

America

SEPTEMBER 2023

VIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

The church-wide gathering begins in October



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HANK CENTER

UPCOMING EVENTS



AGAINST FREE MARKET ECONOMICS: Lecture and Luncheon with Dr. Tony Annett
October 12, 2023
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM
Beane Hall, Lewis Towers,
Water Tower Campus

Free markets are good at producing wealth but fall quite short in engendering justice or well-being. On the other hand, Catholic social teaching— and the economic theories attached to the Catholic intellectual tradition— offer a more balanced view of market economies and the people they are meant to serve. Resisting free market ideology, Catholic social teaching emphasizes how the common good must take precedence in economic life. Anthony Annett, author of *Cathonomics: How Catholic Tradition Can Create a More Just Economy*, will explore the insights of this tradition in light of current debates. *Limited Space. Registration Required.*



SANT'EGIDIO LECTURE AