a sense of belonging? Am I important to the church?’”

The number of Catholics in Latin America has also decreased, so immigrants from that region are less likely to be



A recent study suggests evangelical Latinos are more engaged with their faith than Latino Catholics.



giosity and love for lay ecclesial movements.”

Armando Ruiz, who leads the Guadalupe Project in Phoenix, is trying to do the same. His ministry offers formation classes in homes to make the faith more accessible. The classes focus on the Bible, Mass and Mary. “Small groups—small enough so that it’s like you’re having coffee,” Mr. Ruiz said. The Guadalupe Project wants to help Latino parents teach their kids the Bible, because these families are critical for the Catholic Church.

Mr. Ruiz has a family member who left the Catholic Church for a Protestant denomination but later returned. He noted that Latinos often find more opportunities for leadership in Protestant communities. “We don’t nurture the leadership that’s here,” Mr. Ruiz said of the Catholic Church. “Once [Latino Catholics] leave the Catholic Church, they become pastors. We [Catholics] tend to lack the zeal for evangelization,” he said, adding that the Protestant message often is: “Listen, brother. Go and get more brothers!”

Access to Catholic education is another issue Mr. Ruiz mentioned. In his area of South Phoenix, there are 22,000 children attending school, he said, but the local Catholic school has an attendance of 200. In general, Latinos are underrepresented in Catholic education, which means that the Catholic Church loses opportunities for faith formation at a young age.

All Are Welcome?

The shortage of priests in general presents yet another obstacle to engaging Latino Catholics, and a lack of Latino priests in some places can be particularly challenging.

“Latino priests are overwhelmed,” according to Mr. Ruiz. “They go out to bless houses, cars—they even go to birthdays. It gets busy!”

Priests are not always the answer, though, according to Eliseo Espinoza, a former Catholic originally from Agua Prieta, in the Mexican state of Sonora, but raised in Antioch,

Catholic than in years past.

The V Encuentro, a multiyear process organized by the U.S. bishops to learn the needs of the Latino community, identified engaging the children of immigrants as a top priority, Mr. Aguilera-Titus said. The bishops approved a national 10-year plan at their June meeting that seeks to better engage the Latino population through youth, young adults and families.

Actively reaching out is particularly important, according to Mr. Aguilera-Titus, who said that many U.S. Latino Catholics have been influenced by proselytizing from Protestant churches that are critical of the Catholic Church. “That has done damage for at least five decades,” he said.

In the United States, church leaders have established Hispanic ministry in more than 4,500 parishes, Mr. Aguilera-Titus said. This kind of ministry empowers Latino Catholics to “resist” proselytizing and, he believes, helps bring people back to the church. Catholic charismatic groups are particularly effective at evangelizing, he said.

“We are looking at a church that needs to be a lot more missionary if it is to more fully engage Hispanic Catholics,” Mr. Aguilera-Titus said. “We are not only immigrants; we are missionaries. We are injecting into the Catholic Church in the United States new vitality and youth and gifts, such as our faith in God and our sense of family, our popular reli-



The reasons why Latinos leave the church are as complex as the community itself.

Calif. He says sometimes they are part of the problem.

“Sometimes I go back and I think, ‘Why did I completely get out of Catholicism?’” he told me. “It was a lot of little things that added up. But if I had to say one thing, it would be the rigidity and lack of acceptance.”

Mr. Espinoza was baptized Catholic and his family would go to church regularly early in his life. His mother prayed the rosary daily. Then, for reasons still unclear to Mr. Espinoza, his father stopped going to church. It was hard to continue going because his mother did not drive. “He wouldn’t even drive us to church,” he said.

Eventually, an apostolic church with upbeat music drew his family in. Mr. Espinoza liked the friendly, community-oriented events, including dinners and weekend picnics in the park, but was unsure about speaking in tongues. “That used to freak me out when I was a kid,” he laughed.

As an adult, Mr. Espinoza and his wife, Veronica, decided they would raise their children Catholic. For many years, he attended a parish in South Phoenix, went to Bible study and attended meetings of the Knights of Columbus.

“They had stuff that was fulfilling my needs. I was all for it, all excited,” he said. “Then we had a change of leadership.”

The former pastor fell ill, and his replacement was very strict. “He started telling ladies how they needed to dress for Mass,” Mr. Espinoza said. The new pastor ended the Bible study, and Mr. Espinoza found himself feeling unqualified or unworthy to participate in certain activities.

The pastor also scolded the congregation for only showing up on Christmas and Easter, Mr. Espinoza said. He described the pastor as an authoritarian figure who was not open to questions. The new priest emphasized the Tridentine Mass and wore more traditional vestments, like a maniple, when celebrating Mass.

“That completely changed what I was getting out of it. All these rules, and all I wanted to do was learn about God, right?” Mr. Espinoza said. “I get it now, but at that moment in my life, I didn’t need to be lectured. I needed to be hugged.”

The excitement he once felt about bringing his children



to Mass did not return. And like his father before him, he started telling his wife to go without him. “But something was always telling me, ‘You need to get back to something,’” Mr. Espinoza said. “Now I know I was being called.”

After driving by Grace Walk dozens of times, he and his wife decided to give it a try. They were immediately taken with Pastor Calloway and his wife, Pastor Tammy. “There was something about them. They just looked so normal. They looked like me. So we decided to come,” he said. “I came in shorts. I wanted to see if they looked down on me, right? And nah, they just welcomed me.”

Latinos simply do not always feel welcomed in Catholic churches, according to Milton Javier Bravo, the vice president of mission, values and inclusion at Edgewood College in Madison, Wis. “To be a Latino Catholic is countercultural not only to American culture, but even American Catholicism,” he said, referring to popular traditions and the faith handed down through family and community. “In order to be accepted, you almost have to renounce your culture.”

For many Latino Catholics, the deepest connections



The high-energy music at Gracewalk Church in Phoenix brings everyone to their feet on Easter Sunday.

to their faith communities more often occur outside of Mass, Mr. Bravo said. These practices are more about understanding the interconnectedness of individuals within a community and the abiding love of God and neighbor, he said. Further, many value social justice work as a way of reflecting the values of these celebrations. This type of work also engages Gen Z and Gen Alpha Catholics, Mr. Bravo said.

“An experience of faith is first and foremost a relationship,” he said. “That requires encounter, a fostering of conversation, setting the table for all voices to share their experiences. You can’t do that in an hour on Sundays. And once you start listening, you can’t be but compelled to act in a different way.”

The Disaffiliated Masses

While the percentage of Latinos who are Protestant remains relatively steady, Pew reports the biggest change is among the religiously unaffiliated. Disaffiliated Latinos now make up 30 percent of all Latinos in the United States, triple the number from 12 years ago. The religiously un-

affiliated include about half of Latino adults under 30. By contrast, only 20 percent of Latinos over 65 are unaffiliated.

Those I interviewed pointed to a number of potential causes. Some of the unaffiliated have parents who are not religious, so they were never introduced to a particular faith. Others had a bad experience with organized religion and chose to no longer practice. Still others say they are simply not interested.

Mark Cabrera started feeling unsettled in the Catholic Church as a teenager. He had been raised Catholic by his Mexican family in Texas, but he felt his confirmation program was not geared toward Latinos.

“I didn’t really feel connected to anyone,” he said. “After high school, I guess I sort of stopped going.... As Latinos, it’s sort of, ‘O.K., I go to church every Sunday because my parents are going.’ It’s not because you want to. It’s just an obligation.”

He went away for college but did not make many Catholic friends there. “Making white friends that were Catholic was weird to me,” Mr. Cabrera said. “I’m trying to find people who are similar to me, and I wasn’t finding that in



‘To be a Latino Catholic is countercultural not only to American culture, but even American Catholicism.’

the Latinos who were there.”

It is a little hard for him to name a precise reason other than a general indifference toward the faith. “I’m not really into it. If someone asked me, I guess I would say I’m Catholic...or at least I still believe there’s something after the fact, after we die,” he said. The Catholic Church’s position on some issues, like same-sex marriage and abortion, are also obstacles for Mr. Cabrera.

Mary Rivas was also turned off by some of the teachings emphasized in her Catholic community in Maryland. Ms. Rivas is the oldest of four children and said she is the only one of her siblings who does not practice her faith by going to church every Sunday. “I make an effort to have a more personal relationship with God,” she said. “I don’t find that I can have a relationship with him through something as specific as a religion.”

She stopped going to church five years ago. She had suffered physically and mentally during her second pregnancy and after her child was born. Because of her mental state, she checked into a psychiatric hospital.

“What was proposed to me was simply, I wasn’t praying enough. I wasn’t going to church enough. I wasn’t being a good enough wife because I didn’t want more kids,” Ms. Rivas said, summarizing the advice she received from some fellow Catholics. Members of her community advised her and her husband to practice Natural Family Planning, a church-approved method of spacing children. That way, they told her, she could still receive the Eucharist.

“N.F.P. is not a 100 percent guarantee, and I found myself pregnant with my third baby,” Ms. Rivas said. “My doctor said, ‘Enough. You can’t keep putting yourself through

all of this mental and physical stress for the sake of someone telling you that you are going to go to hell otherwise.’”

She wound up in the psychiatric hospital again. “I wanted nine children, but my body said otherwise,” she said. Ms. Rivas chose to start taking hormonal birth control, but she said the women in her community judged her for it.

“It really broke my heart because, you know, we preach so much about people being individuals created in God’s image, and everybody is different,” she said. “The plants and the birds and everything are unique. And yet women are only given one option for their reproductive health. But not everybody’s bodies are able to just work on N.F.P.”

Ms. Rivas has two daughters, and she began to think of how they might be treated if they faced similar pregnancies. She was directed by other Catholics to speak with women who did not have tough pregnancies, and then to speak with priests.

“As wise as many priests are, their worldview and lived experience is so different from a woman’s, so different from a wife, so different from a mother,” Ms. Rivas said. “And they are only giving advice based on what they’re taught, not their own life experience of being a woman.”

The Catholic Future Is Latino

According to Pew, Hispanics accounted for 51 percent of the growth in the U.S. population from 2010 to 2020. (And most of that growth is not from immigration: Newborns are responsible for most of that growth, and 80 percent of Latinos in the United States are citizens.) Given the demographics, it is critical to make space for Latino faith and culture to thrive.

It is also critical to understand generational differences in Latino cultures, especially when it comes to immigrant populations, said Cristofer Pereyra, chief executive officer of the Tepeyac Leadership Initiative, a nonprofit organization that helps lay Catholics become civic leaders. First-generation immigrants arrive and, seeing the financial opportunities the United States has to offer, often feel like they need to catch up.

“The prosperity that second- and third-generation immigrants are able to attain makes them feel like they don’t need their faith,” said Mr. Pereyra. “Let’s be honest, when we talk to God, most of the time is when we need him. When you grow up poor in Latin American countries, you need God all the time. Suffering is a constant reminder.”

He believes that bringing people back to the faith is as simple as getting back to basics, including confession, Holy Hours and perpetual adoration. “We don’t have to reinvent the faith, we just have to be more Catholic,” he said.

Despite the fact that the Catholic Church is attracting



Armando and Monica Ruiz lead Catholic Bible studies in South Phoenix. The effort attempts to make the Catholic faith more accessible to Latino Catholics.

a smaller proportion of the Latino population, the proportion of the Catholic Church that is Latino continues to grow. Church leaders and ministries must account for the fact that the Catholic Church is becoming more Latino, according to Deacon Charlie Echeverry of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. He is the founder of the Black/Brown Collective, which focuses on emerging platforms and audiences. He noted that 42 percent of the Catholic Church in the United States is Hispanic, and Latinos account for 62 percent of Catholics under 18.

Given these demographics, the Catholic Church must also consider the role language plays in connection to one's faith, Deacon Echeverry said. "You've got guys who are second, third, fourth generation Hispanic," he said of the numbers. "A lot of them don't speak Spanish. But their liturgical experience is Spanish because they're brought [to Mass] by their parents or aunts and grandmothers. They don't know the Our Father in English. So when you put them in an English Mass, they feel disconnected."

But trying to offer access to worship—bulletins, websites, Masses—in multiple languages often has led to the dynamic of having two parishes in one church, one that speaks English and one that speaks Spanish. A similar phenomenon happens with the formation of deacons—through programs in either English or Spanish. But Deacon Eche-

verry said the diaconate should have everyone together, as is the case with priest formation in seminaries.

"They've got guys from Vietnam, from Nigeria, from the U.S., and they're all being formed in one language. [In the diaconate] we had different syllabuses, different facilitators, different events and experiences," he said. "We should focus on the person. We should focus on accompaniment."

The global synod on synodality has been an opportunity to do just that, according to Ignacio Rodriguez, the associate director of Ethnic Ministries for the Diocese of Phoenix. Listening enables those who work and volunteer for the church to better understand underlying issues that impede participation.

"That'll help us know how to evangelize, how to make encounters, how to make our parishes more welcoming and help those people who aren't attending Mass see the beauty of what the Catholic Church offers," he said. "Because it's not all just rules and regulations. There's a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. And that should always be the center of any type of program or evangelization effort, regardless if the person is 100 years old or a newly baptized baby."

Mr. Rodriguez, who is the president of the National Catholic Association of Diocesan Directors of Hispanic Ministry, said many of those who leave the church do so



There's hope that whoever has left the church will at some point want to come home.

because they are unhappy with their parish community, are unhappy with a priest who always preaches on certain topics, or are individuals who have lost confidence in organized religion. There is still a lot of healing to be done, for example, in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis.

“For the church, there’s always hope. There’s hope that whoever has left the church will at some point want to come home,” Mr. Rodriguez said. “So it’s up to us to find a way to make that happen for them. Because we don’t want that to happen [only] on their deathbed. We want them to have an encounter with Jesus Christ, and an encounter with each other.”

Ingrid Sáenz de Torres knows firsthand that a return to the Catholic Church is possible. She grew up in Guatemala and said her mother was Catholic in name only. She learned about the Catholic faith from her grandmother. Pentecostal groups approached her as a young person and she remembers standing by the door of their church to listen to the music.

“I went home and told my mother and she scolded me. ‘If you’re going to go to church, you need to go to a Catholic church!’” Ms. Sáenz said. “But she would never take me.”

When she moved to the United States, she met the man who would eventually become her husband, though some of their children were born before the couple married. At that point, Ms. Sáenz started bringing her children to Mass and decided to become a parishioner.

The religious sisters at the parish asked if she was married.

“No, he doesn’t want to marry,” she told them, because it was true at the time. “What am I going to do?”

“Well, then you can’t be a parishioner,” she was told. “But bring him and we’ll talk to him.”

At that point, though, she stopped going to Mass.

Not long after, Jehovah’s Witnesses came to their

house. Her husband was intrigued because they promised to answer his numerous doubts. True to their word, the Jehovah’s Witnesses came back to their home once a week to give them classes for more than a year. Then the couple went to the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ meeting place, which they refer to as a Kingdom Hall.

“I was very curious, so I asked a lot of questions,” Ms. Sáenz said. The group would read from *The Watchtower*, the Jehovah’s Witness magazine. But something did not sit right with her. She went home and compared Bible verses in the different Spanish translations she had: the Jehovah’s Witness, Protestant and Catholic. The inconsistency bothered her.

Eventually both she and her husband lost interest and tried an evangelical church. Ms. Sáenz liked the preaching and music but was less comfortable with some of the charismatic elements.

At one point, a Catholic couple stopped by their home expressing enthusiasm about their parish performance of “Las Pastorelas,” an Advent play that recounts the story of the shepherds who greeted the Christ Child in Bethlehem.

“But did they bother to invite us to join them? No! And we needed that little push,” she laughed. “The thing about other churches is that they invite you and then they actually come by and get you. In the Catholic Church, no one invites you.”

But eventually, someone did invite them. Her nephew Manuel Torres Caballero asked them to come by for their Catholic prayer group—which she said felt almost like rejoining an evangelical church. And that was it. “That’s when we came back to [Catholic] church,” she said. “I’m here now and I’m not leaving.”

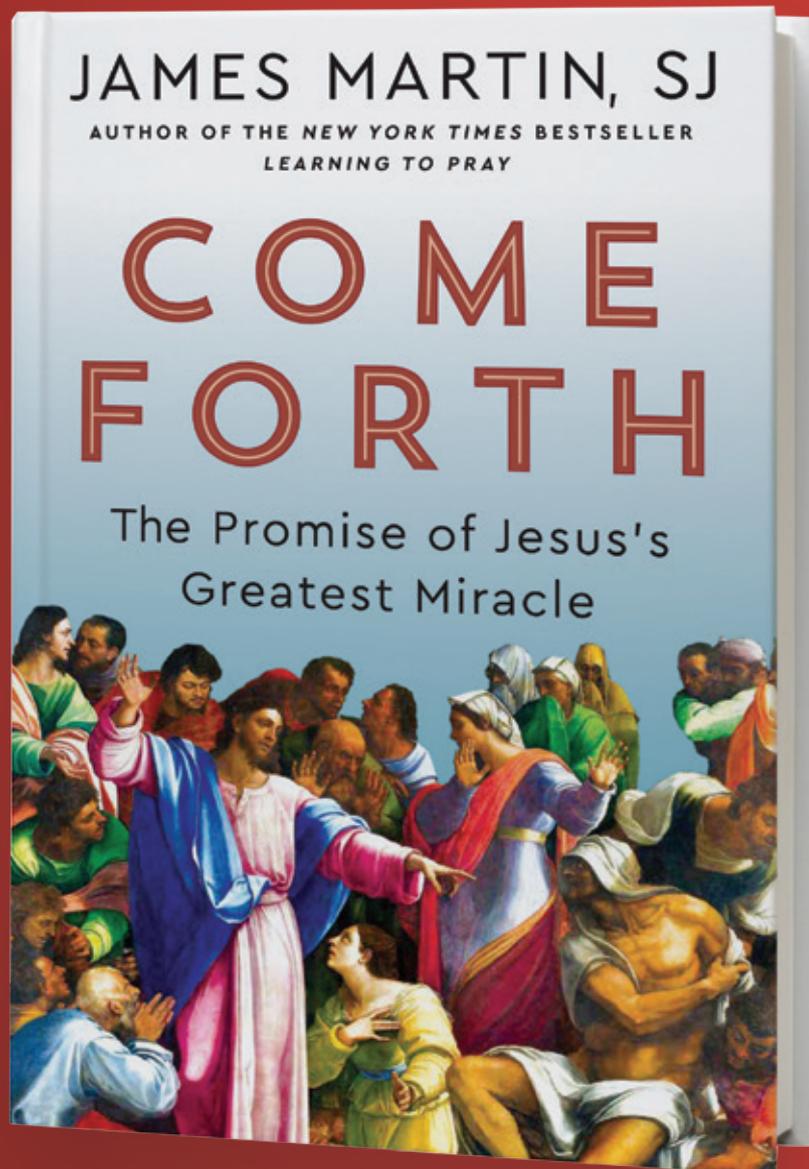
J.D. Long-García is a senior editor at *America*.

New from James Martin, SJ

COME FORTH

James Martin, SJ
Author of the New York Times
bestseller *Learning to Pray*

Discover how the Raising of Lazarus invites you to new Life.



“God calls each of us into a new life, inviting us to leave behind whatever is dead. But how? James Martin’s magnificent new book on the Raising of Lazarus shows us! He dives deep into the Gospel story to reveal how Jesus’s greatest miracle can help each of us experience the new life that God promises. *Come Forth* is a spiritual masterpiece.”

RICHARD ROHR, OFM,
author of *The Universal Christ*

“James Martin—arguably our greatest writer priest—has penned a genius meditation on the Raising of Lazarus. It’s a travel story and a spiritual manual to renewing one’s faith. I read it in one sitting and came away with a deeper hope that grace alone can call me out of whatever tomb I’ve buried myself in. Destined to be read and reread forever. Bravo!”

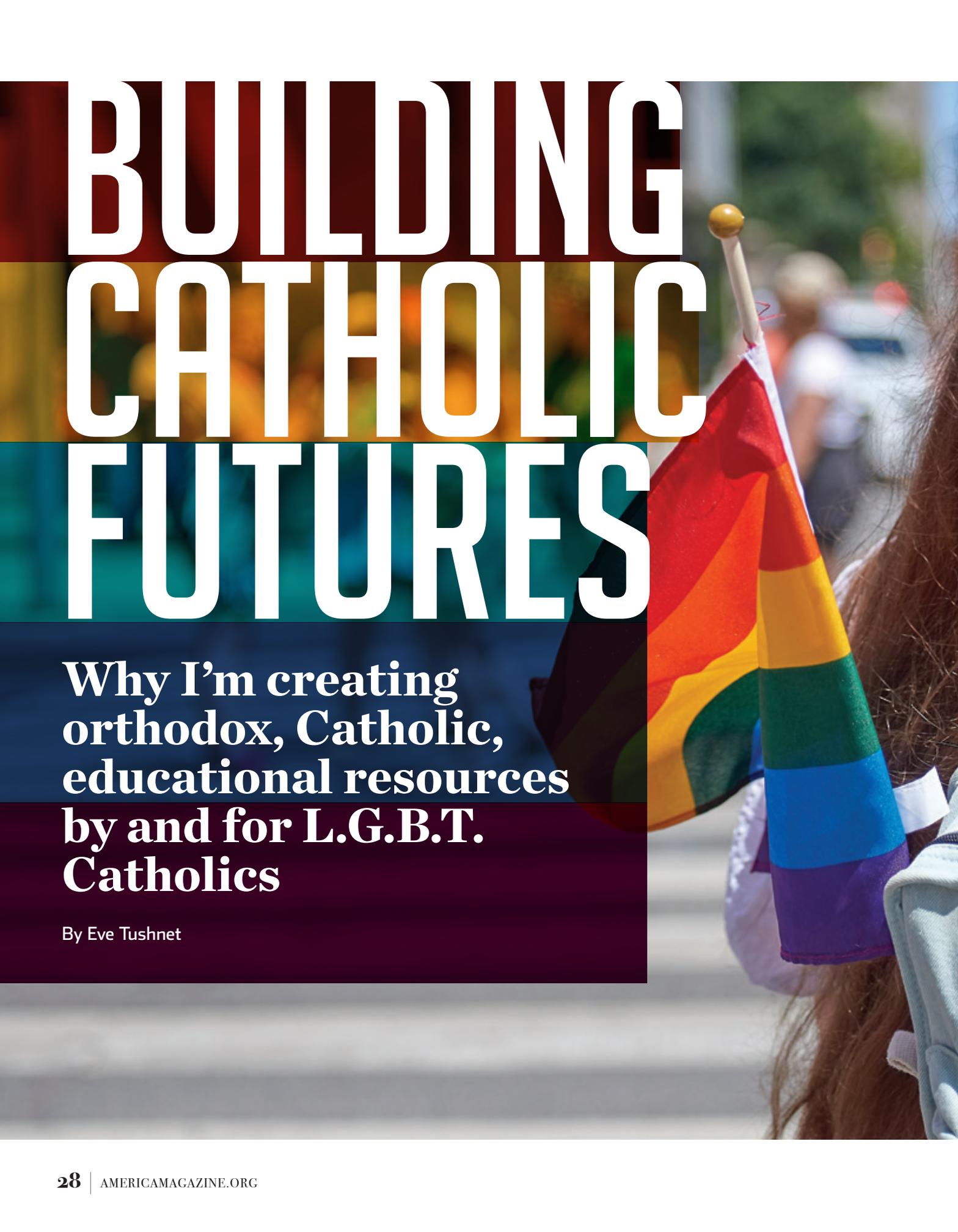
MARY KARR,
author of *The Liars’ Club* and *Lit: A Memoir*



HARPER
ONE

Pre-Order Today!
**Available now wherever
books are sold.**

BUILDING CATHOLIC FUTURES



**Why I'm creating
orthodox, Catholic,
educational resources
by and for L.G.B.T.
Catholics**

By Eve Tushnet



Keith Wildenberg is a tall man whose hawkish face is topped with a mop of shaggy curls. He is leaning over my kitchen counter and gesturing with a wine glass as he recalls the days of his youth: “So many of the evangelical [Catholic] kids were the queer kids,” he says, meaning the Catholic students who gave witness talks at teen retreats and sought out informal ways to share their faith. “We had the best testimonies!”

Mr. Wildenberg first heard gay people mentioned in a Catholic context in 1978, when he was in sixth grade. He recalls that a classmate “made a crack about sodomy,” and the religious sister leading the class informed them that the sin of Sodom wasn’t about sex, and that “homosexuals deserve our compassion.” Although he wasn’t out of the closet then, Mr. Wildenberg already had begun to realize that he was an outsider in some painful way connected to his sexuality. Still, his faith flourished in high school, with plenty of encouragement from priests and teachers. He spent some time discerning the priesthood but instead moved to San Francisco—where he thought all gay men eventually ended up—and is now semi-retired and sings in his church’s schola cantorum. After a long journey with his faith, he is now a practicing Catholic on fire to evangelize.

That is why he chose to become part of a new initiative called Building Catholic Futures, which I helped to start. The initiative began in part because a friend pointed out that my work focuses on helping queer adults restore a relationship with God that has too often been damaged by the silences and falsehoods that make gay people feel like outsiders within their churches.

These damaged relationships have a devastating effect: For most people, religious participation protects against suicide. But for L.G.B.T. youth, studies have found either no protective effect of religious participation or, in one study of college students, a higher rate of suicidality among more-religious youth. My friend asked: *What if we could reach kids before their faith gets damaged?* What if, by the time a young person begins asking questions about their own sexual orientation, they already trust that there is a place for gay people in the Catholic Church?

The aim of B.C.F. is to build this trust. We are currently a loosely structured grassroots organization, although we plan to seek nonprofit status next year. We are focused on creating comprehensive, age-appropriate resources for Catholic institutions and families that present gay and lesbian people as part of Catholic history and offer hope for today’s queer youth. This could include worksheets for religious education classes, retreats for high schoolers, lesson plans for teachers, pamphlets for parents, professional development workshops for teachers and priests, and even a program to train other non-straight Catholics to be mentors in their local communities.

There is no perfect term to capture all the ways people experience sexual orientation within the Catholic Church today, let alone a term that could cover all the historical figures whose lives might be inspiring to contemporary young people. This article will use a number of imperfect terms, including *gay*, *queer* and *non-straight*, to suggest a range of experiences. In B.C.F.’s historical materials, we give close descriptions of people’s lives without making assumptions about what language they



WHAT IF, BY THE TIME A YOUNG PERSON BEGINS ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR OWN SEXUAL ORIENTATION, THEY ALREADY TRUST THAT THERE IS A PLACE FOR GAY PEOPLE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

would use to describe themselves today.

Some of our resources will be aimed at educators who hope to serve non-straight young people better; some speak directly to high schoolers, like worksheets telling the stories of orthodox, queer, Catholic lives in ways that are relevant to students of all sexual orientations. Some resources will help parents navigate complex cultural changes in ways that will help them create a faithful and welcoming Catholic home, regardless of whether their own kids come out or not. I expect that some places will use our materials piecemeal, while other parishes or dioceses will become almost like partners. We hope to offer larger events that might include public panel discussions, workshops for priests, mentorship training and devotional events for the local L.G.B.T. community. Our hope is to help everyone envision a church in which queer Catholics are present.

The people contributing to these resources, including myself and Mr. Wildenberg, identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or same-sex attracted; and we accept Catholic teaching in full. Ten of us met late last year for B.C.F.'s first in-person working retreat. The founding participants range from twentysomethings to those nearing retirement. We come from many walks of life—a priest, a mom, a teacher in a Catholic school, a youth minister and more. Collectively, we have spoken to hundreds of L.G.B.T. Catholics and those ministering to this population.

We have begun drafting materials and are seeking educators, priests, catechists and parents who can “beta-test” materials and, once our resources are ready, use them in their communities. Our project is, as far as I know, the only project of its kind: the only attempt to create Catholic



educational resources not only about, but *by* and *for* non-straight people of faith.

This project will help guide Catholics at all the points where young people encounter the church—in their families, in school, in the confessional, even online—with orthodox and creative approaches to questions of L.G.B.T. life and faith.

Our Founding Principles

Together, we developed three principles to anchor our materials. First, *start the conversation*. By this we mean the materials should not just be a reaction to the status quo, but should also propose Catholic visions for gay people's flourishing. Second, tell *real people's stories* in ways that are relevant to Catholics of all sexual orientations. And third, *focus on vocation before chastity*. In doing so we remember that ordered sexuality is only one part of ordering our hearts to respond to God's infinite love.

All of our work aims to go beyond the expected, polarizing, culture-war-inspired rhetoric that too often influences our political and even religious conversation. Instead we try to answer one central question: How can Catholic kids questioning and naming their sexuality trust that they are loved by God and envision a future of love within the church?

Across the country, Catholic schools and dioceses are realizing the urgency of this question. In the past three years, a wave of new laws at the state level have restricted public schools' acknowledgment of L.G.B.T. life. Although Catholic schools are not covered by these laws, many feel the same political pressures that led to their passage. Again



iStock

and again I have been told by people who work with youth that questions about L.G.B.T. life are the most frequent ones they receive and the hardest ones to answer. Some dioceses have tried to address these questions with new policies, but I have spoken to many teachers and administrators in Catholic education who believe these policies do not address their or their students' real needs.

In order to understand what the landscape is like for queer kids in Catholic schools, I spoke with teachers, administrators and alumni. B.C.F. is working on materials that address only sexual orientation, because that's where our shared experience lies, but I spoke with people with personal or professional knowledge of the experiences of transgender or gender-questioning Catholics, too. I talked to queer cradle Catholics who have never left the faith, those who remain in the church but dissent from many of its teachings and those who have left the Catholic Church entirely. The people quoted here include both people in celibate same-sex partnerships and people in gay marriages. I have spoken with orthodox Catholics who say they would not put their own children in Catholic schools or who have left Catholic education in part because of anti-gay policies.

What I learned corresponds with what I heard from my companions during the retreat weekend. Catholic children are caught in a crossfire. Many feel they are forced to choose between staying faithful to the church and being honest about their sexuality or gender identity. Far too many Catholic young people are still hearing only silence or messages of fear about L.G.B.T. people in the church. Even some people who fully accept the Catholic Church's teaching on sexuality and gender are finding themselves

alienated by the way the church teaches it.

But I also discovered a surprising amount of common ground. I found a lot of hope that Catholic institutions can serve queer young people better while strengthening our institutions' Catholic identity and inviting youth into a deeper relationship with Christ.

Getting Started

For the past 24 years, David Palmieri (who contributes to **America's** Outreach project) has taught at the Catholic high school from which he graduated in the 1990s. A picture of Mr. Palmieri with the man he calls his "teacher hero" hangs in his office, which is also adorned with a stuffed bunny bearing the logo "Jesus Loves Me"—a present from students who won it at a carnival. Mr. Palmieri never intended to become an activist for any cause, let alone for L.G.B.T. youth. But a graduate school research paper on pastoral ministry started a journey that ultimately led him to found the Without Exception Network, which connects educators in Catholic high schools seeking to serve their L.G.B.T. students. He created the group because the resources and guidance he was hoping to find simply did not exist.

"It's not because people don't care," he said. "It's more a matter of discomfort with getting started. Nobody wants to initiate the conversation, especially when we're talking about kids, but the reality is [that] L.G.B.T. students are in our schools."

The Without Exception Network provides some resources for members, including a guide to starting an L.G.B.T. ministry at school and a guide to accompanying transgender students, but its primary focus is building community. It aims to connect educators with one another, so they can share wisdom and work out the best approach for their own contexts. (Mr. Palmieri is not connected with Building Catholic Futures.)

In recent years, many Catholic dioceses have tried to draw up policies related to L.G.B.T. students. However, Mr. Palmieri said that, overall, diocesan policies do more to constrain teachers and administrators than to help students discover Christ. He has seen how often students feel they must hide their "authentic self," especially if they suspect their feelings or mannerisms might not be accepted. He wants teachers to be free to act in ways that can reassure students that they can take off their "mask," even if that means a school must then wrestle with complex questions about gender identity—like names and pronouns, locker room usage, school uniforms and overnight retreats.

"I've started to think that if we're going to go down this road of issuing policies," Mr. Palmieri said, "we should re-



OUR WORK AIMS TO GO BEYOND THE POLARIZING, CULTURE-WAR-INSPIRED RHETORIC THAT TOO OFTEN INFLUENCES OUR CONVERSATION.

frame the conversation and come up with a series of principles offered to school leaders. And say, ‘Now we trust you...to implement our policy in response to the circumstances you encounter.’” Principles might include things like “Nothing about us without us”—meaning that administrators should always involve actual L.G.B.T. people in decision making. (This was something several other people emphasized, and it is part of B.C.F.’s approach.) “And I would love to see more talk about Jesus,” he said. “The policies don’t talk about Jesus; they talk about Catholic anthropology.”

Diocesan policies on sexuality and gender for students range in scope. Some, like that of the diocese of Orange, Calif., address only gender identity, while many others focus on gender but include restrictions on the pastoral accompaniment of sexual minority students as well. The Diocese of Sioux Falls, S.D., released an especially stringent policy in 2022 that bars students from “advocat[ing], celebrat[ing], or express[ing] same-sex attraction” or “transgenderism” “in such a way as to cause confusion or distraction” and urges the use of the term *same-sex attraction* in all circumstances, as opposed to more colloquial terms like *gay*. It bars the creation of “transgender bathrooms” and, like many diocesan policies, bars the use of preferred names and pronouns. Although the policy strongly condemns bullying, it also condemns any behavior regarding gender or sexual identity that might “confuse” other students and treats this confusion as potential grounds to expel an L.G.B.T. student.

The Archdiocese of Denver’s policy, released in 2022, urges teachers to confront “gender ideology” whenever possible, bars “gay-straight alliances” and requires schools to tell parents if a student “begin[s] to assert an identity at odds with their biological sex,” which would out young people to parents without regard for the child’s reasons for coming out only to peers or trusted mentors. Like many other such policies, it expresses a great deal of concern for

what others may think the school endorses. These policies consistently ignore the possibility that appearing to reject, harm or dismiss the concerns of L.G.B.T. students may also cause scandal and misunderstanding of Catholic doctrine.

Both at the B.C.F. retreat and in my interviews for this article, queer people asked for clarity from the church—the real teaching presented without adding in any theological extrapolations or “Catholic anthropology.” But we also need *possibility*. Again and again, queer Catholics told me how hard it was to imagine their future as a non-straight believer. No diocesan policy that I know of treats this feeling of impossibility as the central problem.

The process of creating a policy for the Archdiocese of Seattle was unusually transparent, when compared with other dioceses, and involved the convening of a task force that included Catholic school administrators, teachers and parents. Two of my interviewees who had taught in the archdiocese praised the task force’s recommendation of “pastoral care ministries” for youth “dealing with L.G.B.T.Q. questions,” though specific actions were not detailed.

Mr. Palmieri does not personally know of any teachers fired or students expelled specifically because of a new policy. He added that many of “those who are working on the ground with kids respect the policies, but are also operating with ‘wink and nod’ strategies to make sure that children are actually being cared for” and finding what he called “loopholes and workarounds” so that students feel “noticed and named and known.” These last three elements, he said, are the keys to earning the trust that makes meaningful ministry to L.G.B.T. youth possible.

The need for an individualized rather than a one-size-fits-all approach arises most strikingly regarding trans or gender-questioning students at single-sex schools. In my interviews, several people asked to speak off the record on this topic. One teacher noted that schools may have to navigate the parents’ own uncertainty or disagreements about how to address their children’s questions. Some schools have made individual exceptions to retain students who transition. Others have worked with students who decided to postpone transition until after graduation.

Perhaps the strongest argument against a top-down policy is that every student’s situation is different, and compassionate accompaniment requires flexibility and attention to individual circumstances. I asked Dr. Timothy Uhl, secretary of education for the Diocese of Buffalo, N.Y., what he would put in his ideal policy, and he laughed at the very idea of a top-down “ideal policy” to cover all situations. “I say, ‘Be careful what you wish for,’” he added, noting that

top-down policies might be too constraining, instead of allowing people to “make thoughtful decisions at the local level.” Dr. Uhl notes that his perspective is shaped by the gay people in his own family. His own memories of Catholic school are of its strong community.

When it comes to vexed questions of sexuality or gender identity, Dr. Uhl has found a couple of principles helpful. First, stick to the specific source of conflict or uncertainty instead of assuming that “one thing leads to another.” He gives the example of a girl who wants to take another girl to the prom: “We don’t even know if they consider it a date!” (I can attest to this: I took a girl to my prom, just as a friend.)

Second, give kids time and stay calm: “My general approach, which is maybe right, maybe wrong, is that the younger you are, the less permanent we should [expect decisions to be]. If a fifth grader decides he wants to use different pronouns, that doesn’t mean he’s going in for surgery.”

From Shame Toward Sharing Lives

One aim of B.C.F. is to introduce students to gay lives through a lens other than sexual sin. Ashton Weber, a student at Yale Divinity School who identifies as a lesbian, grew up in Ohio and attended Catholic school from first grade through college. She is one of many people I spoke with who said that nearly all conversations and comments in which being queer was mentioned in the church were in the context of sin. She said one of the first times she heard about being queer was in church, when the priest said something like, “Talking about sin—so, for example, gay people....”

In high school, she was assigned to write an essay in defense of the Catholic Church’s stance on homosexuality. “You would get a bad grade if you didn’t agree with the church’s opinion,” she said. “[So you’re] trying to figure yourself out, and also get a good grade in religion class, writing these papers about how you’re intrinsically disordered.”

As a result, she grew up feeling intense shame and isolation in her sexuality: “We learned about [queer] sexuality as if it was some far-off thing that none of us would ever engage with. ‘Them,’ ‘these people’—it was super othering.” This shame made it almost impossible for her to understand what was happening when a friendship ended in which she’d had unacknowledged romantic feelings. This was a theme among several conversations with my interviewees: Silence about gay life doesn’t keep people out of emotional entanglements, it just makes it harder for queer young people to navigate their friendships.

“Emily” is a young, bookish woman with a head of wild



The logo for Building Catholic Futures features Jesus on a rainbow and is inspired by traditional imagery of the Ascension and the Last Judgment, says founding member Eve Tushnet. (Courtesy of Building Catholic Futures)

curls. She spoke with me under a pseudonym, since she teaches in a Catholic middle school and fears losing her job if her sexual orientation becomes public. In the Catholic communities in which she grew up, she was taught a “baseline message that homosexual acts were sinful,” but even that was only brought up “briefly and tentatively when you had a chastity talk.” She currently teaches at a boys’ school with free tuition, serving mostly students below the poverty line. In the curriculum there, too, gay people are relegated to “a single sentence—really only part of a sentence [in] a list of things that are sins against the Sixth Commandment.”

While older Catholics may assume that all young people are progressives, Emily says her students tend to find progressive views of sexuality and gender “cringe.” Calling someone gay is considered a shameful insult. She wishes she could give her students some insight into what it means to identify as gay and let them know that “it isn’t something chosen.”

Some people described bullying or ostracism because of students’ (real or perceived) sexual orientation. “Melissa,” a professional in her twenties with a look that channels k.d. lang dressed for an office job, went to a single-sex Catholic high school in a Midwestern town. She recalls that because the other girls perceived her as gay, they “didn’t come within six feet [of me].” When a teacher got angry on her behalf, she found herself telling him, “Don’t worry about it, I’m used to it. I can’t say the words, ‘It will be worse if you [don’t let it go].’” Even though she wasn’t out of the closet, she had heard of other gay students who were expelled and was “always looking over my shoulder for whether I would



AGAIN AND AGAIN, QUEER CATHOLICS TOLD ME HOW HARD IT WAS TO IMAGINE THEIR FUTURE AS A NON-STRAIGHT BELIEVER.

get called to the office or kicked out.” She said she was once beaten up because of her orientation but says she feels that her experience pales in comparison with others she has heard about.

Beyond overt hostility, what severely damaged people’s faith was silence. Only one person mentioned that before he came out himself, he’d heard about another gay practicing Catholic. Even in schools where L.G.B.T. students’ sexual orientation and gender identity are fully accepted, it is often hard to find models of queer people who are living out the Catholic faith in their communities. It is our hope that B.C.F. materials will help fill this gap.

This absence contributes to the feeling, expressed by many of my non-straight interviewees, that they had to “choose” between being L.G.B.T. or being Catholic. And this absence may be especially important in light of Catholic education’s aspiration to form the whole person, rather than just teaching facts or skills. Several people mentioned this “holistic” character of Catholic education as part of what makes it special. But if students feel torn in two, Catholic education has failed them.

Fostering Faith and Identity

I asked the 17 people I interviewed for this article to describe how they hope Catholic schools can serve L.G.B.T. students. It can sometimes seem as though truly welcoming queer people and nourishing our faith requires compromising on orthodoxy, or as though teaching and preserving an orthodox Catholic faith requires compromising on welcome. I was surprised at how often my interviewees sounded a more hopeful note. Among Catholics with a wide range of relationships to the institutional church and varying levels of acceptance (or not) of church teaching on sexuality, broad areas of common ground emerged.

B.C.F. will work toward what many of the people I



The caregiving provided during the AIDS epidemic made clear “there is a lot to learn” from queer communities, says Ashton Weber, a student at Yale Divinity School. In photo: the New York City Pride Parade on June 25, 2017.

spoke to want. They want students to know that gay Catholics exist, both because these stories can illuminate our faith and because gay students should never feel that they have to choose between their faith and their identity. They want a focus on what one youth minister called (without my prompting her!) “vocation”: not a binary choice between marriage or religious vows, but a name for all the varied ways God might call someone to live with love. They want Catholic teaching to be presented without special condemnation for gay sins, and without any culture-war additions. Several people referred to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as the best source, whether or not they accepted Catholic teaching.

The Catholics I spoke with want a church that is not afraid of questions—and not afraid to learn from gay cultures while guiding gay people to deeper flourishing. Ashton Weber, a student at Yale Divinity School gave an inspiring list of ways in which gay cultures and communities can reflect Christian wisdom. She finds an echo of the early church in the “chosen family” who form part of so many L.G.B.T. people’s lives, and who may offer love that one’s family of origin refused to give. In a church culture that often idolizes the nuclear family, the “chosen family” can remind us that many early saints found that their faith placed them in opposition to their parents’ expectations or demands. The caregiving provided by gay people during the AIDS epidemic made clear, she said, that “queer community [is] a radical refusal to dispose of anyone,” adding, “Regardless of your position on gay sex, there is a lot to



learn” from queer communities about how to live in real community.

Some Catholics also want schools to re-examine their assumptions around gender difference and what lessons students might benefit from. Perhaps the most fascinating suggestion came from Will Kuehnle, a former teacher in Catholic schools. At a high school where he had taught, boys and girls went on separate retreats that both led up to a big, emotional talk. The boys’ talk is always about pornography, he said, and the girls’ talk is about Jesus as their soul’s greatest lover. Mr. Kuehnle described this to me and then mused, “It would be fascinating if we gave [the girls’] talk to the boys!” Yes, what if we introduced ordinary American high school boys to St. Bernard’s bridal mysticism?

For those who believe that Catholic sexual morality is repressive or unjust, highlighting it will always be suspect, even if chastity is presented as only one aspect of a flourishing queer life. Schools will always face a complex balancing act when it comes to presenting the importance of both following one’s individual conscience and forming it well. But what strikes me about this array of possible approaches, from telling queer Catholics’ stories to envisioning a wider range of vocations, is how few Catholic schools are doing *any* of them. There is so much common ground, and yet it is almost all unoccupied.

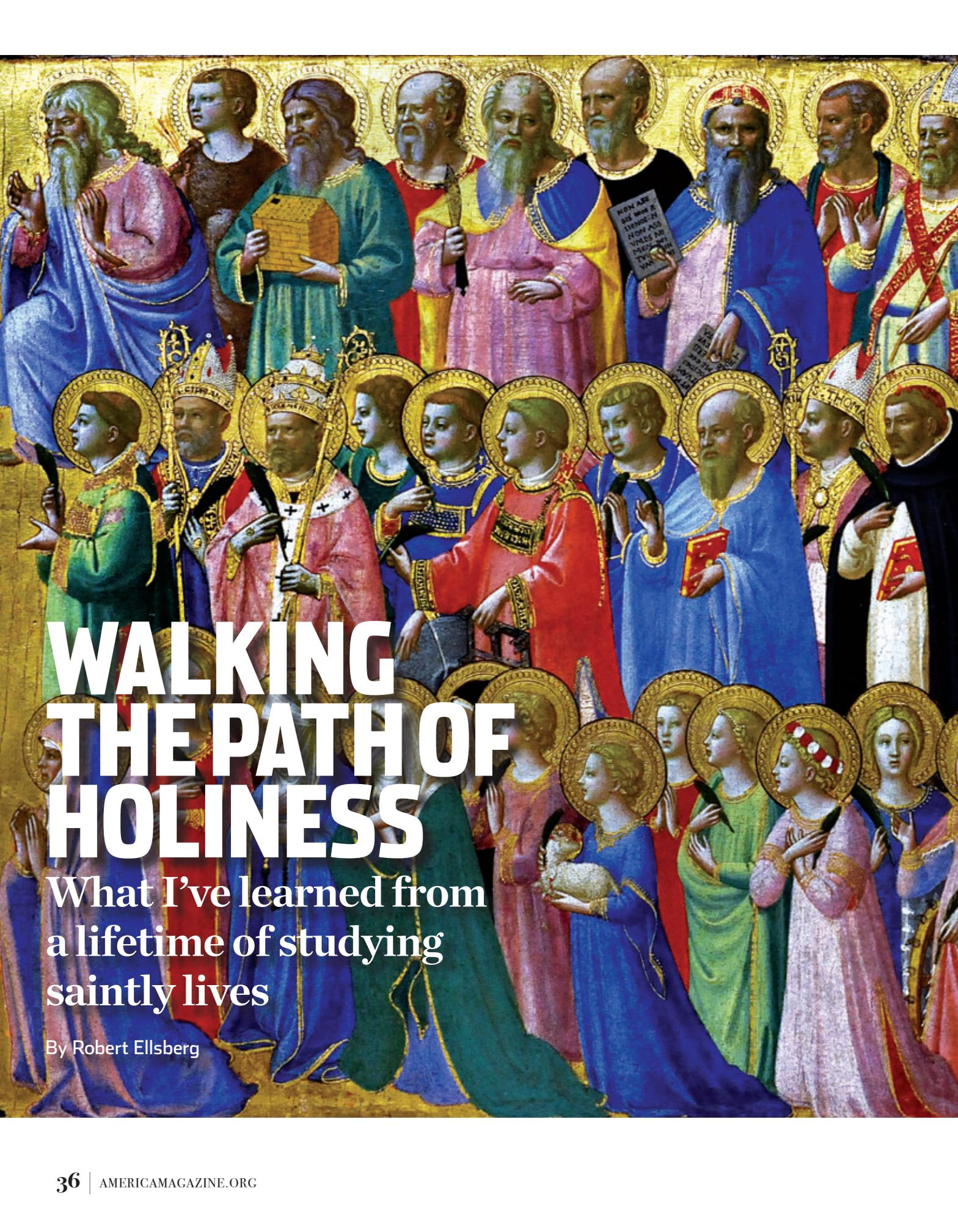
Moving Toward the Transcendent

Standing by my kitchen sink, Keith Wildenberg is rising to a *ferverino*: “[Gay kids’] testimonies were always [about]

truth. About overcoming the falsity that every kid experiences. We were secretly experiencing falsity in ways that our peers weren’t, and that made our testimony to truth all the more effective. The falsity that everyone struggles with is that we are not loved. The truth we all come to know is that we are loved. The testimony is the truth that we are loved by Jesus Christ and”—he is speaking very deliberately now, and is very fierce—“*that’s* what counts.”

Mr. Wildenberg added: “Gay Catholics need to speak an anthropology of same-sex love and friendship that makes sense.... Thomas [Aquinas]’s project is, we start with the human passions. We start with love, with desire, with joy. All of these are pointed toward the transcendent, pointed toward truth, beauty, and goodness, and these are all pointed toward God, who equals love. That’s the starting point for evangelization. This is the natural law: that our desire to reach out to another human being is good, because it represents a desire for communion with Jesus Christ. What are the ways that the human heart warms to love of Jesus through love of another person? How do we talk about that without exploding?”

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 (Ave Maria Press).



WALKING THE PATH OF HOLINESS

What I've learned from
a lifetime of studying
saintly lives

By Robert Ellsberg



"The Forerunners of Christ with Saints and Martyrs," part of the altarpiece painted by Fra Angelico in the early 15th century for the Convent of San Domenico, Fiesole, Italy.

Alamy Stock Photo

I didn't grow up knowing much about saints. In the Episcopal Church in which I was raised, my knowledge was largely formed by stained-glass windows and a hymn that declared: "One was a doctor, and one was a queen,/ And one was a shepherdess on the green:/ They were all of them saints of God, and I mean,/ God helping, to be one too." The list of these occupations did not lead me to think that saints were the kind of people you might meet every day, despite the assurance of the closing verse that there were hundreds and thousands more where they came from: "You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea/ in church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea."

My parish church was named after St. Alban. I don't recall ever being told anything about St. Alban, who I figured was some sort of notable English bishop. Only much later did I learn that Alban was the first martyr of the English church, a prominent citizen who lived in Roman-occupied Britain sometime in the third century. One day he gave shelter to a priest who was fleeing persecution. Although Alban was not a Christian, he was moved by the faith of his guest, and after several days he asked to be baptized. As soldiers approached, Alban exchanged clothes with the priest and sent him on his way, so that when the soldiers arrived they seized Alban, mistaking him for the priest, and brought him before a judge. After revealing his identity and declaring himself a Christian, Alban was condemned to accept the priest's fate—to be flogged and beheaded.

By the time I was in high school I longed to know that there were saints like that—maybe not the kind that you met in lanes or in shops or at tea, but who truly exemplified what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "the cost of discipleship." Then one day, while perusing the shelves of my school library, I happened upon an old edition of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, a classic collection of legends about St. Francis of Assisi and his early followers.

As I skimmed over the contents of this little book, I was captivated by the picture of a man who tried faithfully, as the author put it, to be "conformed to Christ in all the acts of his life." I read about how Francis kissed a leper and afterward abandoned the affluent life of his parents to live in poverty and serve the sick. I read about how he tamed a savage wolf with his gentleness and how he crossed a battlefield of the Crusades to meet in friendship with the Sultan. I read about his ecstatic hymn of praise to "Brother Sun and Sister Moon." Was a saint perhaps someone who reminded us of Jesus? Even from a distance of many centuries, I experienced a sense of what had captivated so many of Francis' own contemporaries. His example was not simply edifying but also deeply appealing. He exuded a spirit of freedom and joy. People wanted to be near him to discover for themselves the secret of his joy.

It was some years after my encounter with St. Francis' little flowers that I saw that vision put into practice—not in a Franciscan community, but while working alongside Dorothy Day





Part of my mission is to present the saints as they really were.

at the Catholic Worker in New York City. I had been going through some hard years of wondering what my life was for, and it felt as if the questions I was asking couldn't find their answers in college. I had drifted away from church practice, feeling that in church I didn't seem to come across the kind of moral witness embodied, for instance, by young people who were going to jail in protest of the Vietnam War. I had discovered Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy of consistent nonviolence, and it was in this spirit that I found my way to the Catholic Worker at the age of 19. A famous picture of Dorothy being arrested in a protest with striking farmworkers in California struck me as an image of the Gospel in action.

Beyond that, I didn't know much about Dorothy Day, except that her commitment to nonviolence was rooted in a wider practice of service and solidarity with the poor. I did not know the story of her conversion, or the way that her solidarity with the poor was rooted in a deeper recognition of Christ's real presence in all who were hungry and oppressed. The Catholic Worker, the newspaper and movement she founded with Peter Maurin in 1933, was based in houses of hospitality in the slums, where lay Catholics lived in voluntary poverty among the poor they served, practicing the works of mercy—feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless—while also witnessing for peace and promoting social justice. Here was a community where one didn't need to be embarrassed about admiring and wanting to walk with the saints!

Soon after I arrived Dorothy asked me to serve as managing editor of The Catholic Worker newspaper—a most unlikely assignment for the next two years, though it would ultimately shape the rest of my life as a writer and editor. My five years at the Catholic Worker coincided with the

last years of Dorothy Day's life. By the time I arrived, she was already weak and bent with age, yet there was a youthfulness about her, a spirit of adventure and an instinct for the heroic that was tremendously appealing. She made you believe it was possible to start building a better world, right here where you were. She made you believe, as St. Francis did, that the Beatitudes were for living.

Dorothy died in 1980 at the age of 83, just after my return to college. By that time I had found much of what I had been seeking, and perhaps more. Among other things I had become a Catholic, inspired in large part by what I had learned about the saints, both those I read about and those I had met.

Living the Faith

There were many saints who popped up regularly in Dorothy's conversation and writings: St. Joseph, patron of the Catholic Worker, who was himself a worker; St. Joan of Arc, a martyr of conscience; St. Benedict, the father of Western monasticism, who promoted the life of community as a path to holiness and who lauded manual labor as a form of prayer; St. Teresa of Avila, the mystic and reformer, who would raise the spirits of her sisters by dancing on the table with castanets; and her favorite, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the Carmelite nun whose teaching on the "Little Way" showed the path to holiness that lies in all the tasks and encounters of our everyday life. And then, of course, there was "my" own St. Francis, who set out to reform the church by imitating the radical poverty and freedom of Jesus.

But anyone who spent time with Dorothy Day quickly discovered that she drew inspiration from a much wider cloud of witnesses. They included peacemakers like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Cesar Chavez, heroes of the labor movement, philosophers like Emmanuel Mounier, writers like Charles Péguy, Ignazio Silone, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and even fictional characters from their novels. She was much less interested in abstract ideas than in how such ideas were lived out, especially in practical examples of love, solidarity and community. She made little distinction between the canonized saints and other great souls.

Nevertheless, Dorothy believed it was not enough to honor or venerate such figures. All Christians were called to be saints. This didn't mean aspiring to canonization or having a church named after them. Rather, it meant taking seriously one's baptismal vows—responding to the call to put off the old person and put on Christ. It was a process that would occupy our entire lives and would never be fully accomplished. It was something expressed not only in great and heroic deeds but in the everyday occasions for forgiveness, patience and gratitude.

As I returned to college, I carried these lessons with me, along with a four-volume edition of *Butler's Lives of the Saints*. Apart from studying these volumes, my personal list of saints and witnesses continued to grow, enhanced by my studies in religion and literature, my travels in Latin America and my subsequent studies in theology.

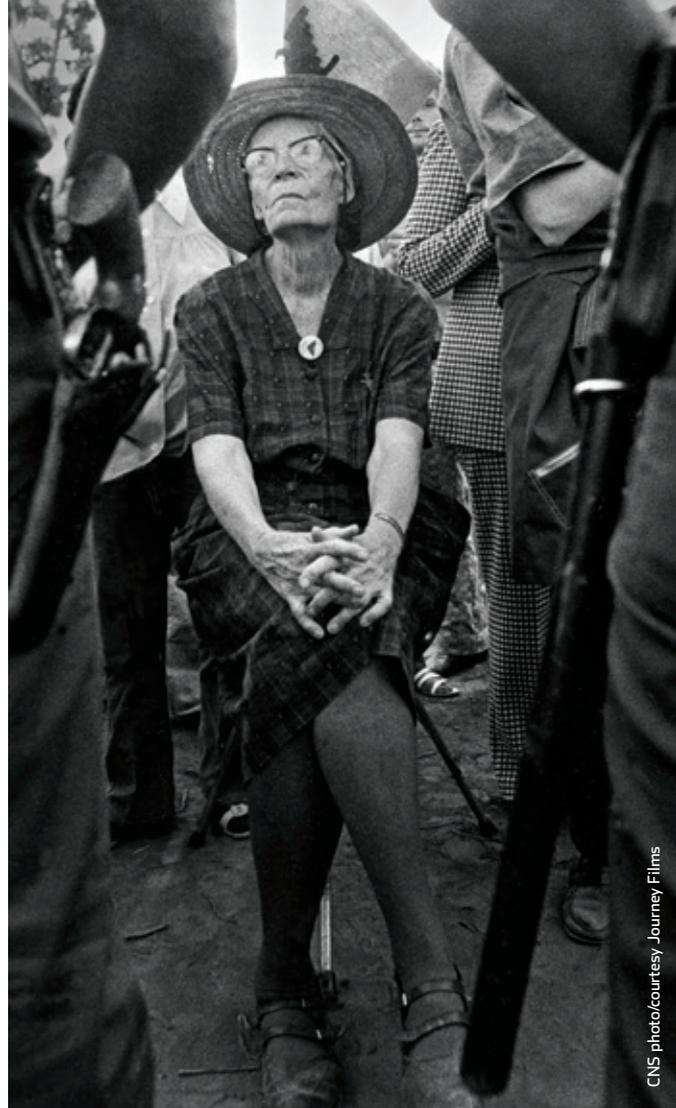
In 1987 I was invited to become the editor-in-chief of Orbis Books, the publishing arm of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. The Orbis program at that time was especially focused on theological voices from the margins—Africa, Latin America and Asia. There I became interested in the various ways the Gospel message became incarnate in diverse cultures, in dialogue with other religious paths and in connecting faith with the urgent needs of the world. I learned about new martyrs, missionaries, theologians and spiritual explorers.

All of these interests and encounters eventually contributed to the book I published 25 years ago: *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time*. At the time I didn't imagine that I was writing a book that might significantly alter the way people thought about saints and the forms of holiness. Nor did I imagine that for many Christians it would become a daily devotional, read and reread in successive years.

In envisioning this book, in which I planned to combine stories of official saints with a diverse list of "prophets and witnesses for our time," I had no thought that it would appeal beyond the select audience of those who shared my eclectic interests.

Many of my subjects, such as Camus, Kierkegaard, Thomas Merton, Simone Weil, Gandhi and Flannery O'Connor, reflected years of study and reflection. Others were new discoveries, some of them suggested by friends who were following my project: Ben Salmon, the World War I conscientious objector; Sadhu Sundar Singh, an itinerant Christian holy man in India; Walter Ciszek, the American Jesuit who spent decades as a prisoner in the Soviet Gulag; Eberhard Arnold, founder of the modern Bruderhof community; Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the 17th-century Mexican nun and proto-feminist; Maura O'Halloran, a young Irish-American woman who achieved enlightenment as a Zen monk in Japan.

Many of my selections were inspired by a quote from Simone Weil, the French philosopher and mystic, who said that today it is not enough merely to be a saint, but we must have the saintliness required by the present moment. Of course, one's definition of those needs is inevitably subjective. But this starting point made me alert to the many examples of saints who felt impelled by the Gospel to address a problem or challenge posed by their moment in



This image by the photographer Bob Fitch is featured in Martin Doblmeier's documentary "Revolution of the Heart: The Dorothy Day Story."

history—a need, perhaps, recognized only by themselves. They did not simply conform themselves to some predetermined model of holiness. Often they invented and became the trailblazers for a new way of following Jesus.

In reading the life of Dorothy Day, I was struck by the long journey that led to her own vocation in the Catholic Worker. As a child she had been attracted by the stories of the saints and their heroic service of the poor and the sick. But where, she asked, were the saints to change the social order? "Not just to bind up the wounds of the slaves but to do away with slavery?" In effect, she perceived the need for a different kind of saint, and her vocation came about in response to that call.

A Saint-Watcher

Over time I settled on the term *saint-watcher* for my occupation. It seemed like a friendlier word than *hagiographer* for someone who writes about holy lives. It also made me



I believe we are shaped by what we look at and what we love.

sound as if I was out and about, and not simply poring over archival records. The word *hagiography*, after all, has fallen into disrepute. It has become associated with a particularly saccharine, credulous and pious style of writing. Too often, as Dorothy Day observed, the lives of the saints were written “as though they are not in this world.” She continued, “We have seldom been given the saints as they really were.”

Perhaps that is part of my mission: to present the saints as they really were. And perhaps also to enlarge our understanding of what holiness means. And the process continues: For over 12 years, I have contributed a daily column called “Blessed Among Us” to the devotional “Give Us This Day.” In more than 1,200 columns, I have reflected on both traditional and non-traditional saints, as well as my own version of breaking news around canonizations or the passing of contemporary witnesses.

Jesus never outlined the criteria for canonization. But he enumerated a list of those who were “blessed”: the poor in spirit, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers. These are not exactly the traditional criteria for naming saints. Yet it is possible to identify these qualities not only in great figures like Mother Teresa, or Óscar Romero, but in people of our own acquaintance. Perhaps, as Pope Francis writes, they are among “our mothers, grandmothers, or other loved ones. Their lives may not always have been perfect, yet amid their faults and failings they kept moving forward and proved pleasing to the Lord.”

Above all, I am interested in the living Gospel that is written in the lives of those who have walked the path of holiness. I like that phrase—“walking the path of holiness.” When we speak of “saints” we tend to think of a finished product. But while we live we are never finished. In the case of the saints, their holiness was expressed in the whole course of living—in their quest for their vocation; in how they responded to the challenges of their moment in history; in their encounters with other people; in how they

confronted obstacles, disappointments, temptations and suffering; in how they persisted up to the end. That is what it means to walk the path of holiness. And when we speak of saints in that way, it helps us recognize the lines of continuity with all who aspire to walk that path, rather than simply the gulf that separates us from their storied achievements.

At the end of the day, the object is not to be canonized, to be *called* a saint. The object is to be a whole, integrated and happy person in the best sense of someone whose life is aligned with the deepest purpose for their existence. And recognizing and honoring those qualities in other people is one of the ways that opens up our own path.

In the famous interview published in *America* in 2013, Pope Francis distinguished between a “lab,” or laboratory, faith and what he calls a “journey faith.” In a lab faith, everything is clear-cut and certain; all the answers are known in advance. But in a journey faith we discover God along the way; the truth emerges through experience. This is a faith that is open to the experience of doubt and uncertainty, and is always open to ongoing conversion. Francis said: “Our life is not given to us like an opera libretto, in which all is written down; but it means going, walking, doing, searching, seeing.... God is encountered walking along the path.”

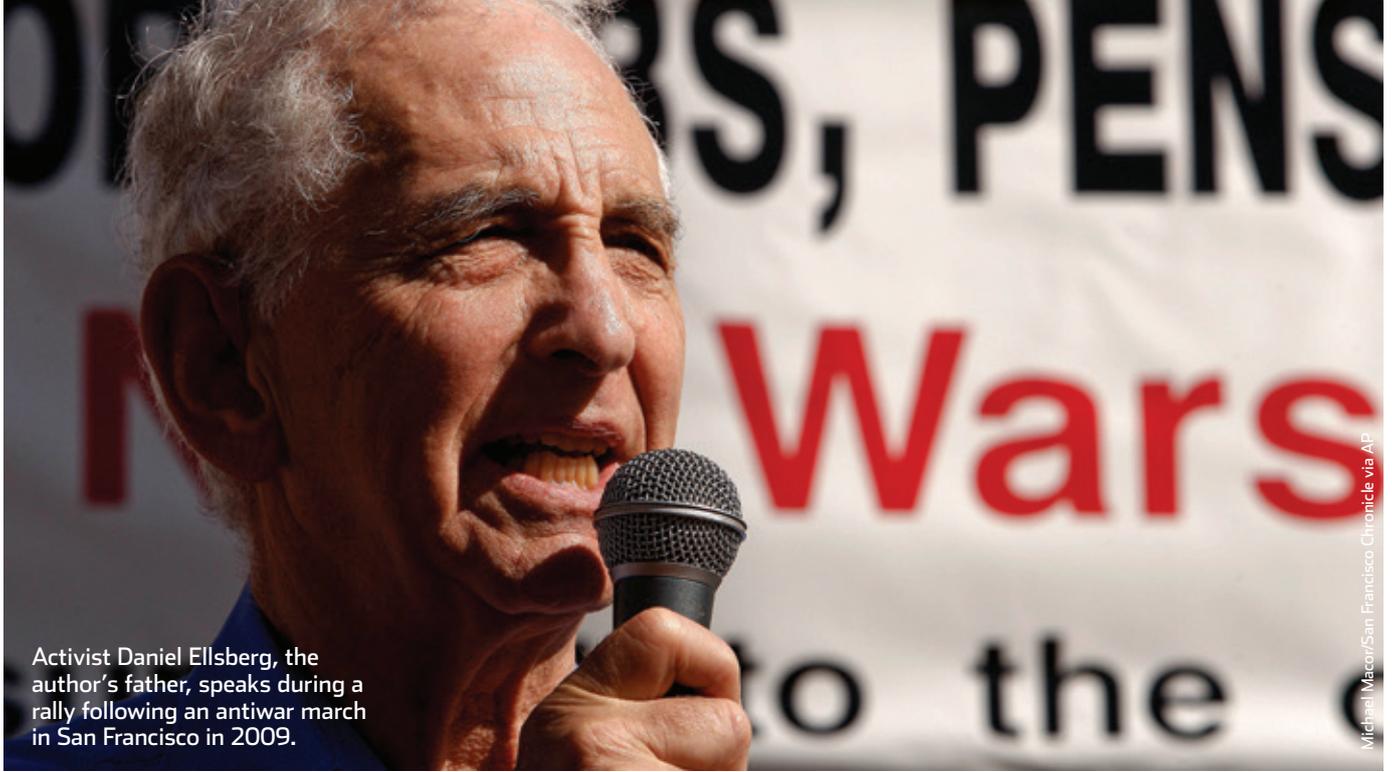
St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, was probably the first Christian who looked at his own life story as a spiritual text. In recounting this story, he described his restless search and his own failures and sins, which were as much a part of the story as his eventual conversion. In the end, he saw it all as a story of grace. God was present in his life, hovering over him, even in those times when the thought of God was far from him.

Dorothy Day was another who looked at her life this way. In her memoir, *The Long Loneliness*, she described many intimations of faith and the example of various Catholics who pointed toward her eventual conversion. But she gave equal credit to her experiences in the radical movement, the example of those who dedicated themselves to the poor, even when they were not consciously motivated by faith. She gave credit as well to her own experiences of failure and confusion, experiences of both grief and joy, and ultimately the experience of loving a man and giving birth to a daughter, which prompted her decision to become a Catholic, even though this meant separation from the father of her child, who would not agree to marriage. God, she believed, was present in the whole story. That is what a journey faith is about.

Shaped by What We Love

So why do I write about saints?

I believe we are shaped by what we look at and what we



Activist Daniel Ellsberg, the author's father, speaks during a rally following an antiwar march in San Francisco in 2009.

love. It makes a difference if we look at stories that elevate our spirits, empower our consciences, and open our hearts to new possibilities of human living. So often we give our attention to things that do the opposite.

In reflecting on the stories of saints, I was struck by how often a critical turning point in their lives came through their encounter with another saint. Sometimes that was a personal encounter, but often it came through reading a story.

I think of all those young men and women in Assisi who were captivated by the example of St. Francis, and who abandoned their privileged lives to join him in poverty and joy. Later, that same effect came from stories about St. Francis and his followers—like those in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*. As they began to circulate, Franciscan fever swept through Europe like a pandemic. That same power may lie hidden on countless school library shelves, awaiting rediscovery.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, traced his conversion to reading about the saints. He was a vain soldier and courtier, recovering in his castle from a war injury, when he found himself with nothing to read but a book of lives of the saints. At first he found them boring—compared with the tales of courtly valor he preferred. But gradually, as he read these stories, he found his heart strangely stirred. For the first time he recognized a different kind of valor, and the question began to arise: “What if I were to live like St. Francis, or like St. Dominic?”

It was thus for the saints. It was thus for me.

My life has been deeply shaped by the respective influences of my mother, who raised me and saw to my regular

attendance at St. Alban's Episcopal Church, and my father, Daniel Ellsberg, a former government defense analyst who would achieve fame in 1971 for releasing the Pentagon Papers to the press. [Editor's note: Daniel Ellsberg died on June 16, 2023, from pancreatic cancer.] It was in 1969 that he first began copying this top secret history of the Vietnam War, and on a couple of occasions, enlisting the assistance of me and my younger sister. Our roles (at 13 and 10) were limited and largely symbolic. But with the expectation that he might go to prison for the rest of his life, he wanted his children to see firsthand what it looked like to take a risk on behalf of peace, truth and the greater good. In fact, when he was eventually arrested, he faced 115 years in prison.

This was part of the background of my early years, though thankfully the charges were dismissed in 1973 upon the disclosure of illegal actions by the government. The president's efforts to conceal those actions, which came to light as a result of the Watergate investigation, resulted in the resignation of the president and the end of the Vietnam War.

Many people have been inspired by my father's example and by his subsequent lifetime of work in the cause of peace. But I know that his action was inspired by the example of others, particularly young men who were risking their freedom by their conscientious refusal to cooperate with the draft. They had no expectation that their individual actions would change history. They did not have access to classified documents. But they did what they could. It was after listening to one particular young man calmly announce at a conference that he was about to go to prison that my father asked himself, “What could I do to help end the war if I was willing to go to prison?” His subsequent life

was an answer to that question.

No doubt my father's example had a great deal to do with my decision to leave college and go to the Catholic Worker, and thus with everything that followed. He inspired me to seek my own path, to find my own way of trying to make my life cohere with the principles I believed in. But it also led to my calling to remember and share the stories of witnesses throughout history who offered a heroic example of faith, hope and love in action.

My father would not call himself a "person of faith," though no doubt he is a "person of hope." In that spirit he has dedicated his life to the cause of preserving the planet from the perils of nuclear war. He does not regard hope as an expectation that all will turn out well. He regards it as a way of acting. "I choose to act as if we had a choice to change the world for the better, and avoid catastrophe." He does not recognize himself in the company of many figures in *All Saints*. But there is no doubting his influence on the path that led me to write it and other books.

As I write, my father is dying of pancreatic cancer. Though not a "person of faith," he is among those heroes whom Camus honored, those who, without the consolation of belief in an afterlife, still committed themselves to join with others in the struggle for life and against the forces of death. Thus, he has fulfilled the calling that Camus assigned to the Christians of his time: "to speak out clearly and pay up personally."

I have seen and felt the impact of living witness—how one lamp lights another. Dorothy Day's life was built on this conviction: the power of our small gestures, the protests, the acts of charity, which, even if no more than a pebble dropped in a pond, might send forth ripples that could encircle the globe. As she wrote, "We must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible only for the action of the present moment, but we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform all our individual actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes."

One of my recent reflections for "Give Us This Day" was about Mattie Stepanek, who died in 2004 at the age of 13 from a hereditary disease. He was conscious all his life that he was facing a young death, yet his emphasis was on living. In his short, grace-filled life, he became an ambassador for peace, publishing best-selling books of poetry, befriending Jimmy Carter (who gave the eulogy at his funeral), teaching religious education classes in his parish, and touching countless people with his remarkable witness to the gift of life. I noted that a guild is currently promoting his cause for canonization.



Mattie Stepanek, who died at the age of 13 after battling a rare form of muscular dystrophy, holds one of his best-selling books of poetry.

Afterward I received a message from his mother, who recognized my name but couldn't immediately place it. However, in going through a box of Mattie's things, she suddenly remembered, and sent me a picture. It was a copy of *All Saints*, which she said Mattie kept checking out of the library every two weeks until he could afford to buy his own copy.

This was a new experience, but also a confirmation of why I write these reflections: So that somewhere, somebody might read these stories and imagine a different way of living, and ask themselves, "What if I should live like Mattie Stepanek?"

Robert Ellsberg is the editor-in-chief and publisher of *Orbis Books*. He is the author of many books about the lives of saints, including *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time*. This essay is adapted from the 25th anniversary edition of *All Saints*, published by Crossroad Publishing Company, which retains all copyright.

THE CATHOLIC HOMILIES PODCAST

PREACH



NEW FROM AMERICA MEDIA

What makes a great Catholic homily, and what goes into the art of delivering it well?

“Preach” is a new weekly podcast from America Media that features a diverse cast of the finest Catholic preachers. Each week, preachers open up their hearts and minds, sharing their spiritual lives, approaches to interpreting scripture and techniques for preparing the best homilies.

Listen on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, your favorite podcast app, or at americamagazine.org/preachpodcast

New episodes release on Mondays.

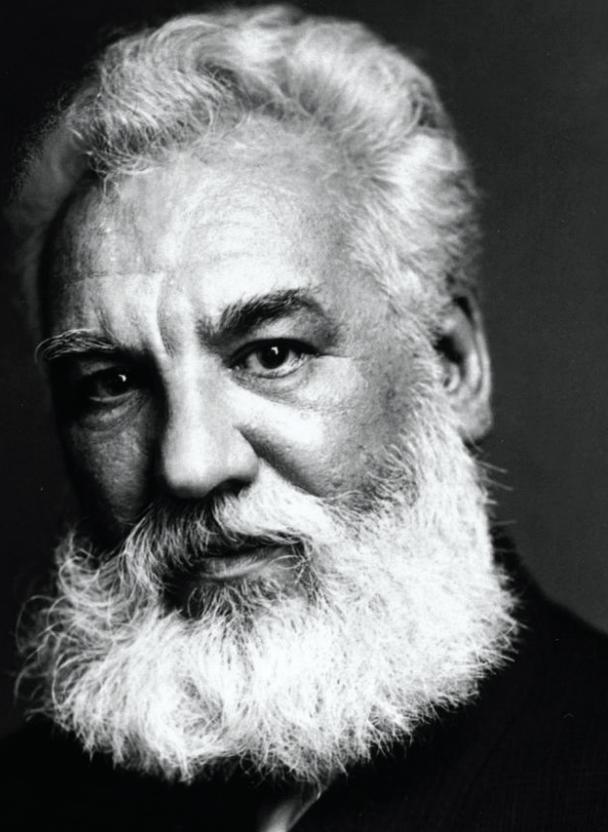
“Preach” is made possible through the generous support of the Compelling Preaching Initiative, a project of Lilly Endowment Inc.

America | MEDIA

REJECT THE CULT OF 'INTELLIGENCE'

You're worth more than that

By Guy Consolmagno and Christopher M. Graney



In 1925, the lawyers Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan duked it out in front of a packed courthouse over evolution. This has often been portrayed as one of history's ultimate science-versus-religion fights in which science, of course, won. Except, it wasn't, and it didn't.

What "Inherit the Wind" and all the other dramatizations about the "Scopes Monkey Trial" leave out is that the textbook used by John T. Scopes, *Civic Biology*, contained some science gone seriously wrong. It claimed that evolution "explained" the so-called natural superiority of certain races and nationalities, and it promoted eugenics—creating better human beings through "good breeding." And the book describes the poor, the handicapped and the insane as "true parasites," adding, "If such people were lower animals, we would probably kill them off to prevent them from spreading."

These ideas were part and parcel of the public face of science in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Popular science insisted that we could perfect the human race, or the individual "races," by encouraging good breeding of people. It was an idea so self-evident, and so promoted by prominent men like Alexander Graham Bell, H. G. Wells and Oliver Wendell Holmes, that anyone who opposed it on moral grounds was seen as dangerously backward.

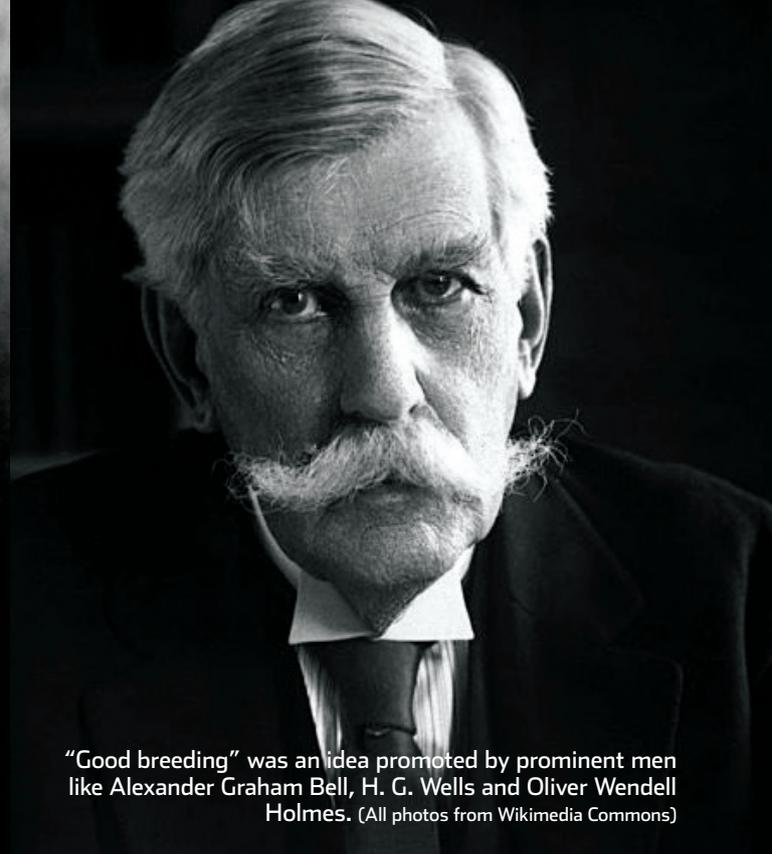
Eugenicists Among Us

Alexander Graham Bell was not just the inventor of the telephone; he was key to establishing one of today's lead-

ing scientific journals, *Science*. In a 1908 article in *National Geographic*, he asked whether "we can formulate practical plans that might lead to the breeding of better men and better women," suggesting a "simple process of promoting the marriage of the superior with the superior." He also proposed immigration restrictions for eugenics purposes. In 1924, Congress passed such a law, putting a strict quota on immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe (immigration from Italy to the United States fell by 90 percent). Worse, the act banned *all* immigration from Asia.

H. G. Wells, the prolific science fiction writer, claimed to be opposed to the idea of "positive eugenics" (breeding superior people). But he did support preventing certain classes of people from having children. In his 1906 *Socialism and the Family*, he wrote, "the children people bring into the world can be no more their private concern entirely, than the disease germs they disseminate or the noises a man makes in a thin-floored flat," and so the socialist state should be concerned about "disease and evil births alike." In his view, it was "sterilization of failures" that would improve the "human stock."

Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes was honored as a "progressive" voice on many topics such as the freedom of speech, and so his defense of eugenics gave support to that idea among intellectuals (who naturally saw themselves as being "superior"). More specifically, his support affected the rise of eugenic principles in the law itself. Under his direction, the U.S. Supreme Court in 1927



“Good breeding” was an idea promoted by prominent men like Alexander Graham Bell, H. G. Wells and Oliver Wendell Holmes. (All photos from Wikimedia Commons)

ruled 8-1 in *Buck v. Bell* that forced sterilization on eugenic principles did not violate the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

“It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind,” Holmes wrote. Following the *Buck v. Bell* decision and well into the 1970s, tens of thousands of women (mostly minorities) were forcibly sterilized in the United States in the name of eugenics.

Self-Serving Measures

Eugenics is not just repugnant as an idea—it is also scientifically wrong. Promoters of eugenics developed tools to statistically analyze masses of data about people and demonstrate conclusively that their ideas worked, only to find that those tools showed their ideas were wrong. The complexity of the human genetic code makes any attempt to achieve an “improvement of the species” through “promoting the marriage of the superior with the superior” hopelessly naïve.

But more important, any efforts to study and evaluate “superior” human beings are fundamentally flawed. We cannot measure some form of “superiority” in the way that we can measure human height and weight. The “eu” in “eugenics” is from the Greek for “good.” What exactly would be the “good” that it is supposed to be looking for?

Unsurprisingly, the assumption seems to be that the best of humanity looks an awful lot like those who want to be directing the improving.

In reality, modern science cannot even measure people regarding, say, athletic prowess, much less some sort of general “superiority.” One would think it would be easy to determine who can run or bicycle or swim a certain distance in the least time, or jump the farthest or the highest. But what if someone uses performance-enhancing drugs? How much does a race result depend on who has the best coaches or the best gear? Or consider the importance of a culture that supports a particular sport: There are more than one billion people in India and plenty of mountains with snow, but India has never won a medal in the Winter Olympics.

Now consider the problems of measuring “intelligence,” which for so long has served as an unspoken standard for “superiority.” “Intelligence Quotient” tests assume that intelligence is a single one-dimensional concept that can be measured objectively. But to anyone who has been around a variety of people, that is contrary to common sense.

Practical Intelligence

We both have experience with a broad range of students, having taught at Harvard and M.I.T. as well as at community colleges. Certainly the students who are found in one sort of institution may have different skills, different abilities, different cultural assumptions and different problems



The desire to have ‘intelligence,’ and to display it for all the world to see, has become a cult.

to be overcome from those at another. But we know firsthand that these differences cannot be ranked as “superior” or “inferior.”

One of us, Brother Consolmagno, once got a lesson on this when teaching at Le Moyne College, a small Jesuit school in Syracuse, N.Y., whose students are often in professional programs like nursing. They were certainly different from his students at M.I.T.

Once, when a Le Moyne student was making a class presentation and happened to mention a certain principle from Aristotle, another student let out a loud groan followed by a pronounced roll of the eyes. Did she not care for philosophy? Why was she being so rude?

But then the student sitting next to her leapt from his desk, grabbed her and gently laid her limp body on the floor. Another pulled out his cellphone and called campus patrol, describing the kind of seizure she’d had and reporting the building and classroom where they were. Within five minutes, medical help was on hand.

If that had been a classroom full of his M.I.T. students, Brother Consolmagno thought, that poor woman could have been dead before anyone noticed what had happened. Even if they did notice, no one would have known what to do. But a classroom with nursing students knew how to respond.

Chris Graney had a similar experience when he was a young professor teaching “technical physics” at a satellite campus of his community college, located in a small town in Kentucky. As a “fun project,” he assigned his physics students to build catapults that would throw vegetables as their projectiles. He envisioned modest devices made of wood and PVC pipe. But he underestimated his students. Most of them worked in local industries and had skills he never thought of. They convinced their employers to loan them welders, torches and other supplies, then proceeded to put their skills to work in an arms race that resulted in large, truck-mounted engines of war...and safety hazards to

the community!

We all know that there is a difference between intellectual attainments and street smarts. So why would anyone think that we could “scientifically” determine who is “superior” when it comes to intelligence?

Secret and Unearned Knowledge

The appeal of eugenics was its unspoken assumption that surely “I am one of the superior people.” Even if I am not gifted with an athlete’s prowess or a model’s face, my superior intelligence clearly means that I must be among the favored few who get to pass on our gifts to future generations.

Even today, with eugenics itself discredited, the desire to see yourself as smarter than average can be found everywhere, from childhood taunts to internet memes. The desire to have “intelligence,” and to display it for all the world to see, has become a cult.

One way this shows itself is in the form of a broad skepticism of the sort that says that the really smart person doesn’t fall for the stuff that everyone else believes. Of course, skepticism has been a hallmark of modern science since Galileo’s time. He taught us to believe the results of experiments above the pronouncements of academic authorities, or so we’re told. But compare this with the “skepticism” that we witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic from those who thought that defying the vaccine-promoting authorities was following in the footsteps of Galileo. Such skepticism is not Galileo’s; it is not a desire to run experiments, publish the results so others can replicate them and thus put authoritative pronouncements to the test. Rather, it is a tribal marker, a way of saying, “I am one of *these* people, one of the *intelligent* people who think for themselves—not one of *those* people, who don’t.”

Why would people who regard themselves as intelligent be skeptical of the best science of the day and instead trust their health to, for example, something they found on the internet? Perhaps it happens because, in our society, skepticism of authority runs alongside a desire for certainty that leads to an excessive credulity in science—the same sort of credulity that led to acceptance of eugenics.

The two desires are, of course, antithetical to one another. You cannot at the same time demand perfect truth while also rejecting any authority that would claim to lead you toward that truth. What results instead when our brains are faced with these two diametrically opposite desires is that we wind up squirting off sideways. We reject “officially sanctioned” authority in favor of a secret source of knowledge available only to a hidden few. And even though something that can be found online is, by definition, available to

everyone who can get on the internet, the experience of discovering it by yourself on the computer in your basement creates the illusion that this is a private and hidden discovery, open to those intelligent enough to find it...one that by its hidden nature appears to have value beyond that received via more public media.

This temptation to easy private discovery is one we should recognize. It is the allure of Gnosticism, a desire to embrace “secret knowledge.” It was a prominent movement that the church fathers had to deal with in the second and third centuries. But well before then, you could see it in the esoteric Eleusinian rites of ancient Greece. And “I’ll tell you secret knowledge that God doesn’t want you to have” was the temptation of the snake in the Garden of Eden. This secret knowledge would come easily; Adam and Eve only had to eat an apple, not build their own garden.

It is instructive to see how this desire for secret knowledge can manifest itself even among those who might legitimately be thought to be highly knowledgeable already. People educated in fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (like the authors of this article!) are particularly tempted to think of themselves as superior—the “smartest people in the room.” They are, after all, highly trained at their own work, which the average person usually does not understand. They can sometimes extrapolate from their experience with their own abilities in science to a perceived superiority in the knowledge of all subjects.

And what is the point of being superior if all you do is agree with everyone else? With that attitude, you almost have to be a contrarian. This makes such folk easy prey for the peddlers of modern forms of Gnosticism: U.F.O.s, the “face on Mars,” faddish diets, strange new religions—none of which stand up to Galileo’s form of skepticism.

The urge toward such an attitude has serious consequences for our society. What have we gotten from people demanding perfect truth while rejecting any authority that would claim to lead them toward that truth, and yet are unwilling to do the hard work needed to get to the truth or to at least contribute to the search for the truth? The “post-truth” age. In it, what I accept as true is only that which agrees with my biases, with my tribe, with my identity, with what I want to hear (and in the internet age, I can always find, easily, what I want to hear). Those who think otherwise will seem to me as lacking in intelligence; or worse, as malevolent enemies.

Rather than heaping scorn on those who fall prey to such urges, though, maybe we should look at the origin of these ideas.

What Are We Worth?

If we assume that scientists or self-proclaimed experts deserve to be followed because they are more intelligent than the rest of us, then implicitly we equate “more intelligent” with “superior.” That was the root temptation behind much of eugenics, and it is at the root of the temptation to Gnosticism: letting your sense of self-worth come from thinking that you are more intelligent than the average person.

Contrast the identification of intelligence with superiority to what we find in Matthew 11:25, which quotes Jesus saying, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants.” In 1 Corinthians 1:17–2:7, Paul insists that the wisdom of the Gospel looks very different from what the world considers wise.

This is not to demean intelligence or any other ability. After all, we are professional astronomers; we think we are intelligent. But it does mean that intelligence cannot be correlated with “worth” any more than strength or speed can be. The value of whatever intelligence, education or even wisdom that we have does not lie in those attributes themselves. Whatever we do has value only insofar as it is a form of praise to our Creator.

We all have our own God-given talents and abilities, whether they are academic or something else. It is certainly legitimate to measure how people differ from one another, just as it is great fun to test our athletic abilities or participate in other sorts of contests. But our worth does not derive from the results of such tests. Any science that seeks to measure our *worth* by measuring one trait or another is science gone wrong.

Engaging our abilities makes us more authentically the person whom God created us to be, and thus able to encounter God more fully, each in our own way. For the authors of this article, astronomy happens to be the playing field where we have been given an opportunity to come to know God. Others find God in places that we cannot reach. As children of God, created in the image of God, and thus of immeasurable worth—we find God in all things, and do all things for God’s greater glory.

Guy Consolmagno, S.J., is the director of the Vatican Observatory, in Castel Gandolfo, Italy. Christopher M. Graney is an adjunct scholar with the Vatican Observatory. This article is adapted from a chapter in *When Science Goes Wrong: The Desire and Search for Truth*, to be published in October 2023 by Paulist Press.



A rally against assisted suicide in 2016 on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Ontario

CNS photo/Art Babych

A Crisis in Canada

Medical assistance in dying is not what our most vulnerable people need

By Noël Simard

Illness, suffering and death are existential realities and crucial issues that we Catholics face together with all our brothers and sisters in humanity. In keeping with the Gospel of the compassionate Christ, Christians have always sought to alleviate suffering and support the dying in the final moment of their earthly existence. Caring for those who are suffering, providing medical care for the ill, accompanying those at the end of life with compassion and tenderness and being in solidarity with the most vulnerable members of our society are basic elements of our civil and religious identity. But in Canada, the legalization of euthanasia—so-called medical assistance in dying, or MAID—challenges our common values and shakes the very foundations of our living together.

In 2014, the National Assembly of Quebec adopted Bill 52, which authorizes a physician to provoke the death of a patient who is terminally ill and is seeking aid in dying. In order to override the Canadian Criminal Code, which pro-

hibits aiding another person to commit suicide, the Quebec government established that assisted euthanasia by a physician was an act of medical care and, as such, was under provincial jurisdiction.

In 2016, following a ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada, the government of Canada passed the first federal bill, C-14, on euthanasia, or the “Medical Assistance in Dying” (MAID) law. Physicians could now perform euthanasia for competent and clearly consenting patients suffering from an incurable illness whose natural death is reasonably foreseeable. Very soon, these provincial and federal laws were challenged by plaintiffs who were not in a terminal phase of an illness and who argued that the laws were too restrictive and violated their rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In response, the Quebec government ruled that the eligibility criterion that a patient be near the “end of life”—meaning their death was reasonably foreseeable—was no longer in effect in Quebec as of

March 11, 2020.

In March 2021, the government of Canada followed suit. A federal bill (C-7) was passed expanding euthanasia eligibility nationwide to those whose death was not “reasonably foreseeable.” Moreover, the Senate of Canada approved euthanasia for persons with mental illness who sought medical assistance in dying. It gave the government of Canada 24 months to establish rules for MAID for people whose only eligibility criterion was a mental disorder.

In the same month, the government of Quebec created a special commission with the mandate to study the expansion of MAID eligibility to persons with disabilities and those with mental illness. The provincial commission was also asked to reflect on the issue of advance requests, which would allow MAID, based on prior signed consent, even when a person can no longer confirm consent.

In March of this year, the federal government decided to prolong the 24-month deadline set up by the Senate. The government requested another year to reflect and consult more deeply on whether it is pertinent and justified to grant persons living with mental illness access to MAID.

Expanding the eligibility of MAID to persons with mental illness and the possibility of advance requests threatens the dignity of the human person and the common good, while raising many questions that have no easy answer. For instance, do we have tools to measure the suffering of someone living with mental illness? At what stage of mental illness will it be possible to offer MAID, and who will be entitled to determine that moment? While we know that mental illnesses are often impossible to cure, how can we ensure that all treatment options have been offered, and how can we know that all reasonable treatment options have been exhausted?

We also know that mental illnesses can diminish people’s ability to judge and deal with their environment and secure the proper means to care for themselves and their loved ones. This incapacity may also push the person to be more susceptible to desire death and commit suicide. How can we determine that the person in this situation really wants to terminate their life and truly consents to it?

There are also compelling reasons that advance requests for euthanasia should be excluded from advance directives. First, the notion of giving advance consent for euthanasia in anticipation of a situation where a person is no longer able to confirm consent attempts to address a situation that remains hypothetical and cannot take into

consideration a possible change of attitude. Second, these advance requests do not consider the desire to live and the emotions that a person may experience at the end of life. Each person lives in the present moment, in their own way, with the grace the Lord gives them at that time.

I remember when my sister Ghislaine was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia (a mix of Parkinson’s and dementia). I was afraid she would not wish to continue living because she was a proud and exceptionally autonomous woman. To my surprise, she continued to enjoy life and live to the end with serenity because of her faith and the fact that she was surrounded by love and compassion from her family and health care providers. She is a reminder that the principles of solidarity, benevolence and compassion must continue to guide us in our care of the most vulnerable members of our society.

There is a big difference between advance directives that would include euthanasia and those referring only to the withholding or withdrawal of treatment. When a person decides not to be treated for cancer or not to receive dialysis because the treatment is no longer beneficial or has become too burdensome, it is a personal choice. This choice may be justified, even with the risk that the person’s life may end more rapidly.

In the case of euthanasia, there is no risk. Here is certainty: The person will die immediately. And what about the burden for the person who must carry the proxy or make the decision in that individual’s place? The autonomy of the sick person is not absolute. There are limits to the exercise of freedom when the common good or fundamental values, such as the sanctity of life and the person’s inherent dignity, are jeopardized.

Those in favor of the expansion of euthanasia (legal in seven countries) and physician-assisted suicide (legal in 10 countries and 11 U.S. states) argue that safeguards are implemented to avoid abuses and risks of maleficence. The Canadian experience reveals that the safeguards are not respected. For instance, in Canada, the safeguards of “reasonably foreseeable death,” including a mandatory waiting period, were promptly removed.

The rapidity with which the governments of Quebec and Canada opened up the possibility of greater access to MAID also suggests that other factors, including economic ones, are at play. Investing in palliative care costs more than promoting deadly injections. No wonder there are pressures on palliative care hospices to offer MAID and threats that if they do not, they will not receive funding from the government. No wonder some health care pro-



Canadians must not allow the euphemistic language of ‘medical assistance in dying’ blind them to the evil of legalized killing.

viders are putting pressure on patients with chronic diseases to ask for MAID. When long-term care facilities face serious staff shortages and sick people do not receive the care they are entitled to, MAID becomes a solution. We are in dangerous territory when a lack of economic and human resources motivates end-of-life decisions or when opinions and emotions replace fundamental values in enacting laws.

Proponents of legalized euthanasia have developed a strategy for its acceptance and legalization by the public at large. They have created confusion in the language and presented it as a medical treatment and care. Euthanasia is neither a medical treatment nor care. Treatment opens the possibility of healing and forms a therapeutic bond between patients and health care providers; euthanasia deliberately ends the therapeutic bond and the healing process.

Supporters of euthanasia have also created confusion from a moral point of view: The law is a teacher, and many will conclude that if euthanasia is legal, it is moral. But in reality, Canada’s permissive euthanasia regime threatens fundamental societal values, including the sanctity of life and the inherent dignity of the person and the common good, and it should be questioned and challenged. Canadians must not allow the euphemistic language of “medical assistance in dying” blind them to the evil of legalized killing.

What is needed instead is an expansion of services in the community that will help people suffering from serious diseases or mental illness cope with their reality and find meaning in their life. The accompaniment of those suffering and needing support, which is so dear to Pope Francis, must include those at the end of life and those dealing with chronic and lifelong illnesses. For that reason, good, quality palliative care should be offered more often and at an earlier stage of a serious disease. It is also important to create benevolent communities sustaining the sick, their caregiv-

ers and health care professionals, whether at home, in hospice or in other circumstances.

We do not need an expansion of laws giving more access to euthanasia. In fact, we do not need MAID because we have an alternative to the problem of suffering and dying. By that, I mean palliative care that offers not only release from pain but also answers the economic, affective, emotional, social and spiritual needs of the sick and dying person. It is necessary to give the sick or dying person the possibility to maintain their dignity and be accompanied with love and compassion until their natural death. What is needed is not medical aid in dying but medical aid to the dying person. What we need is to help people find meaning in life, suffering and death.

The Catholic Church has been a strong voice for human dignity of the sick and suffering in the years since euthanasia was legalized. “Caring is more than giving medication or administering a treatment,” the Assembly of Quebec Bishops wrote in a document titled “Approaching Death in the Company of Christ.” “It means taking the time to be with the suffering person. This time and presence are the obligatory road of real compassion.”

The Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops commissioned a group to create a toolkit of four modules to promote palliative care in Catholic parishes and other related contexts. The toolkit, “Horizons of Hope,” can be downloaded for free on the C.C.C.B. website.

Euthanasia reveals a crisis in our society’s understanding of suffering, dying and reasons to live our life to its natural end. Our faith in Jesus, who brought meaning to suffering and dying through his life, death and resurrection, brings us light and hope that we are not alone on our journey. Through the medical and Christian community, Christ walks with us when we experience suffering and the final phase of our earthly life. We, too, are promised an eternity of love, peace and happiness.

The Most Rev. Noël Simard is the bishop of Valleyfield, Quebec, and a member of the board of directors of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

SAPPHO

By Beth Hinchliffe

They knead my leg,
her tiny mounds of instinct,
the secret razors barely sheathed beneath,
until they suddenly draw blood.

Aurelia Plath had placed her on my lap
as I sat stiffly on the couch where
decades and bodies had erased
the pattern of its weary fabric.

“She was Sylvia’s cat,” Aurelia says,
pulse shuddering in her throat,
tightening the words.
“She called her Sappho.”

It is 1973. Ten years after
God’s lioness stifled her own voice,
after the towels under the door
saved her sleeping babies.

After Aurelia threw back her head
in that primal howl of grief, guilt,
anger, fear at the telegram:
“Sylvia died today.”

And now there is only Sappho for Aurelia.
The babies are lost to their father.
Her parents are lost to time.
Her daughter’s memory, lost to the world.

And through it all, through Aurelia’s blinding fury,
the madness of anguish, the desperate scrabbling
to keep her memories untouched by ugliness,
Sappho sits. Kneads. Watches.

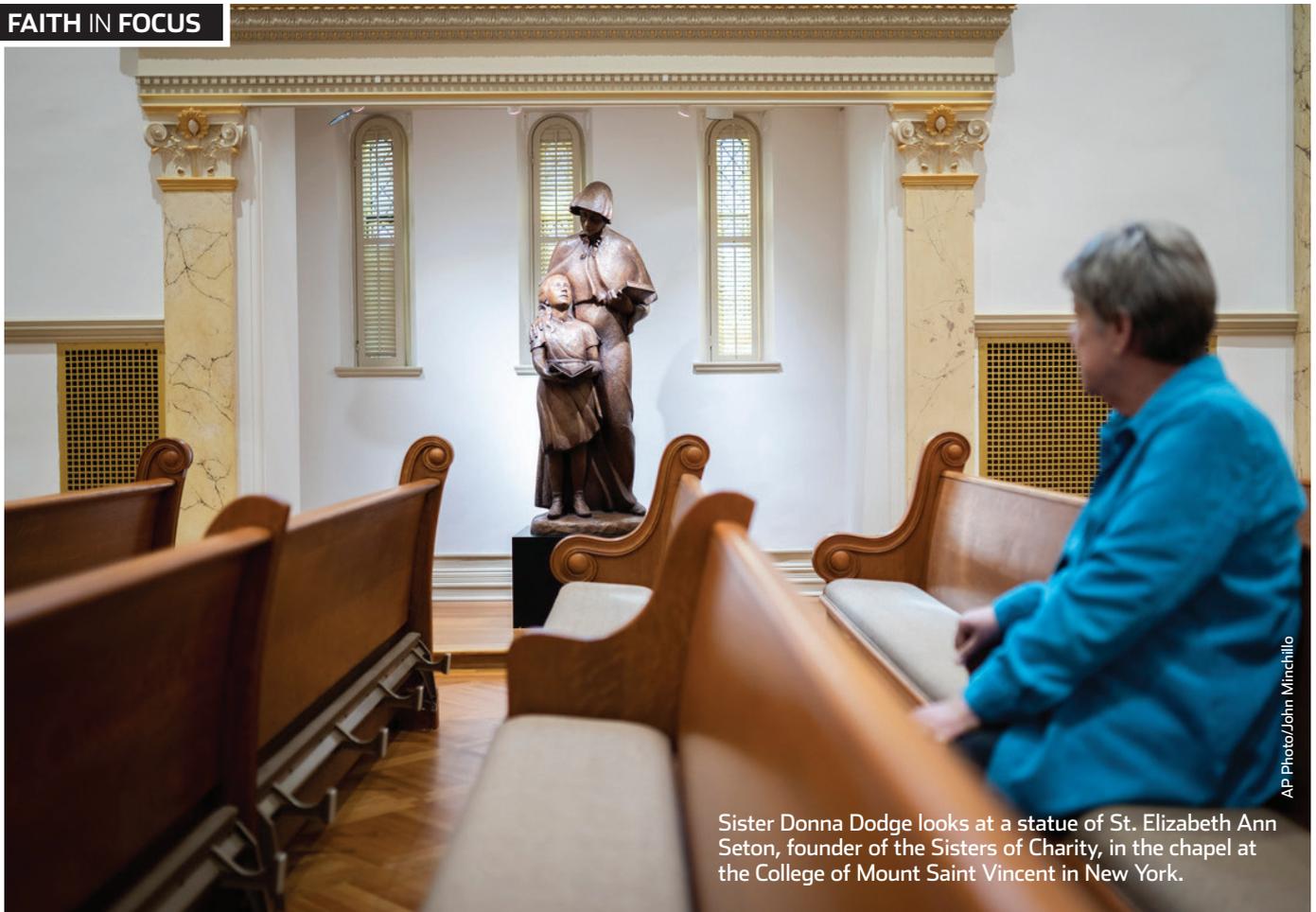
And now she sits on me. Turns her head
to measure me. Presses into me,
as all those years she pressed into Sylvia.
Soundlessly, constantly, working her paws.

I touch her fur tentatively, she doesn’t stir.
I stroke her, lightly, then harder, feeling
the muscles tense then relax, the rhythm
Sylvia would have felt.

Sappho’s eyes. Locking my gaze as
she once locked Sylvia’s. Harsh,
glistening agates, not judging, not mournful,
not beseeching. Just seeing.

I leave the house, with its 10-year-old air, and
on the side table a card To Mummy, Love Sivvy.
Trembling Aurelia stays and weeps and rages for 17 years.
And for four more years Sappho watches, and remembers.

Beth Hinchliffe is a former White House speechwriter and graduate of the University of Cambridge and Trinity College in Dublin. This poem was a runner-up in America’s 2023 Foley Poetry Contest.



Sister Donna Dodge looks at a statue of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, founder of the Sisters of Charity, in the chapel at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in New York.

AP Photo/John Minchillo

Nerves, Tears and Chanting

What I saw during the New York Sisters of Charity vote to stop accepting new members

By Sherryl A. White

In 1968, a brief article by Karl Rahner, S.J., titled “The Theology of Risk,” appeared in *The Furrow*, the Irish theological journal. Reflecting on the rapid societal changes being confronted by the church in the world, Rahner posed the mandate of risk as the more courageous way forward. Risk, he suggested, “means relinquishing old, tried ways and risking untried paths, where the future historical outcome cannot be adequately foreseen.... Security lies today no longer in the past, but in the future.”

Fifty-five years later, the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of New York have chosen to embrace that theology of risk. In early April, five sets of double doors to a hotel ballroom were quietly closed. Sisters and associates made their way to tables, knowing that the issue of vocations was next on the agenda at the congregation’s 2023 General Assembly. They listened to the report of predictable data: fewer members, a rising median age, a longstanding absence of viable inquirers. Then, the recommendation from the Executive Council called the question. The room became a sea of color as 4-by-6-inch pieces of bright green construction paper were lifted high, wobbling in the air as



the delegates' arms trembled. The wait seemed interminable as the eyes of vote counters scanned the room. These cards were ballots, green signaling affirmation. The final tally? Unanimous! The delegates had just voted to stop accepting new members to the Sisters of Charity of New York in the United States. The air was still. The silence felt like a cloak enfolded the room. There was more to come.

The president, Sister Donna Dodge, took the podium again and with loving resolve proclaimed the second recommendation of the Executive Council. It would require another vote. "The council recommends and asks the Assembly to affirm that we, Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of New York, will continue to live our mission to the fullest, while acknowledging that we are on a path to completion." The silence deepened. As their facilitator, I called for the slide that appeared on huge screens bookending the stage. The text of the resolution appeared on the screens, along with the congregation's logo. The last word hung in the room: *completion*.

As the recommendation was read, I glanced at the front table where three former presidents of the congregation were seated. Even though they knew this was coming, to a person, their heads jerked back. Then they looked at each other. Without even knowing it, they took a deep breath at precisely the same moment. And held it. *Completion*.

Sister Donna stepped aside and I took the microphone to call the vote. I had done this hundreds of times over decades as a facilitator at such gatherings. "Will all those in favor, please raise your green card? Thank you. All those opposed, red card. Thank you. All those abstaining, yellow. Thank you." This time, it felt very different. There was nothing remotely routine about this moment. We

The faculty of the Academy of Mount Saint Vincent is seen in a photo taken between 1958 and 1962.

waited, side by side, as the vote counters read the room. Sister Donna whispered, "My knees are trembling." I did not have the heart to tell her I was nauseous. Nerves. She reached for the podium to steady herself. Again, the green cards waved. It was unanimous. The Sisters of Charity of New York—one of the oldest American congregations in the country, a historic giant in the boroughs of New York City and beyond—was on the road to completion. There was a brief silence until someone intoned a familiar chant and they began, stretching for the harmony: *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*.

This might sound melodramatic, but the words that came to me at that moment were from the hymn in Paul's Letter to the Philippians: "He emptied himself, accepting death, even death on a cross." This was the sisters' moment to choose. They chose to take a risk, embracing the unknown work and consequences of completion. To do so required them to stand with passionate courage, emptying themselves of belief in a limitless future to embrace their ultimate ending.

In the late 1960s, Rahner believed that "the courage to undertake risk is today an urgent necessity." I think the Sisters of Charity of New York sensed a similar call. Throughout the year of preparation for the General Assembly, they did not shrink from nor deny their realities but faced them squarely. In fact, from the outset of their preparations, they decided to step outside the norm to hold a shared General Assembly with the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth in New Jersey. The two autonomous congregations, one



The sisters' choice was not easy, but it was timely.

diocesan and the other pontifical, committed to collaborate in meeting their graced future together. Driven by the question “What can we do better together than alone?”, they crafted an agenda that gave rise to new relationships and shared acts of assembly. For members of S.C.N.Y., the choice of completion was integral to their freedom to voice with joyful strength the yesses that were still theirs to make. Be assured, those yesses are legion.

The birthright of the Sisters of Charity of New York is a loving commitment to service, especially to those living in poverty. When you stand in their presence, you stand with those they serve. They call to mind for me the words of Johann Baptist Metz, who spoke of the importance of holding the dangerous memory of the marginalized poor, of bringing that awareness to rattle the doors of the church. These sisters who meld mission with ministry to those in need are giants who shake the consciences of all with hearts to see.

Consider this impact report of only a few of their sponsored ministries and you will see the complex task before them to ensure their legacy of charity continues:

- The Sisters of Charity Housing Development Corporation provides safe, affordable housing for seniors and those at risk.
- The New York Foundling, one of New York’s oldest and largest social service organizations, serves over 30,000 children and families across the five boroughs, Rockland County and Puerto Rico.
- St. Joseph’s Medical Center, Yonkers, is the only remaining Catholic hospital in the five boroughs and Westchester County, and works daily to integrate primary care and behavioral health to benefit the whole person.
- Elizabeth Seton Children’s Center is the largest

residential medical center in the United States, serving over 3,000 children with severe complex medical conditions.

- Life Experience and Faith Sharing Associates serves homeless persons on the streets of New York City.
- Part of the Solution serves hundreds of hot meals daily, operates a food pantry, and offers clothing, counseling, free legal services and medical care to people struggling with poverty in the Bronx.
- The College of Mount St. Vincent, celebrating 175 years of academic excellence in the Bronx, educates students, many of them first generation college students.
- Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center in Guatemala works for systemic change.

These stories and more are not about to end. They are part of careful planning that will ensure the legacy of charity lives on.

Complex Choices Ahead

The more personal import of the sisters’ decision to embrace the path of completion will take time to embrace. As the news broke on social media, hundreds of people responded with words of compassion and care. While the sisters were touched by the immediate response of the public, I think the sisters’ decision is going to call them to lean deeply into their faith in the weeks and months to come. Breaking news fades quickly. They will have before them complex choices to make and plans to implement. Elected leadership in religious life is facing unprecedented challenges.

Obviously, given the intensity of the moment, there were tears in the room. One of the delegates, Sister Eileen McGrory, rushed to the side of the stage during the proceedings and whispered, “We need The Slate on stage!” referring to the book that lists the names and dates of death for the thousands of Sisters of Charity of New York from its foundation over 200 years ago to the present day. I moved to the table holding their sacred items of Constitutions and soil from Mount St. Vincent in the Bronx and picked up The Slate. As I moved it to the front of the stage, the presence of those names was felt, along with all those members unable to attend the General Assembly, watching the live-stream broadcast on screens across the city. The room felt crowded with the spirits of thousands of Sisters of Charity of New York, women who, over the centuries, have embodied the charisma of Sts. Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac and Elizabeth Ann Seton. These will surely be faithful



Delegates to the Sisters of Charity of New York's 2023 general assembly vote unanimously on April 13 to begin a "path to completion."

OSY News photo/courtesy of the Sisters of Charity of New York

companions to the current sisters as they move forward on the path of completion.

As members of the larger Charity Federation, they will know the support of other sisters, some of the communities having made the same choice for completion. That afternoon, as the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth returned to the ballroom from their own separate session, you could see the deep sense of communion that had built over the year of shared meetings and conferences as they greeted the Sisters of Charity of New York. I think, to a person, no one felt immune from the challenges facing religious life now. It was the bond and belief in a common charism that held them as sisters.

The sisters' choice was not easy, but it was timely. *Completion* is a word frequently heard these days among women religious in the United States. Some prefer *fulfillment*, others *transformation*, while some deny its inevitability. The reasons? There are as many answers as there are people in the conversation. But it cannot be a complete surprise. If you consider the projected future of any life form, individual or organizational, completion is a natural step. We are finite beings. Perhaps it just comes down to being a matter of time, degrees or stages. Will new life emerge? I hope so. Isn't that what we profess? Isn't new life what the paschal mystery proclaims?

The Sisters of Charity of New York have given a re-

markable gift and challenge to religious life in the United States. In their faith, they have embraced a path of risk that will surely demand a price from them, but they are also taking steps to ensure the legacy of their charism for generations to come. Faced with alternatives, they chose, as Rahner described it, "the one which risks more, which is more courageous in introducing innovation...which is the most venturesome course...and has the best chance to win all or at least something."

One could ask, will the charisms of religious life live on? Join me in lifting a bright green ballot to say, "Yes!" To imagine life without them is inconceivable.

Sherryl White, C.S.J., a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden, Pa., is a social psychologist who ministers as a facilitator and consultant for congregations of women religious.

CAUSE OF OUR JOY

How giving birth ignited my devotion to Mary

By Colleen Dulle



iStock

Mary embodies some of my most deeply held values.

Like many women, I have a complicated relationship with Mary.

Mary embodies some of my most deeply held values. As a young, poor woman from Galilee, she represents how God chose to enter into human existence in the most radically humble way. Her “Magnificat” is one of the most powerful passages in the Gospels. And her own “yes” to God is, of course, the ultimate model of how a human being should relate to God.

These lessons, though, often become muddled when Mary is presented only as a model for women. As the theologian Elizabeth Johnson wrote in her book on Mary, *Truly*

Our Sister, Mary is often seen as “the ideal embodiment of feminine essence.” She continues:

Whether her perfection then serves to disparage other women or to inspire them, her obedient, responsive, maternal image is at play in the community as the norm for women in contrast to men. When combined with an understanding of God and Christ as essentially masculine, the result reproduces in theology, spirituality and church polity nothing less than the patriarchal order of the world, now with divine sanction.

When viewed through this lens, Mary represents an impossible double standard. The poet Mary Szybist told me in an interview for **America** that encountering Mary this way damaged her own sense of self-worth: “The message is that [as a woman] you are valued for your virginity and you are valued for being a mother. To grow up to be neither a virgin nor a mother leaves the puzzle: Under that kind of pressure of imagination, how does one value oneself?”

Mothers, too, struggle with how to relate to Mary’s virginity and the emphasis the church places on it. She alone, after all, is both a virgin and a mother.

It was that double standard and the way Mary was invoked as “divine sanction” for the “patriarchal order of the world” that led me to keep her at arm’s length through much of my life. I often told people that, intellectually, I just didn’t understand the appeal of Marian devotion. What was it about Mary that led some of the most progressive Catholics I knew to pray the rosary every day?

Mary, despite my hesitations, has always been present to me. At times it feels I have been haunted by her, to borrow a phrase Dorothy Day used to speak about God. Perhaps it is my many years of Catholic school, or my teenage habit of praying a rosary on my morning drive every day, but I have always found myself reflexively reciting Hail Marys in life’s liminal moments: washing my hands, waiting for a red light to change, watching hot coffee drip into the carafe. Without ever really thinking about it, I am always talking to her, always in the same words, echoing the Annunciation (“Hail Mary, full of grace...”), and finally asking her to remember me now and at the hour of my death.

My mental hangups with Mary, though, kept me from talking to her beyond these almost unconscious recitations. I tried to separate the liberating images of Mary from the oppressive ones, but I never could. I found that the figure of Mary was too entangled in arguments that did not resonate with me or my understanding of myself as a woman.

Then I became pregnant, and my struggling relationship with Mary became impossible to ignore.

My friend Sarah and I were both nine months pregnant when we waddled into Mass for the feast of the Immaculate Conception last December. We had both anticipated the kind of justice-oriented, inclusive-language liturgies our parish usually holds. But that day our celebration was combined with that of another community with different liturgical tastes, and so the Mass included no fewer than four male altar servers in cassocks crammed into the basement chapel’s tiny sanctuary. Incense wafted up a meager few feet to reach the drop ceiling. And the homily focused more on Mary’s own virginity than her being born without original sin—that is, more on virginity than on the actual

Immaculate Conception. We had hoped the liturgy would help us feel connected to Mary as mothers, but instead the prayers and preaching made us feel embarrassed by our bellies. One friend summed the message up well when she jokingly greeted us after Mass, “Hello, defiled women!”

Sarah and I sat in the chapel for a long time after the congregation had dispersed and the cassocks had been hung up. Some Sundays after Mass, people had seen us together and said we looked like an icon of the Visitation. That day, we felt the opposite. Instead of feeling like icons of Mary, we felt our bodies were public reminders that we would never measure up to Mary’s feminine ideal. It was not lost on us that this was a message delivered to us exclusively by men.

We needed something stronger than a competing theological argument to be reminded of our dignity. Ultimately, God delivered, in the way God always does—in incarnation, in flesh and blood.

Sarah and I gave birth one week apart, in the same hospital room. This was her second child and my first. For me, it was a revelation; I had never felt so connected to God, or to Mary, than in the months that surrounded this time. To spend nine months vomiting and aching while feeling such an intense creative drive—sometimes dismissed as a “nesting instinct,” though it applies far beyond nursery decorations—made me understand *in my body* how it feels to create new life out of love, and why our creation story includes God resting on the seventh day. Daily life with my son is a living midrash, a fleshing-out of the Scripture stories, that gives me a glimpse into the “hidden life” of Jesus with his parents. And the pain and difficulty and, yes, beauty, of labor and breastfeeding have given me a new understanding of the words “This is my body, given up for you”—one that no priest can understand, but Mary can.

Mary still haunts me, now in a comforting way, as a friend who is there when I struggle to put my baby to the breast at 3 a.m., as someone who understands when I am exhausted and at my wit’s end and yet could still cry out of love just from looking at my baby. Mary gets it. She understands, in her own flesh and blood, broken and given for our sake. Now, in my own flesh and blood, I begin to understand her, too.

Colleen Dulle is an associate editor at **America** and co-hosts the “*Inside the Vatican*” podcast.



Toward Eternal Life

New technology seeks to halt the aging process. Our faith tells us not to fear death.

By Kevin Clarke

My teenage children think they are going to live forever. And I do not mean that figuratively. They believe that by the time they reach the age of advanced decrepitude currently inhabited—winningly—by their honorable father, modern science, through a cunning combination of technological, medical and pharmaceutical interventions, will have so thoroughly disarmed the grim reaper that they can expect to live on indefinitely. I'm not sure why anyone thinks this is a particularly great idea, but I am beginning to understand where my kids are getting it.

In my imagination, the ruthlessly prolonged life looks something like Mr. Burns's disembodied head, floating in a bowl atop a metallic body seeking a new Smithers—no doubt his clones will do—to perpetually torment. But on YouTube and social media, digital immortality is discussed with seriousness and enthusiasm by ardent transhuman-

ists, "singularitarians" and futurists whose fanciful expectations make their way into pop culture on TV and streaming services in shows like "Upload" and in speculative designs for A.I.-powered griebots and memory creators.

The idea of a technologically secured eternal life has become a theme our screen-happiest generation is regularly imbibing. The result is that, in the analog world, real people are pursuing something beyond mere longevity, something slouching toward immortality.

Members of the American billionaire club are trying in their own ways to follow Mr. Burns's lead, but with better muscle tone. Former Twitter chief executive Jack Dorsey, Meta/Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and Amazon's Jeff Bezos are only a few of the uber-wealthy rumored to be among a growing community of "life-hackers," or "bio-hackers."



Mr. Bezos' physical transformation during his mid-50s—look at that gun show!—is hard to deny, and he is a prominent investor in Unity Biotechnology, a Silicon Valley start-up conducting research on senescent cells—"older cells" that have stopped dividing. These cells appear to be among the drivers of the various aches and ailments associated with aging. Meanwhile, among the scores of other start-ups and enterprises seeking to turn your desire for an extended life into a tidy profit, researchers at the emerging bio-tinkerers BrainEx and OrganEx are experimenting with processes that threaten something close to the events fictionally described in the 1985 horror film "Re-Animator." These sci-entrepreneurs aren't too sure yet where their cutting-edge work is leading, but at least in the film version, the mad scientist revived dead flesh to disastrous effect.

Bryan Johnson, described in *Futurism* magazine as a

mere centimillionaire, has put his digital finance fortune to use in pursuit of a forever-young future. According to a report in *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, Mr. Johnson spends approximately \$2 million each year to keep something approaching the 18-year-old iteration of himself going, providing a steady revenue stream to upwards of 30 doctors, nutritionists and trainers. And I thought my Peloton subscription was expensive. His obsession with self appears set to be monetized through something he has dubbed Project Blueprint, one algorithm to rule them all. His latest not-creepy-at-all, youth-preserving gambit is a "multi-generational plasma exchange" with his father and 17-year-old son.

With these role models at play in the fields of the Lord, what exactly am I supposed to tell my children about coming to terms with our middle-class, natural lifespans? They already perceive my resignation to inevitable decline and demise as a charming relic of a time that is swiftly passing.

They've all enjoyed those Percy Jackson stories, overloaded with immortals as they are. Maybe I should get them to spend some time revisiting the story of the centaur Chiron. An immortal but not free from worldly suffering, facing the gloom of an eternity burdened by the pain of a wound from a poisoned arrow, he welcomed instead the merciful release of death.

I don't pretend to be facing the big uncertain end with cheerful, courageous resolution. Dealing with my own accelerating limitations and managing elderly parents and frequent trips to assisted living, memory care and E.R. units have not exactly filled me with anticipatory joy for the next few decades of my own life. But neither have I felt the burning desire, that my kids appear to take for granted, to somehow get in the way of my shortening telomeres. I am no deep thinker, but I think I can spot a con when someone is trying to work one on me.

While the rich have the opportunity to toy with longevity, in the real world of scarcity and limits the rest of us inhabit, life expectancy is not straining toward eternity. It has actually been heading in the opposite direction. A national legacy of poor investments in nutrition, health care and mental health, the Covid-19 and opioid epidemics, and gun absolutism have reversed years of progress in average longevity. In 1900, U.S. life expectancy was 47; by 1950 it had reached 68, and it hit 79 by 2019. But in 2020 it fell to 77, and then to 76 the following year.

I would like to live a long and healthy life, sure, but I don't desire to live past my naturally allotted time. Yes, "past my time" is a hard thing to define, and harder still is to convince my kids that this vague standard represents



Birth and death bookend our temporal experience, but we are called to fill everything between them with love and mercy.

something morally better or humanly richer than the tech immortality they are growing to believe is their birthright.

But there just seems something juvenile and greedy in that expectation. Since life began, it has been the proper rhythm of life for the old to make way for the young, not to stand in their way or pull up the ladders behind us or, worse, mine them for our own comfort and consolation. The church already wisely speaks of intergenerational justice that would inevitably be harmed by a society bent on life extension at all costs.

There are also a number of practical problems created by these dubious advances in longevity. Like many other Western nations, the United States already commits vast resources to support its elderly, creating imbalances that in the end deny important investments in the just-beginning lives of children and young people and in addressing other acute social needs (and I hasten to add those imbalances apply to the lives of the elderly themselves in our market-driven system, where natural life spans seem to wax and wane based on ability to pay). How much more lopsided will our society become if “radical life extension” moves into the mainstream?

Does having a longer life say anything about how happy, productive or fulfilling that life will prove? Does greater longevity equal greater satisfaction, or does it just create more opportunities for heartache and self-seeking and self-serving?

Forbidding as the specter of the end is, there is an art in living well and in dying well, something Kenneth Woodward captured in his account of the final days of Chicago’s Joseph Bernardin in 1996. Announcing to the press the return of his liver cancer and the coming conclusion of his

life, Cardinal Bernardin admonished those who sorrowed. Do not despair; in Christian hope, death comes as a brother, as a friend, he said.

My church indeed helps with understanding and accepting the inevitable, and not just because of the expectation of life everlasting it heralds (a belief I frankly struggle with all the time) but in its constant emphasis on the sacredness of life in the great now, as well as our personal responsibility to it and to each other while we are living it.

In his Easter Vigil homily in 2010, Pope Benedict acknowledged “humanity’s anguish at the destiny of illness, pain and death that has been imposed upon us.” He said that people have constantly thought that surely, someday, “there must be some cure for death...[and] the medicine of immortality must exist.” But Benedict challenged the idea of extending life as an unassailable good in itself.

“There would be no more room for youth,” he cautioned. “Capacity for innovation would die.... [E]ndless life would be no paradise, if anything a condemnation.” Benedict continued:

The true cure for death must be different. It cannot lead simply to an indefinite prolongation of this current life. It would have to transform our lives from within. It would need to create a new life within us, truly fit for eternity: It would need to transform us in such a way as not to come to an end with death, but only then to begin in fullness.

That “medicine of immortality” is already within our reach, he promised. “In baptism, this medicine is given to us. A new life begins in us, a life that matures in faith and is not extinguished by the death of the old life, but is only then fully revealed.”

Birth and death bookend our temporal experience, but we are called to fill everything between them with love and mercy and decency, and not cling to fantasies of a fraudulent eternity through a digitally replicated life or dabble in costly bio-interventions while a world of want swirls around us.

Maybe that message is worth streaming, too. Maybe it is one that takes a lifetime to accept.

Kevin Clarke is *America’s chief correspondent and the author of Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out (Liturgical Press)*.

Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus in the Holy Land

Under the leadership of Fr. James Martin, S.J. and Fr. Sam Sawyer, S.J.

11-Day Pilgrimage February 22 to March 3, 2024



We invite you to join

Fr. James Martin, S.J.
Editor at Large
America Media

Fr. Sam Sawyer, S.J.
Editor in Chief
America Media

on our annual (and once-in-a-lifetime!) pilgrimage through the Holy Land as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Travel Package

Discount Price - \$9,499
(payment by check or money order)

Standard Price - \$10,088
(payment by credit or debit card)

Prices are per person based on double occupancy.

* **Single Room Supplement:** \$1,475

A limited number of single rooms are available at the supplement shown above.

This pilgrimage is LAND ONLY; travelers are responsible for their own travel arrangements in/out of Tel Aviv.

Space is extremely limited. For more information contact:

Alessandra Rose
Advancement Manager
arose@americamedia.org



Be on the lookout for our next pilgrimage in the fall of 2024

Go to www.americamagazine.org/pilgrimages for the latest information about all of our pilgrimages.

America | MEDIA
A JESUIT MINISTRY





Seeking God at Burning Man

By Bryan McCarthy

In 2022, I made an unlikely pilgrimage to a city of joyful mavericks and anyone else ill-fatedly curious enough to wind up there by invitation or mistake. What I found was an unconventionally but profoundly spiritual experience. I went to Burning Man.

For the uninitiated, Burning Man is—and this description is likely to satisfy exactly one “burner,” me—a combination of three things: a desert survival camping trip, the electronic dance music equivalent of Woodstock and the ultimate postmodern art exhibition, in which creators are spectators and vice versa. Approaching its 40th anniversary, it is held yearly in Black Rock Desert in Pershing County, Nev., and, in some years, has drawn as many as 80,000 participants for its nine-day duration.

The event is organized into concentric, semicircular “streets,” named alphabetically (Apparition, Breton, Cocoteau, etc.) and radial cross-streets enumerated according to quarters of an hour on a clockface from 2:00 to 10:00

(as in “2:15 Street,” “2:30 Street,” etc.). Within the regions formed by these streets lie hundreds of camps, each offering their unique gift to “the playa” (the waterless “beach” that makes up the physical location of Burning Man). The gifts range from the silly and sweet (as delivered, for example, by “Kindergarten Kamp”) to the overtly hedonistic (available in the infamous Orgy Dome) to the more conventionally profound (like the “Shabbat Ecstatic Prayer” offered at Milk and Honey).

A two-mile campless circle known as “open playa” occupies the center of the bullseye made up by the annular streets and serves as a shortcut from one side of the city to the other. Dead center stands the Man, a giant, abstract humanoid sculpture who, as the event’s name indicates, is torched in the stark tenebrosity of the Saturday night desert. On Sunday, burners engage in a similar, early-evening burning of the Temple at the 12:00 mark on open playa’s circumference. Beyond this temple lies “deep playa,” the



Jurvetson, via Wikimedia Commons

From 2019: Creators are spectators and vice versa at the Burning Man festival.

the event clearly has some un-Catholic elements, the willingness of burners to be experimental in working out their ethics allows them to bump into truth that goes over others' heads. I would, therefore, have no trouble sending an earnest Catholic to Burning Man because, for someone with the right ears and eyes, it provides opportunities to become more engaged and more intentional in faith.

For example, the “Death Guild Thunderdome,” a gladiator camp with a futuristic “Mad Max” vibe, straps two people into harnesses and swings them into the center so they can pound each other in the air with slightly more injurious versions of a Nerf bat. The real fight and violence lies in the kicking and head-locking necessary to make the pounding possible.

At the first sign of a fight getting too unsafe—e.g., broken-bones unsafe—nine big, tough-looking dudes dart in and break it up. For the most part, however, the M.C. is egging fighters on. The experience allows fighters to meet the beast within, perhaps for the first time, and to see what it feels like for that beast to win or to confront the cascade of confusing emotions when it does not.

emptiest and least noisy area of the event, though both open and deep playa are home to scattered art installations that petition active engagement. All this makes up the space that perennial burners earnestly refer to as “home.”

No one would mistake Burning Man for a Catholic church: The event is unapologetically decadent. Camps all over the playa offer indulgences like dripping grilled-cheese sandwiches, popcorn dip and bananas rolled in cinnamon with names saturated in double entendres, for almost everything at Burning Man has a cheekily sexual air. Naked and nearly naked bodies that span the range of human shape and color are everywhere, though surprisingly fewer than I expected for a “clothing optional” event. And, unlike anywhere else I have ever been, appreciation of the beauty thus embodied seems not only welcome but perhaps even offered as a gift.

Strikingly, there is a counterintuitive spiritual purpose for all this, and for everything else at Burning Man. While

The guiding principle at Burning Man seems to be that fun is spiritual. Or, more exactly, that excess is spiritual. During their regular lives in “default world,” many burners are minimalists and/or progressives with big hearts for the poor and the environment. But for 10 days out of the year, they engage in the most gratuitous profligacy. That profligacy gets at what I take to be one of Burning Man’s core insights, that the twin extremities of extravagance and deprivation, simultaneously operative, can teach us something not otherwise so apparent.

And that desire to be extravagant—or, as burners say, “radical”—extends to principles like giving. During my time at Burning Man I heard stories about companies earning money all year so they can spend a bunch on what they provide the playa. At one point, a playa friend and I looked up at a 40-foot speaker tower with pyrotechnics shooting off on a regular basis. We agreed that running that sound stage—one of eight or so on that street alone—must



For someone with the right ears and eyes, Burning Man provides opportunities to become more intentional in faith.

cost a quarter of a million dollars by the end of the week. Indeed, the total cost of gifts to the playa had to be in the hundreds of millions.

Mostly, however, the event metes out its lessons in relationship. “Burning Man is hard,” a popular saying goes, and I left the playa carrying a pin emblazoned with it. For some people, the heat is what breaks them. For others, it is the fine powdery dust that gets into every nook of the body, clothes and gear. For still others, it is the sleep deprivation—there is not a single place or time on playa without music of a decibel level that renders sleep difficult at best.

But even those who overcome all these obstacles to the comfort that facilitates agreeability must navigate interactions with people who are not overcoming them. Every emotion is invited to the surface: anger, fear, joy, shame and sadness. Because, as should be clear by now, everything happens at Burning Man: births and deaths (both biological and spiritual), engagements, weddings, divorces, funerals, new friendships, love, heartbreak. All this gives content to what might otherwise come across a mere cliché: “Burning Man is life.”

For my own part, I came with the “intention” (the word burners use) or “hope” (in the theological sense) of experiencing God’s love—a recurring sticking point in my life—and of becoming a more equanimous, solid leader. My first night on the playa, I participated in a group virtual reality session, six of us total inhabiting the small hexayurt. As nature scenes and kaleidoscopic abstractions appeared along to music, I seamlessly entered an ongoing state of dialogic prayer. “Do you love me?” I asked God. And later, in a tone so childlike it surprised me, “What are you thinking?”

I felt the response, “Not only do I love you, but I love all

your friends, and this is what it looks like.” The ensuing visual was a white orb of light with six magenta lasers shooting toward me, or, I guess, toward us. I lay there agape at the parallel between the six lasers and the six of us in the session.

Of course, that was rather direct, but the fulfillment of both hopes—experiencing God’s love and becoming a calmer, stronger leader—came by more roundabout means as well. In particular, Burning Man rendered more acute the bizarre and sometimes lonely reality that I inhabit two worlds, with their concomitant communities. On the one hand is a world of cheerfully rebellious drug policy reform advocates with, usually, far-left political views and an abiding distaste for organized religion. On the other hand is the world of the historical and institutional Catholic Church and broader Christianity that is certainly not defined by conservatism, but includes conservatives. I am very comfortable in each of these worlds—until, that is, I remember that I am also comfortable in the other, and that these two worlds are not comfortable with each other.

And yet I came to Burning Man imagining it would somehow augment my faith. In preparing to make the trip, I received lots of advice about being open and bringing my full self to the event. Along with “gifting,” one of the principles of Burning Man is “radical self-expression.” Usually, the latter takes the form of things like psychedelic spandex pants and faux-fur coats with embedded Christmas-tree lights. But what if the self I express and bring to the event is—in complicated ways I am still grappling to understand and integrate—Catholic?

Stepping into the dust for the first time, armed with my question, “What here is Catholic?,” I immediately thought to myself, “What here is not Catholic?” I was joking—sort of. What I have always loved about the Catholic Church is its sacramentality—its celebration of the fact that the physical is spiritual, that God’s fingerprints are on everything. Even if much of the festival is very un-Catholic, at Burning Man, too, materiality is intentional and systematic. It is part of what makes both Catholicism and Burning Man what they are, and it shapes everything else they have to offer.

There are some obvious incompatibilities, however. I knew before I even entered the desert that Burning Man and the church would, perforce, part company on a few of the event’s 10 principles. Both the aforementioned “radical self-expression” and, even more so, “radical self-reliance” are likely to abrade the church’s emphasis on solidarity. Particularly uncomfortable in connection with this is Pope Francis’ encyclical “Fratelli Tutti,” which warns of “the drive to limitless consumption and expressions of empty individualism” and declares “there is no life when we claim to be self-sufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes,

death prevails.” Consumption and individualism are definitely in effect at the event.

Then again, the individualism is also what makes the conflict between Burning Man and Catholicism less of a problem. Everybody’s burn is what they make of it; your burn is yours and mine is mine. If I want to have a Catholic burn with Catholic questions and Catholic struggles, I can do that and people respect it, even if they don’t understand it or are triggered by it.

Moreover, Burning Man’s individualistic principles are offset by its collectivist ones: “gifting,” “communal effort,” “civic responsibility” and “participation” (everyone must contribute to the culture of the event). All of these have touchstones in Catholic social teaching. Similarly, Francis’ intuitions about technology and the environment in “Laudato Si” can find much to appreciate in “decommodification” (the elimination of branding from the event) and “leaving no trace.”

It was the less official parallels that really struck me, though. During my three-hour jaunt up the mountain on the “Burner Express” bus, the man in the seat next to me spoke about “playa magic” (a.k.a. “the playa provides”). “Somehow,” he said, “the playa always provides—maybe not what you want, but what you need, in the exact moment you need it. That’s playa magic.” I saw it in action the next day when a friend and I were returning to camp. She confided that she struggles with making small talk. As I was giving her tips, we passed a camp whose greeter announced its gift: conversation lessons in their “conversation café.” We looked at each other with irrepressible smiles and mouthed, “playa magic.”

Now, obviously, people at a post-Christian event, many of whom have suffered more than their share of religious trauma, are not going to say, “God provides” or anything like it at their irreverent bacchanal, but I could not help but think this “playa magic” idea felt a little familiar.

My Burner Express comrade explained, “Another thing we say is ‘F— your burn.’ That’s when somebody’s complaining about their experience at Burning Man. Like you’re so important that you deserve to be the only one whose burn goes just like they want it to. So we say ‘F— your burn.’” I would later change the “your” in this formulation to “my” on several occasions; it reminded me of the Christian concept “death to self.”

Probably the most religious moment at Burning Man is also a deeply human one. Sunday at twilight, thousands of us gathered at 12:00 for the Temple Burn, a playa-wide funeral. The temple is a giant piece of sacred geometry (sometimes a pyramid), in which people throughout the week place photographs of recently deceased loved ones or

objects representing things they are ready to leave behind. Earlier in the week, I saw six burners holding up a (presumably empty) coffin in one part of the structure while they eulogized a shared friend.

But at Temple Burn, the crowd was quiet, somberly awaiting the fall of night, when torches would set the edifice ablaze. Suddenly, one man screamed out what was in his heart, followed by hundreds of burners repeating the same words, one by one, like a mile-long chain of dominoes knocking over, until the voices quietly petered out. Were they speaking to those who had died, to all of us, to God? I was not sure, but I stood there thinking how appropriately the words summed up the whole event: “I love you.”

Bryan McCarthy teaches philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh in Greensburg, Pa. He is the president of the Pittsburgh Psychedelic Society.

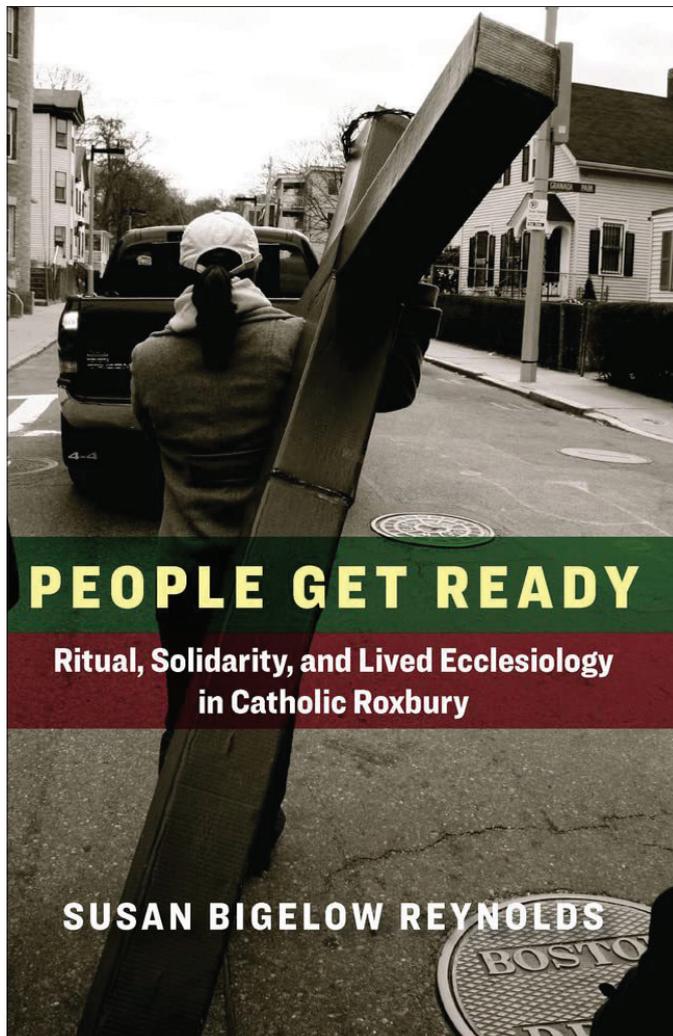
APOLOGY FOR BELIEF

By Alex Mouw

Who would I bother if not my God, each
complaint and spinning holler pointed where?
I’ve tried groveling before birds, beseeched
my laptop’s kernel threads for a better,
less mixed-up world. My wife, yes, she loves me
and is human. Mom and dad similar,
but they first weighted me with piety,
Jesus baggage. I tell my familiars
everything but need to scream my head off
in a Bible cocoon so tightly bound
it passes for love, so sharp it can slough
entire selves. Dimly lit, a shrink once found
I should love myself. Who’d pierce me? I thought.
Who would lure me through depths and not be caught.

Alex Mouw’s poetry and academic work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Literature and Theology*, *Twentieth-Century Literature* and other publications. This poem was a runner-up in *America’s* 2023 Foley Poetry Contest.

A CHURCH OF SOLIDARITY



Fordham University Press / 240p \$30

It was a curious set of circumstances that led to *People Get Ready*, by Susan Bigelow Reynolds, a professor at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. The book tells how an inner-city Boston parish managed to transform itself into a vibrant church community, an experience that Reynolds believes holds lessons for a new understanding of the role of the parish in Catholic ecclesiology.

St. Mary of the Angels, in Roxbury, was founded as a parish in 1908 to help accommodate the growing number of (primarily Irish) Catholics in the Archdiocese of Boston. With the exodus of parishioners to the suburbs, however, St. Mary's lost prominence; by the 1960s, it was in danger of being closed down or merged with another inner-city parish.

The story of *People Get Ready's* origins is almost as compelling as the book itself. In pursuit of low-cost accom-

modations during her graduate studies at Boston College, Reynolds leapt at the chance to reside in the rectory of St. Mary's, where she combined her course work with 13 hours each week of parish administrative work. The parish had no pastor at the time, and this lack of direct hierarchical oversight enabled St. Mary's parishioners to take matters directly into their collective hands.

"I wasn't from Boston, and knew almost nothing about the city prior to moving there, so I didn't have any preconceived ideas about Roxbury," Reynolds said in a phone interview. "This was a gift, because it allowed me to learn through experience and relationship about a part of the city that had been maligned throughout most of the latter part of the 20th century as the consummate urban ghetto."

Within weeks of taking up residence at the parish, Reynolds noticed something special at St. Mary's. This was a community that was doing "lived theology" in relevant ways that she thought could be put to use in academic research on ecclesiology and culture. "Theirs was a story that deserved to be told and brought to bear on scholarly understandings of unity in diversity in the church in a serious way," Reynolds said.

Reynolds argues that efforts to bring the church—and its local parishes—into the modern world that were inspired by the Second Vatican Council planted the seeds of St. Mary's eventual transformation. Vatican II repositioned the parish, Reynolds writes: "No longer enclaves of spiritual refuge in a hostile world, parishes were now relativized within the fabric of their local civic, social and religious ecologies."

Reynolds believes that a Vatican II vision of solidarity offered potential but unrealized groundwork for a transformation in the way Catholics interact at the local level. Post-Vatican II church leaders, however, opted to emphasize the concept of church as communion rather than solidarity as the most effective way to accommodate cultural diversity in the church. "Catholic ecclesiologies have largely neglected the concrete experiences of diverse communities on the ground," Reynolds writes, "consigning the study of parish life to historians and sociologists on one hand or those concerned primarily with pastoral guidance on the other."

Reynolds believes a misapplication of Vatican II's emphasis on communion ecclesiology—a sense of oneness among all the baptized—led to confusion as to what exact role parishes were supposed to play in the life of the church. In Roxbury, Reynolds encountered a community that had stayed alive by prioritizing solidarity with its neighborhood and among parishioners as the key to its existence. Taking to heart the "theological agency" of the people of Roxbury

meant treating parish practices, past and present, as “living ecclesiological sources.”

“Vatican II unwittingly made parish life into a project without a clear template for accomplishing it or even a sense of what, exactly, was to be accomplished,” Reynolds writes, adding that communion became an “agenda-setting paradigm” for theological and pastoral approaches to cultural diversity. Reynolds also suggests that the emphasis on communion ecclesiology inadvertently sustained a hierarchical, top-down approach to parish administration, leaving the laity in a state of “B-grade” holiness.

“When applied to the church in history, communion is often used to glorify a post-racial vision of Christian community in which difference itself is dissolved,” Reynolds writes. “It provides for the nominal celebration of diversity without calling into question the structures of sin and circuits of power that divide communities in history. The result is a pervasive naïveté regarding historical and structural dimensions of division in ecclesial communities.”

In addition, by emphasizing communion over solidarity, parishes were hamstrung in dealing with the problems associated with changing demographics and differences among parishioners of various ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses and even languages.

“By ignoring the power asymmetries that shape ecclesial practice, the communion paradigm continues to underwrite a color-blind approach that renders unclear the mission of the local church with respect to racial justice,” Reynolds writes. This was especially apparent in early- to mid-20th-century Catholic Boston. It was a time characterized by clear delimitations of power, circumscribed hierarchical relationships and well-defined parish boundaries. Despite these obstacles, however, it was in the battle-scarred neighborhood of Roxbury that the people of St. Mary’s parish later began to make their greatest mark.

“Unable to appeal to formal ecclesial structures of lay authority or theologies of ministry that would have supported collaboration, parishioners had to be tactical in their resistance, creating space for dissent within fixed, pre-existing structures and with the resources and possibilities available to them,” Reynolds writes.

Reynolds cites the parish’s annual Way of the Cross celebrations as the key “ritual” manifesting St. Mary’s unique transformation. The processions were reimagined in early 1991 in response to gang wars, drug dealing, a controversial shooting by police and a general uptick in violence in the neighborhood surrounding St. Mary’s. Parish leaders seized on the Good Friday processions as a way to overcome local divisions and invite all community members to not only share in the re-enactment of Christ’s passion and

death, but also to present a highly visible public symbol of suffering leading to redemption.

As Reynolds notes, “The Good Friday journey continues as a protest against violence and as an invocation of divine presence in the midst of everyday risings and dyings.... The Roxbury Way of the Cross can be understood as a form of practical action that affirms solidarity in difference.”

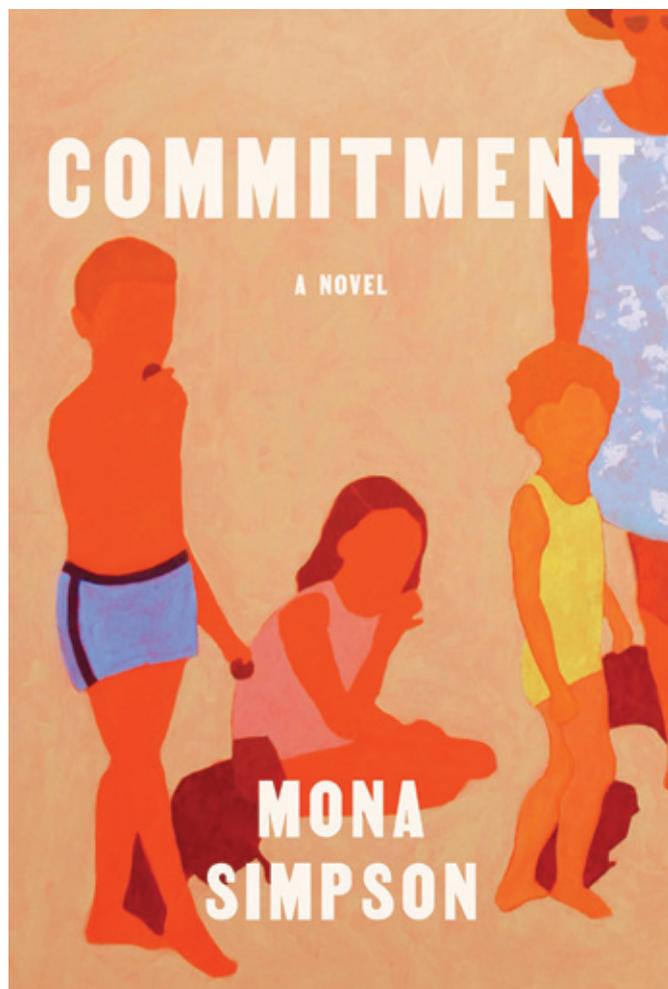
For Reynolds, the St. Mary’s experience holds lessons not only for other Catholic parishes in the United States, but also for anyone interested in how the local parish can become a more meaningful element of “church.”

“The dynamics that have shaped St. Mary’s for a century are today transforming the entire landscape of U.S. Catholicism,” Reynolds concludes. “Among these are new and expanded contexts of migration, sweeping regional shifts in parish growth and decline, an ever-increasing need for lay leadership, limited resources, deep institutional mistrust and betrayal propelled by the clergy sexual abuse crises, and mounting calls for racial and economic justice. In their own way, each of these forces raises complex questions for ecclesial practice, questions that can only be answered by coming to terms with the inevitability of instability and change in the first place.”

People Get Ready is aimed primarily at academic readers. Nonetheless, the book could well become a valuable resource for anyone concerned with the potential of the local parish to promote real solidarity in times of division and mistrust.

Mike Mastromatteo is a writer and book reviewer based in Toronto.

MOM'S STILL IN BED



Knopf / 416p \$29

Mona Simpson's *Commitment* feints at a compelling campus class drama, then unfurls into an even more stirring cartography of the impacts of a mother's deteriorating mental health on her three children.

At the novel's outset in 1973, Walter Aziz is 19 and leaving their SoCal tableau for college at Berkeley, Lina is 17 and an Ivy-ambitious junior, and Donnie is an inchoate 13. All three flaunt some kind of aesthetic talent—Walter dreams of building architectural utopias; Lina draws and sculpts; Donnie can polish and thrift an unremarkable room into beauty, as their mother modeled through the many apartments of their upbringing. We learn through the children's point of view, mostly Walter's, that their Afghan father hails from a wealthy family but has been serially absent from their lives. We also learn that their mother Diane represents an unusual success story, as a child reared in an orphanage who still managed to put herself through college and nursing school and then begin a medical career—no small feat even for a woman of ritzier means in 1950s America.

In the book's true inciting event, Diane takes to bed and doesn't get up—first for days, then weeks, then long enough to menace what little job and housing security the family owns, until that family has no choice but to commit her to a state-funded mental hospital. The reader recognizes Diane's malady as catastrophic depression and prescription drug addiction, but the children of the 1970s lack this understanding or language. Also, their more urgent concern is how to prevent the electricity from being shut off, or their boarder from calling Child Protective Services. A miracle-performing family friend, Julie, steps in as guardian, but the cascading effects of Diane's involuntary and profoundly sad resignation from head-of-household responsibilities resound throughout the novel. (*Commitment* presents the best argument for mothers going to therapy that I have ever read.)

The themes of Simpson's five other novels pervade *Commitment*: the parents of disparate origin, the parent-child relationship and the interruptions of relationships, often by way of mental illness. The novel's first act is permeated by Walter's creeping recognition that his family is even poorer than he had gauged and, worse, that his mother is depending on a long-ago promise from the absent Afghans for his college future.

Walter's character arc essentially appoints him head of the household. Never letting his dreams grow too impractical or unruly, he juggles campus jobs to send money home, then fashions himself as a real estate developer before he is old enough to drink. Lina works herself similarly raw scooping ice cream and stocking a department store, yet manages to wrest herself to Barnard, where she labors, with varying success, to be anointed a Real New York City Artist.

The novel shows a productive and healthy ambivalence about the value of a college education. (The Barnard sections pair well with a Vampire Weekend soundtrack; the Berkeley passages evoke Joni Mitchell.) Diane's greatest pride is her education, and she is hellaciously determined to get Walter, her golden eldest, through college. The experiences of book-smart Walter provide opportunities for the author to train her critical eye on college's incessant outlays: tuition, yes, but also application fees, housing, food, transportation, books, dating and impressing friends' families. "The last thing he needed was to get high," the novel's omniscient author observes as Walter enters a skunky dorm room. "That was for kids who had nets."

The knowledge Walter gains about these semi-obscured costs is helpful to Lina, but she still finds that her Barnard (and eventually, Columbia) admissions can't provide a sense of belonging in those places. Her observations about the subtle, devastating textures of competition

among the ambitious women she meets provide some of the novel's most piercing insights. "She would have loved to be able to hate her mother the way they did," Lina muses about her college friends, "with a breeziness carried by a fundamental trust in a home with a set table and dinner cooking." This angular, acerbic prose gives the novel a sensation both sharp and hazy, not unlike youth itself.

As the two elder children struggle to penetrate the institution of the university, the novel pivots toward its larger critique: that of the institution of the state hospital. Diane's semi-voluntary commitment to a mental institution as an adult mirrors her involuntary institutionalization in an orphanage as a child, and this history seems to inform how totally she reassimilates into institutional living. A kindly, erudite psychiatrist—who Walter hopes will cure and then marry his mother—tells the children Diane should improve within a year of what they call "moral treatment...a period of slowed-down life to take apart the patient's system of habits and to learn new ones." Diane, though, sinks into hypermedicated lassitude and languishes distantly, increasingly less and less verbal, weeding silently in the hospital garden, remaining an inpatient for years.

The novel's most stirring motif permeates each child's fear that their mother's mental illness amounts to a ticking time bomb within them: Diane, too, was bright and upwardly mobile early in life. The novel's action could rightly be described as charting how correct each child is about such a fate.

Each child lives out a different response to this institutionalized structure. Walter learns that the primary contribution he can make to the family is not presence but breadwinning. Lina designs a large-scale project based on research into the compassionate practices of ancient Islamic treatment centers for mental illness, which seem the phenomenological opposite of her mother's Protestant-inflected "moral treatment." Young Donnie, unfortunately, suffers both the bulk of Diane's psychological bequest *and* the underdeveloped fate of most of fiction's youngest siblings. Withdrawn, depressed dependents are hard to vivify as characters, and he emerges only phantasmically—in the narrative as in the family, an appendage of his mother and siblings.

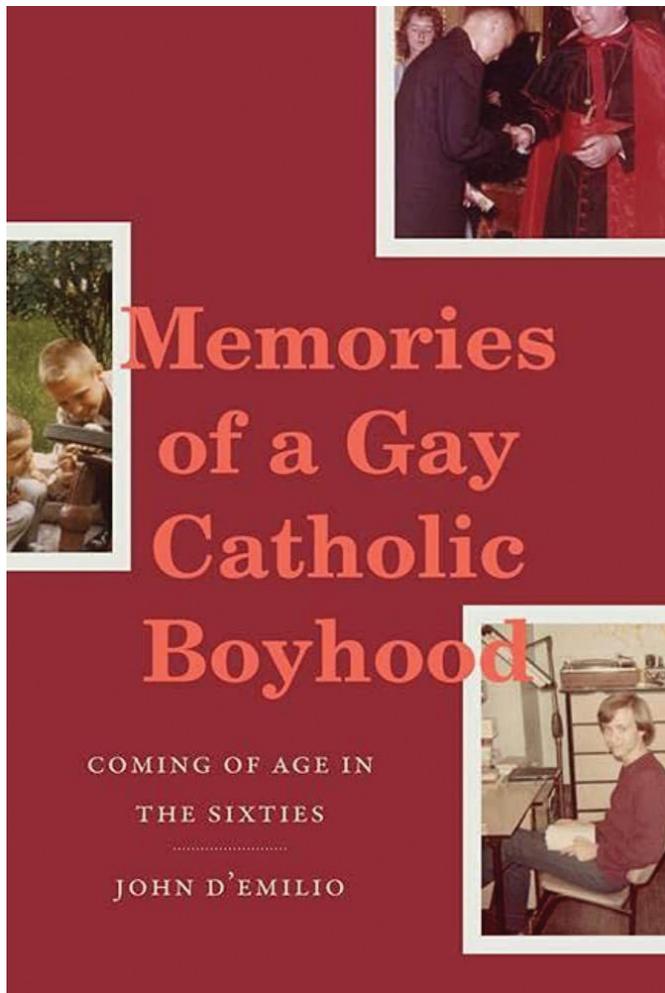
Switching between the perspectives of Walter and Lina (and occasionally Donnie), the novel suffers from some unevenness in the development of those characters. The reader may find it a heartbreaking and powerful narrative choice, for example, to portray a mother's psychosomatic retreat through the eyes and experiences of her children. It is also a choice that risks denying a neurodivergent character maturity, agency and dimensionality. Diane does not

narrate her own experience, and we know of her only what her children know.

However, like Lina Aziz, the character who most strongly resembles her author's autobiography, Mona Simpson is not to be underestimated. *Commitment's* structure and *dramatis personae*, in the final analysis, force the reader to confront some of literature's most essential questions: Do we choose our perception by the world? What parts of living *can* we choose, and what fates are prewritten? "You shouldn't have to be exceptional or even lucky to live a good life," Walter observes, and in doing so, asks two more questions: What is a good life, and who gets one?

More than any other question, though, *Commitment* asks: Do any of us know our mothers as whole human beings? After hundreds of pages of Diane's silence, I cried at one narrative starburst: Lina brings a good man home to meet her mother in the hospital, and lifted in his arms, Diane dances atop his feet. In images like this, Simpson induces a lump in the throat by suggesting another question: Are any of our lives meant to be regarded whole, or does their greatest worth consist of flinty, fleeting moments of connection, stubborn flowers and sudden laughter?

Laura Goode is the author of two books and a film. She teaches in the English department and the feminist, gender, and sexuality studies program at Stanford University.



Duke University Press / 240p \$29.95

It has become common on college campuses for a week to be designated as L.G.B.T.Q.I.+ Pride Week or something similar. During this week, a number of events occur that aim to help the community at large understand, support and celebrate people who experience themselves as sexual minorities. A highlight of the week is often a guest speaker, frequently an actor or sports figure, who speaks to their experience as a gay man or lesbian. This talk is often characterized by the speaker's history of a deep sense of alienation, marginalization and ostracization. This feeling of alienation can be reinforced by family, school and religion. Only the hard work of self-acceptance, these speakers suggest, can relieve the despair that such alienation can engender.

This narrative is quite different from the story offered in John D'Emilio's informative and enjoyable memoir, *Memories of a Gay Catholic Boyhood*. Without suggesting that the process of accepting himself as a gay man within a traditional Italian American, staunchly Catholic, Republic-

can family environment during the 1960s was easy or pleasant, D'Emilio does not give the reader a story of rejection, angst and self-hatred. Actually, in many ways, D'Emilio, an emeritus professor at the University of Illinois and a noted scholar of L.G.B.T. history who has twice received the Stonewall Book Award (1984 and 2004), inhabited a world of extended family, Catholic schools and parish life that offered a relatively safe space for him to discover himself as a politically progressive gay man.

Unlike the novelist and critic Mary McCarthy, whose *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* was characterized by precocious atheism and a sense that priests were generally idiots, D'Emilio found an intellectual, warm and affectionate home in the Catholic community, particularly at Regis High School, the academically elite Jesuit prep school in Manhattan. The Regis of D'Emilio's time was not a place of bullying or name-calling but rather a place where excellence in the classical languages was expected and esteemed, while proficiency in debate or forensics was as highly prized as athletic prowess.

In a particularly touching recollection, D'Emilio remembers a Mr. Ridley, a young Jesuit scholastic who recommended that D'Emilio do a book report on James Baldwin's *Another Country*. Whether the young Jesuit was just an admirer of Baldwin's work or whether he suspected that D'Emilio was same-sex-attracted is unclear. Still, such a recommendation of a book featuring homosexual relations would have been extraordinary at a Catholic high school in 1963. For D'Emilio, the novel provided an explanation for the inchoate feelings and same-sex desires that he was beginning to experience.

Like many Catholic boys of his generation, he suffered great anxiety and guilt about his sexual desires and experiments, but his coded attempts to mention them to his Jesuit teachers were met with responses as benign as they were inept.

D'Emilio reports that his mother liked to claim that Regis—and by extension the Jesuits—ruined him. D'Emilio would disagree. He suggests that Regis was, in many ways, the making of him. One thing that does seem certain is that his Regis education, as rigorous as it was, did not adequately prepare him for the pervasive secularism of the late-1960s Ivy League he entered after graduating high school.

According to D'Emilio, it was only when he was already at Regis that the school agreed to support college applications to Ivy League universities, and this only after parents threatened a lawsuit. The school administration at that time feared the world outside of the Catholic bubble—and with good reason. The religious education and formation a boy received at Regis in the mid-'60s was no match for

the “death of God” movement and the social upheaval he would experience at Columbia University.

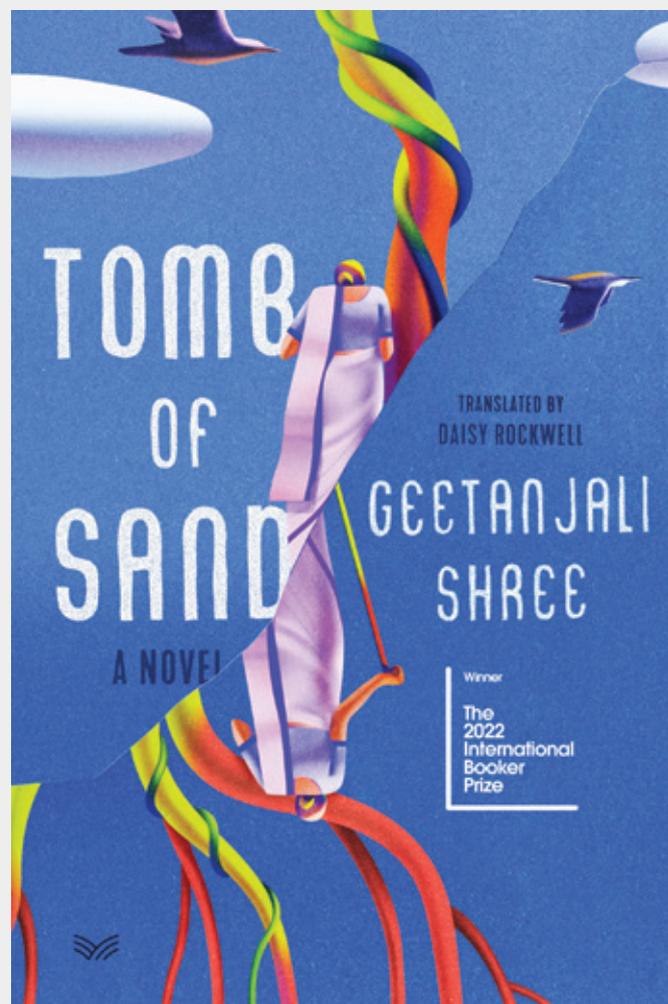
What the Jesuits and other teachers at Regis did prepare D’Emilio for was the emerging post-Second Vatican Council emphasis on social justice and a new openness to pacifism. It was the newly ordained Father Ridley who accompanied young D’Emilio to the draft board hearing in the Bronx that established D’Emilio’s status as a pacifist at the height of the Vietnam War. As attractive as he found this Christian commitment to social justice, it was ultimately not a strong enough attraction to sustain his Catholic identity.

D’Emilio relates how he distanced himself from the institutional church, not essentially because of his sexual orientation but rather because of the church’s institutional and dogmatic nature. He quickly became not an atheist or “ex-Catholic” but what he refers to as a “lapsed Catholic.” Not so much Mary McCarthy’s Catholic girlhood, but perhaps more like Lord Marchmain in *Brideshead Revisited*. He was and still is, he notes, attracted to the divine and to the mystical dimensions of human experience.

As D’Emilio applies his skills as an acclaimed social and cultural historian to his own youth, *Memories of a Gay Catholic Boyhood* offers us a caring and thoughtful window into a time of enormous change in American society and the Catholic Church. His account is warm and gracious; he is quick to acknowledge his own limitations while acknowledging the crucial role of his friends and family in shaping and loving the gay Catholic man he became.

Brian Linnane, S.J., has recently been appointed to the Lanigan Chair in Ethics at LeMoyne College, in Syracuse, N.Y.

LIKE NOTHING YOU’VE EVER READ



Penguin Random House India / 725p \$19

Shortly after the end of World War II, religious infighting between Hindus and Muslims broke out on the Indian subcontinent. As episodes of violence became frequent in communities that had lived peacefully together for hundreds of years, the British partitioned the country into two states, India and Pakistan. This decision compelled millions to relocate. Many Hindus migrated to India, and Muslims journeyed to what would become Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The partition created fury between the religions, resulting in close to two million deaths and 14 million displaced persons. Historians have compared the carnage to Buchenwald and named it the Holocaust of South Asia. Villages were burned to the ground. Children and the elderly were murdered. About 75,000 young women were tortured and raped.

The butchery on the Indian subcontinent 80-some years ago still affects many who were directly and indirectly involved. It also forms the basis for Geetanjali Shree’s novel

Tomb of Sand, whose protagonist, Amma, is tortured but manages to survive.

Numerous authors have written partition novels, short stories, poetry and nonfiction recounting the horrors of this era, including Salman Rushdie, a Muslim, whose novel *Midnight's Children* won the 1981 Booker Prize. This year, the prestigious award has come full circle with Geetanjali Shree, a Hindu, winning the 2022 International Booker Prize. *Tomb of Sand* was translated into English by Daisy Rockwell (granddaughter of Norman Rockwell), who shared the Booker award with Shree.

The Hindi title of the book is *Ret Samadhi*, with *ret* meaning sand and *samadhi* having several meanings. Ranging from a deeply meditative state to an ecstatic union with God, *samadhi* suggests a condition in which the sense of individuality fades away and people realize they share a connectedness to one another. The concept is reminiscent of Teilhard de Chardin's Omega Point, in which everything in the universe spirals toward unification. That rich spiritual resonance in the original Hindi title is unfortunately lost in Rockwell's English translation.

On one level, this is a story of an 80-year-old woman named Amma, who, depressed at the death of her second husband, returns to the city of her youth to find her first love, from whom she had been forcibly separated during the British partition.

On another level, this is a reincarnation story featuring a woman who dies and comes back to life—literally and figuratively. She changes from a helpless old woman to someone who seems like a baby, then a toddler, a child, a teenager and an adult.

Toward the end of the story, she rights old wrongs and crosses borders that should have never been imposed. She calls out the insanity of religious prejudice and insists that it is the connections between people that matter.

Much of Shree's prose is built on puns and clichés. Amma literally has her back against the wall in her bedroom. She figuratively has her back against the wall because she is stuck in a bad position. The cliché, falling through the cracks, is also used literally and figuratively. The same applies to the idea that walls can hear. This is part of her style.

Essentially a fable, the story features Amma, her son, daughter, daughter-in-law and two grandsons, as well as a transvestite friend who appears as both a woman and a man, talking crows that communicate with humans, and a magical cane decorated with butterflies that fly. The cane awakens Amma from her coma and carries her along to hidden places, where she becomes lost.

The most unusual section of the novel occurs at Wagah,

a town on the border between India and Pakistan where a lowering-of-the-flags ceremony occurs every day. The ceremony symbolizes both the rivalry and brotherhood of the two nations. What makes this section unusual is that in Shree's account the audience is composed of the ghosts of dead writers who based their work on the partition.

In the first few pages of the novel, Amma decides that if she were to be hit by a bullet, she would not want to fall face down but rather on her back, reclining regally as if on a soft bed with the sky as her coverlet. And indeed, when a bullet rips through Amma's body, she does fall on her back and appears to be dead.

But is she? The plot of this 725-page-novel depends on one's approach to the question of Amma's death. And Shree leaves the answer up to us: "Those who consider death to be an ending took this to be hers. But those in the know knew that this was no ending; she'd simply crossed another boundary." Yet if we follow the clues that Shree provides, it seems as though Amma is reincarnated.

The story enters and exits the minds of this or that character, shifts points of view, blurs identities and muddies chronological order. It weaves a luminous spell reminiscent of a Marc Chagall painting with characters floating in the air.

The narrative contains numerous allusions to the tenets of Hinduism and to the history and geography of the Indian subcontinent, foreign vocabulary, and references to South Asian writers, as well as to political and religious leaders generally unknown in the West. American readers might also struggle with the story's digressions, wordplay and several unreliable narrators, including one who says "every entry I make here is false" on the book's final page.

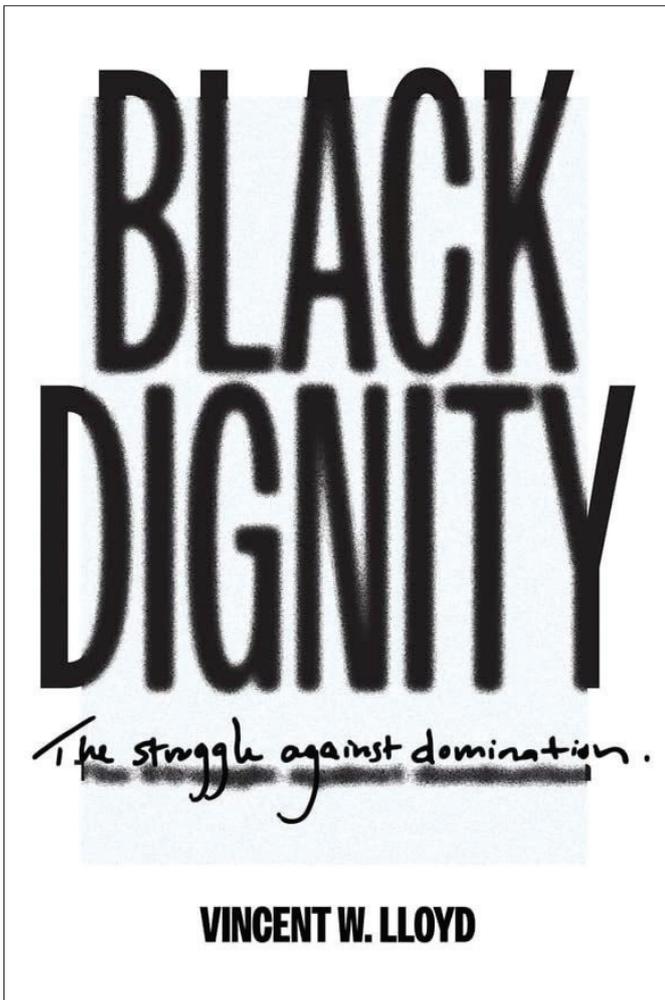
The text is packed with figures of speech and sound in the Hindi version—and Rockwell includes these in her translation. The original story came in at about half the length of the English version. According to Rockwell, the additional pages were necessary to convey the story's metaphorical quality. She makes a good point, but there are a few too many verbal hijinks here for my taste.

Frank Wynne, chair of this year's Booker judges, noted that translating *Tomb of Sand* presented "huge challenges" because the novel is about words, language and storytelling, not just characters and plot. Another judge added that it is "safe to say this [novel] is like nothing else you have ever read."

True.

Diane Scharper has written seven books. She teaches memoir and poetry for the Johns Hopkins University Osher program.

OVERCOMING WHITE SUPREMACY



Yale University Press / 208p \$26

In 1923, amid a wave of lynchings, Claude McKay wrote the sonnet “If We Must Die.” He was faced with a society structured by white supremacy and anti-Blackness, a society that wanted Blacks “to die like hogs/hunted and penned in an inglorious spot.” Confronted with this uniquely American form of death, McKay proclaimed that “we’ll face the murderous cowardly pack/ Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back.” For McKay, the nobility and humanity of Black people was forged in fighting the monsters of white supremacy.

A similar vision animates Vincent Lloyd’s *Black Dignity: The Struggle Against Domination*. For Lloyd, dignity is not something abstracted from a notion of “humanity.” It is wrested from the teeth of domination. It is asserted in the struggle against oppression. It is born the moment the slave seizes his master and throws him down. Perhaps most important for Lloyd, dignity is *Black*.

Begun while he participated in protests in Ferguson, Mo., and continued in seminars and libraries, Lloyd’s book

focuses on the words of generations of Black freedom fighters. To the struggle, he offers the contribution of a keen intellect articulating the underlying philosophy of Black Lives Matter. While I disagree with aspects of his book, his core argument is a profound challenge to anyone who takes seriously the struggle for human dignity, antiracism and the work of dismantling white supremacy.

Lloyd’s philosophy depends on some fundamental claims. The first is that we must understand the “depths of anti-Blackness shading America” such that anti-Blackness “is at the center of everything, for everyone.” It is not an incidental, localized or past reality. It *is* reality. For Lloyd, philosophy is meant to help us understand reality and, more important, to resist and overthrow that reality. Resistance to domination is not on behalf of some antecedent given of human dignity that does not say anything about actual reality. Such abstracted claims about dignity (“all lives matter”) cannot resist anti-Black reality.

Instead, dignity is “something you *do*, a practice, a performance, a way of engaging the world.... It necessarily means struggle against domination.” The world is oppression; dignity is the refusal of the world. It is dying *but fighting back*. Black dignity is found in that fighting back. Since anti-Blackness is the primary form of domination, Black dignity is the primary form of enacted dignity.

Philosophers must begin from that fighting back in order to understand reality. Thus Lloyd places a great deal of importance on the distinction between the ontic and the ontological. Generally, these terms would refer to questions about the being of a specific object (ontic) and the being of beings (ontological). You might say the former is small-picture metaphysics and the latter is big-picture. For Lloyd, both have to do with the struggle against domination. The ontic struggle has to do with specific sites of struggle, a struggle against a particular center of domination. The ontological has to do with “struggle aimed at domination” itself. As with McKay’s poem, fighting is not only specific to instances. In asserting Black dignity, one fights the whole system of domination.

Much of Lloyd’s book is about looking at centers of ontological resistance to domination, such as Black love, Black family and Black magic. Each chapter leans into the claim that racism is not just personal or even systematic; it is the being of reality. According to Lloyd, multiculturalism, liberalism and the American project are to be discarded as expressions of that ontology. Since domination is reality, abolitionism is about abolishing everything.

It is here that some of the weaknesses of the book appear. First, Lloyd seems uninterested in Black voices that differ from his more radical approach, voices that show a

majority of Black Americans want serious reform of the police and criminal justice system but do *not* want the abolishment of either. Those voices see arguments like those for defunding of the police as a form of political colonization by urban elites. What does Lloyd think of the majority of African Americans, who agree that “Black dignity” is a non-negotiable struggle and as a consequence want *more* and better policing? In his book, Black conservatives go unmentioned while establishment Black liberals are depicted as the purveyors of vacuous expressions of multiculturalism.

Perhaps these Black voices belong to those who are just “dreamers” or are trapped by respectability. But then what to make of Martin Luther King Jr., Frederick Douglass or Rosa Parks? They wanted America to live up to its ideals, not abolish them. Lloyd doesn’t let these voices disturb his text. Rather, he states that “Black dignity is the philosophy of Black Americans.” But whose philosophy of Black dignity? Which vision of antiracism? For Lloyd, “One view is right, others might seem right but are wrong.” Ironically, this sentiment seems to feed into what Lloyd, in *Compact* magazine, has criticized as an antiracist cult that seeks to silence dialogue.

Lloyd argues we should center dignity discourse on Black dignity. He rightly recognizes other forms of intersecting oppression, but his account still centers on Black dignity as the first philosophy, such that “all philosophy must be routed through the Middle Passage” and understood in light of “domination’s chief paradigm, Blackness.” But shouldn’t we also center dignity on the Indigenous, the refugee, the unborn or the disabled? Lloyd is right that dignity is something struggled for. However, that struggle does not fabricate a dignity not already there; it brings to light the truth of dignity that is always already there.

Black dignity is an ethical, even ontological, preferential option for dignity. But if we hold this at the expense of intrinsic human dignity, then other voices and other ways of asserting dignity will be lost. This means we lose the grounding of natural law that Lloyd powerfully presents in his book *Black Natural Law*. The danger in losing this is that the struggle may devolve into centers of competing power with little orientation to a justice beyond power.

Making dignity entirely performative—and thus downplaying intrinsic dignity and natural law—is likely tied to how ontological Lloyd makes domination. Domination, as reality, is not a privation of a more original good but is instead the original and ultimate position and thus the position that is never overcome. “The object of ontological struggles is,” Lloyd tells us, “impossible to achieve.” More than 500 years of racial domination speak to the truth of

this claim. But there are other stories of when people cast down domination. In this, I wish that Lloyd had been willing to be more than a philosopher by being a theologian. As King puts it: “the ringing cry of the Christian faith is that our God is able.” Believing domination can be overcome is not “a fantasy of domination itself,” as Lloyd puts it, but a conviction about God and humanity.

If white supremacy is to be overcome, anti-Blackness cast down as sin and blasphemy, and Black dignity centered as fundamental reality, we will need books like Lloyd’s. For all my criticisms, he does the work of philosophizing on behalf of Black dignity. He is right that dignity must be found and asserted in the struggle for dignity.

But there is a grace beyond assertion. Later in his life, Claude McKay converted to Catholicism, finding in it the only source of racial unity. He “turned to God for great strength to fight” while holding to “the Sacred Light.” We should, too. Starting from Black dignity and from the dignity of all who are oppressed, we may someday—by that sacred light and our efforts—find ourselves with human dignity, achieved.

Terence Sweeney is a professor in the honors program at Villanova University.

ALL BY THE BOOK

At first glance, *Papyrus* looks like a typical work of book history, a straightforward exploration of the subject that journeys from scrolls to tablets to codices to modern books. However, Irene Vallejo's first book translated into English is much more than a rehashing of classics like Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* or Robert Darnton's *The Case for Books*.

Papyrus was a popular and critical success in its original Spanish for a reason. It found an audience outside of the academy because it speaks to present concerns and speaks on behalf of many book readers. The elements of memoir that punctuate the book will resonate with the kind of person who would pick *Papyrus* up off a bookstore shelf.

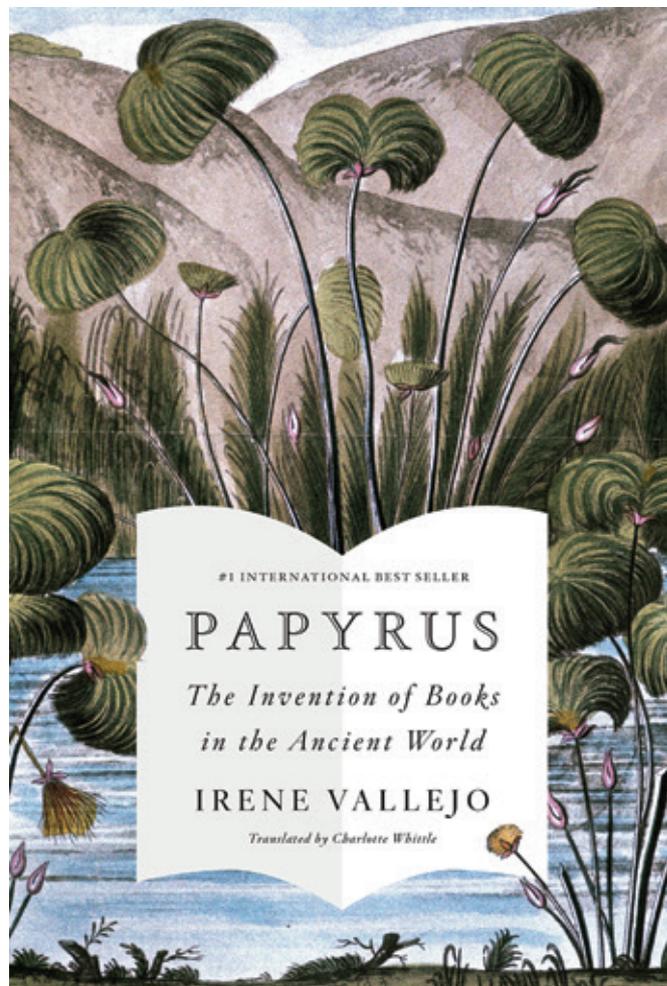
Vallejo holds a doctorate in philology and is a widely published author. In Spain, she is a major public intellectual. Her writings include novels, children's books, accounts of classical authors and syndicated columns on current events.

A history of books dating back to antiquity, *Papyrus* feels like the culmination of two decades of reading and writing about classical literature. Much of the book is spent, in the fashion of *The Education of Henry Adams*, describing the intellectual journey of the author. Vallejo tells us she was herself late to embrace reading silently, a sensibility she shares with the ancients she studies—who often read aloud. She so loved being read to by her mother that she was hesitant to take on the guise of a silent reader. But when she did, she took to the bookish life with great vigor, subjecting herself to the ridicule of peers who found her passion for reading bizarre.

Into adulthood, Vallejo struggled to be accepted as a peer at Oxford University, where she had to jump through numerous bureaucratic and even ritualistic hoops to gain access to the books she wanted to peruse. Her desire simply to appreciate the collections of Bodleian and Sackler were regarded with suspicion in even the most erudite of spaces on earth.

In *Papyrus*, Vallejo delves into the culture of books and libraries that developed in Greece and Rome. She focuses on the Great Library of Alexandria, detailing the growth of the collection and its emergence as one of the most significant centers of learning in the ancient world, before examining its long decline under Roman rule and its eventual destruction during the third century A.D.

At times, *Papyrus* is a present-minded defense of Hellenistic and Roman learning, demonstrating that many of the social, cultural and political concerns of the third century B.C. or second century A.D. are abundant in slightly different vessels in 2023. *Papyrus* is simultaneously a tribute to the inner and outer lives of a reader and to the spaces they



Knopf / 464p \$35

inhabit—libraries.

Vallejo differentiates between the intent of those who *erect* libraries, such as the Great Library of Alexandria, which might be anachronistically described as demi-Calvinist in its aspirations to serve as an outward sign of the inner erudition of its Ptolemaic founders and benefactors, and those who *inhabit* libraries. Library patrons, even back in the days of ancient Alexandria, were a transnational affinity group that made use of their shared space to engage in individual and collective pursuits—reading, listening, scholarship and writing. At that time, a library was conceived of as a public space and marketplace of ideas. Fierce disagreements arose among the patrons of the Great Library of Alexandria; but, in the words of Vallejo, the library itself served as a kind of “cease-fire zone” among conflicting ideas and individuals.

“On the shelves of Alexandria, borders were dissolved, and the words of the Greeks, the Jews, the Egyptians, the Iranians, and the Indians finally coexisted in peace,” Vallejo writes. The romance of that nearly universal library in

Alexandria was the fullest expression of Hellenism, which the author describes as a kind of “proto-globalization” that spread the ideas of Athens and its environs from Anatolia to the Indian subcontinent. This sensibility is in keeping with a current trend in academia that glamorizes empires as vibrant polyglot societies while denigrating nations as progenitors of all the worst of modern impulses. Time will tell if this enthusiasm for empire among scholars will remain as the global political climate seems primed for a shift back to imperialism.

Many aspects of this book are not intellectually fashionable. The author certainly takes the idea of censorship to task, putting her at odds with significant portions of both ends of the political spectrum. Vallejo encourages readers to take a step back from the almost-gleeful arms race on both the left and right to remove apparently objectionable content from circulation. She notes that efforts in antiquity as well as the present to curb the circulation of existing ideas have rarely been successful. Where censorship succeeds is in suppressing new ideas through self-censorship, whereby writers avoid risk and thereby impoverish the public discourse. In Vallejo’s rendering, the free expression of ideas is an extension of the project first adopted at the Library of Alexandria.

However, books and ideas find a way to persist. One of the most arresting stories in *Papyrus* is that of Galya Safonova, who was born in the Soviet gulag in the early 1940s. Her mother, an epidemiologist, had been confined in a prison camp for refusing to snitch on a colleague. Writing was strictly prohibited in the camps. Thus, Galya spent her childhood reading the books her mother had secretly sown together with cloth in the Siberian night, featuring words and pictures scrawled with a quill.

Vallejo meanders in her points in *Papyrus*. At one moment, the subject is Diocletian persecuting Christians; next up is a discussion of college curriculums purging authors like Plato and Descartes for allegedly aiding and abetting racism and colonialism; then the author will venture into a series of anecdotes about her own experiences as a research fellow at the Sackler and Bodleian Libraries at Oxford. Nevertheless, this bricolage approach works well.

Papyrus is a work of striking erudition that demonstrates the influence of cinema as much as of literature. This is a book made up of landscapes, montages and jump cuts. A film adaptation of *Papyrus* could well be an art house hit in the vein of “Helvetica” (2007) or “Exit Through the Gift Shop” (2010), particularly in the niche-friendly age of streaming.

PEN Award-winning editor Charlotte Whittle trans-

lated the book into English. The text in English has an often lyrical quality that reads well and sounds great when read aloud. Since the book discusses in some detail ancient disputes about the propriety of silent reading, I took a stab at reciting several passages from the book out loud. In each instance, the words presented just as well to my ears as they did to my eyes.

Papyrus is a unique contribution to the history of literacy, libraries and the book. It will never be regarded as the standard work on libraries because its tone and content are so unusual, but it may well become an essential book on the subject. Its contributions are moored to the voice of its author, who will be an easily relatable figure for the book’s readership.

Clayton Trutor teaches history at Norwich University. He is the author of *Loserville: How Professional Sports Remade Atlanta—and How Atlanta Remade Professional Sports (2022)* and the forthcoming *Boston Ball: Jim Calhoun, Rick Pitino, Gary Williams, and College Basketball’s Forgotten Cradle of Coaches (2023)*.



CELEBRATING BOLD AND HONEST JOURNALISM

This year, America Media received 32 awards from the Catholic Media Association, including:

WRITER OF THE YEAR

Kerry Weber

BEST EDITORIAL

“Roe v. Wade: An End and a Beginning”

PODCASTER OF THE YEAR

Maggi Van Dorn

BEST INTERVIEW

“Exclusive: Pope Francis discusses Ukraine, U.S. bishops and more”

BEST COVERAGE IMMIGRATION

J.D. Long-García

BEST FREESTANDING PRESENTATION OF ON-LINE VIDEO

“This historic Catholic parish fought to stay open—and won”

BEST BOOK REVIEW SECTION

Spring Literary Review 2022

America | MEDIA #OWNYOURFAITH

LILY, LILY, LILY

By Nancy Brewka-Clark

Every day I meet the eyes of that saint of rough abrasion, Lily of the Mohawks, whose smallpox scars vanished upon her early death in a Montreal mission four centuries ago, in a portrait gracing my pencil cup, and pray for ambitiously soulful content. She looks at me with that solemn face, one hand holding a wooden cross, the other a tortoise with a fir tree sprouting from its shell, framed with the trunks of rising birches, white and mottled, a golden halo around her black braids, and telepaths faith, faith, faith. What do I know of myself even now, when the years have swarmed up in burying piles of white pages, and my heart has to read itself to itself, no longer partnered with my life's love? A widow in typography is a lone word atop a page, spillover from a sentence left behind. The page below gleams white and pure, angelic, saintly in its knowing silence. Since words are destined to deface it, may they at least take form as one unblemished stanza.

Nancy Brewka-Clark *has had work published in the anthologies Visiting Frost and Two-Countries and is the author of the poetry collection Beautiful Corpus. This poem was a runner-up in America's 2023 Foley Poetry Contest.*

SOAR! 37th ANNUAL

New York

AWARDS DINNER

Wednesday
September 13th
— 2023 —

HONORING

Tania Tetlow
President of Fordham University

AND

2023 Father Victor Yanitelli, SJ
Award recipient
Sister Eileen McCann, CSJ


Support Our Aging Religious

Celebrating Religious Life
and Benefiting Aging
and Infirm Religious

www.soar-usa.org/NYDinner

The Word Is Your Strength

Empowering refrains—short phrases that call to mind a deeper wisdom—can empower a person facing a struggle. For example, there have been incidents of “haircut bullying” recently on the Flathead Indian Reservation where I live. Native American male children have been teased and bullied about their long-braided hair, leading some parents to consider cutting their son’s hair to stop the bullying. In response, local community health initiatives set up an event to highlight the significance of long hair for Native men as an expression of their culture. The consistent, empowering refrain of this evening was, “Your hair is your strength.”

Throughout the month of July, the Sunday Gospel passages have a consistent refrain of their own. Over the next five Sundays, one hears the not-so-subtle message,

“The word is your strength.” Matthew ties discipleship to a disciple’s capacity to interpret the Scriptures and sort through the “old and the new” found within them (Mt 13:52). Being steeped in the word of God is, for Matthew, an expression of one’s faith. The word of God anchors a culture of faith that confers the strength to walk as a disciple of Jesus. It helps express the joy of discipleship in the midst of hardship and persecution.

“Out of joy,” reads the Gospel for the last Sunday in July, “a person goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Mt 13:44–46). The “field” contains the treasure of the kingdom, and word of God allows that field to grow into a rich harvest. May readers of the Word for the month of July find strength in this field.

The Word for August is on Page 80.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JULY 2, 2023

Love of the Word in Hardship

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JULY 9, 2023

Resting in the Word When Burdened

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JULY 16, 2023

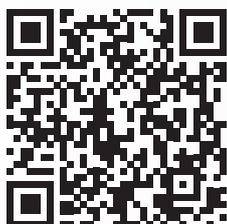
Growing in the Word Through Rich Soil

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JULY 23, 2023

Being the Word Within the Weeds

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JULY 30, 2023

Joy for the Word as the Pearl of Great Price



Stay up to date with ‘The Word’ all month long.
Each of these columns can be found online.

Read More Online

Visit: www.americamagazine.org/word or scan the QR code with your smartphone.

CLASSIFIEDS MARKETPLACE

Are you looking for a...
Job, Retreat, Scholarship,
Volunteer Opportunity,
Book, Gift
and More?

VISIT CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

www.marketplace.americamagazine.org

START YOUR SEARCH



Contact us today!

Ken Arko

Director of Advertising Services

O: 212.515.0126

C: 732.720.9941

karko@americamedia.org

Geena Di Camillo

Advertising Services Manager

O: 212.515.0127

C: 727.741.9209

gdicamillo@americamedia.org

America

A House of Prayer for All

Most people who have spent time around Jesuits are familiar with the spiritual maxim, “finding God in all things.” In the month of August, that aphorism might be adjusted to “finding God in all peoples.” The Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time reinforces this insight with every reading. Isaiah begins with the reminder, “For my house shall be called a house of prayer for *all* peoples” (Is 56:7). The psalm reinforces this, “Let *all* the peoples praise you” (Ps 67:3). In the Gospel from Mathew, a Canaanite foreigner challenges Jesus’ sympathy towards the House of Israel, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table” (Mt 15:27). Jesus is genuinely moved and gives in to the Canaanite woman’s request for God’s healing power to be active within her household too.

On the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, the

readings raise this theme to a mystical and Christological level. Paul reminds the church in Rome about the centrality of their faith, “For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever, amen” (Rom 11:36). The Gospel for the last Sunday in August also reflects this shift. Jesus finds himself with his close disciples at Caesarea Philippi, near an ancient site of fertility worship dedicated to the Greco-Roman deity Pan. This place, called Banias today, is the source of a deep underground spring that feeds into the Jordan. It is no accident that near this place of prayer Jesus said to his disciple Simon, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (Mt 16:18). The “rock” of Peter becomes a new foundation for all peoples to discover Christ as the spring of life-giving waters.

The Word for July is on Page 78.

FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD (A), AUG. 6, 2023

From Christ the Ancient of Days Flows

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), AUG. 13, 2023

Through Christ Kindness and Truth Embrace

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), AUG. 20, 2023

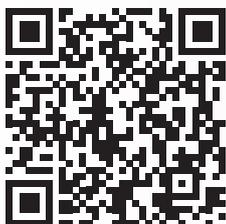
For Christ Are All Peoples

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), AUG. 27, 2023

The Grotto of Pan and the Rock of Peter



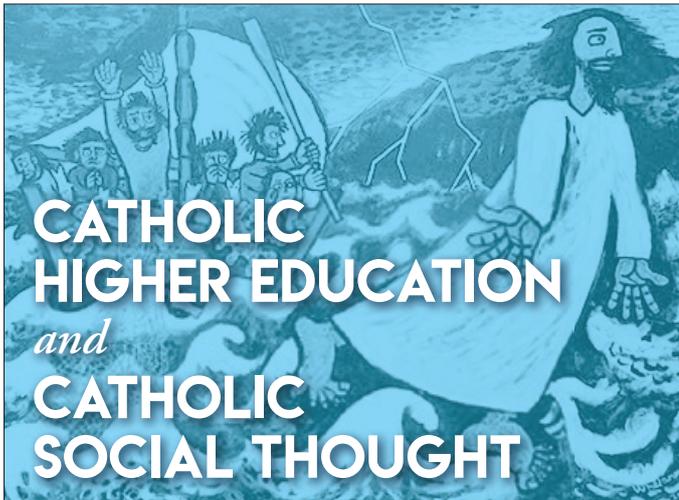
Victor M. Cancino, S.J., lives on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana and is the pastor-delegate for St. Ignatius Mission. He studied Sacred Scripture at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.



Stay up to date with ‘The Word’ all month long.
Each of these columns can be found online.

Read More Online

Visit: www.americamagazine.org/word or scan the QR code with your smartphone.



CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION and CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

Edited by Bernard G. Prusak & Jennifer Reed-Bouley

Would your institution benefit from considering the question: **What is a mission for its future worthy of its past?** Consult with the contributors to *Catholic Higher Education* and *Catholic Social Thought*.

For more information, write consulthecst@gmail.com



WWW.CHEANDCST.COM



CUSTOM STATUES

Bronze • Marble • Fiberglass | Delivery in 120 Days



Sacred Images / Statue Maker
Let me create for your Parish a one-of-a-kind masterpiece of sacred art for a very surprisingly affordable investment.

Contact: Gregory Cave | caveco33@aol.com
516-456-3663 | www.statuemaker.us

America | CLASSIFIEDS MARKETPLACE

SACRED HEART SEMINARY AND SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY (SHSST)

seeks a Roman Catholic priest for a full-time, graduate-level seminary appointment to serve as our Vice President for Formation Programs starting July 2024.

If interested, please send a letter of interest to hr@shsst.edu to begin the application process.

The application submission deadline is January 31, 2024.



www.shsst.edu

P. 414-425-8300

Specialized Formation for

VOCATIONS

shsst.edu/info-for-sponsors



CONTACT **Deacon Steve Kramer:**
skramer@shsst.edu | 414-858-4767



www.shsst.edu | HALES CORNERS, WI

What the Synod Has Taught Me *We are not as divided as the skeptics thought*



It has been a little more than a year since I started brushing up on my Italian. An unlikely invitation had landed in my Whatsapp messages, and yet again, my plans to spend a few months writing a new book were interrupted. This time the invitation was to help with the work toward the Synod on Synodality. It is difficult to think of an ecclesial process more important to me, so I gladly set aside the pile of books.

I have since learned more about the church than I could ever have imagined, and the synod process has come to seem even more urgent and fruitful. Much of what I have learned has been surprising.

In the early months of my involvement, several journalists said that the synod process would inevitably reveal a church divided culturally between Europe and Africa, divided between clergy and laity, and at war with itself over moral issues. I was told that participation was so low as to make the process meaningless, that the reports had probably all been pre-written, and that the process would be either a sell-out or a stitch-up. These were fairly dispiriting statements to take into the process I was preparing for: reading the episcopal conference reports as well as the reflections produced by religious congregations, lay movements and associations, plus the many individual submissions made to the synod.

If I were to talk to the same journalists now, I would tell them that their preconceptions were wrong. I came away from the process with

a deeper sense of the profound and vulnerable questions raised by synod participants. For some people, this was the first time they had spoken publicly about their hopes and fears for the church. They felt a profound sense of dignity in contributing but worried about whether they would really make any difference. In a culture that prizes certainty and opposition in political discourse, many people gave voice to their uncertainty and their desire for guidance and accompaniment, and for the communal spaces that would make reflecting together possible.

One bishop compared the synod's method of spiritual conversation to a disarmament process, and another told me his diocese would never be the same again (a good thing!). Many who participated in the synod spoke honestly about the difficulty of genuinely listening to someone you disagree with, or with whom you feel you have little in common beyond a baptismal identity.

But it also became evident to me that the church is not divided in a culture war between continents. Many of the most significant tensions and cleavages lie between neighbors, whose histories shape much of their ecclesial experience. The innovation of meeting at the level of the continent (something with which Latin America now has long experience) is one of the least mentioned but one of the most important aspects of the synod.

Another discovery: The questions of the status and participation of women, increased transparency in the

church, and how to hold together love, mercy and truth in extending a welcome were not solely the concerns of the global North. These echoed from every corner of the Catholic world.

It is true that some individuals and groups remain skeptical and even hostile toward the process; others now wish they had had more chances to become involved. It is also true, I think, that the most silent group in the process so far is priests and bishops. This process will not be properly synodal unless they find a way to share their own experiences, with trust, with the wider people of God, and we need to understand more about why they have not done so already.

As we head into the next stage of this process, I remain hopeful and curious. The challenge of this next phase will be for those who participate in the assembly meeting of the Synod of Bishops in Rome this October to remain as closely connected as possible to those vital local expressions of love, uncertainty, hope and lament; to find ways to draw others into its dynamic pathway; and in doing both, to open new ways of walking together into the future.

Anna Rowlands teaches Catholic social thought and practice at Durham University in Durham, England, and currently provides support to the Office of the Synod of Bishops and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VATICAN ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY TELESCOPE

The Alice P. Lennon
Telescope
The Thomas J. Bannan
Astrophysics Facility
**September 29-October 2,
2023** • Tucson, AZ

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29TH

THE ANNIVERSARY GALA
Hacienda del Sol Resort

5:00 PM

With featured guest Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., USMC (Ret), Former NASA astronaut and administrator
Sponsorship opportunities available
RSVP Required

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30TH

TOUR TO THE VATICAN ADVANCED
TECHNOLOGY TELESCOPE

8:00 AM Departure from Tucson

6:00 PM Return to Tucson

RSVP Required

Transportation (to and from Tucson)
and lunch will be provided

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1ST

MEMORIAL MASS FOR THE REV.
GEORGE V. COYNE, S.J.

Director of the Vatican Observatory:
1978-2006

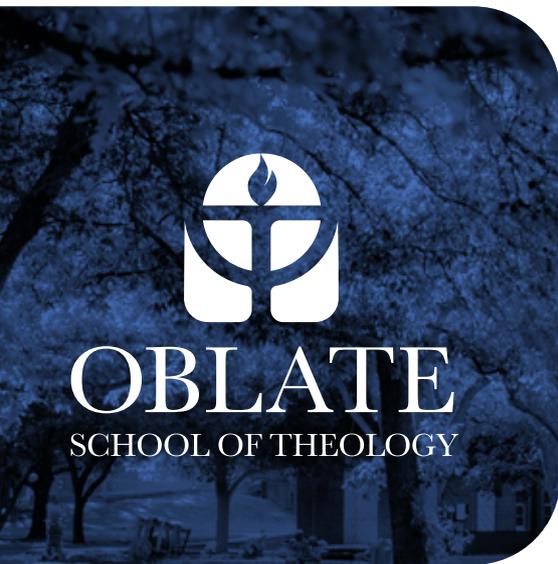
President of the Vatican Observatory
Foundation: 1987-2011

11:00 AM

Ss. Peter & Paul Church
Reception immediately following
RSVP Not Required

For more details, and the
full schedule of events
Friday through Monday, visit:
**[vaticanobservatory.org/
vatt30/](https://vaticanobservatory.org/vatt30/)**





Empower your Spiritual Growth

Embark on a Transformative Journey to Connect God's Word and Spirituality by Registering for Our Fall 2023 Online M.A. Programs.

FALL ENROLLMENT CLOSES AUGUST 17TH

Online Programs:

- M.A. Sacred Scripture
- M.A. Spirituality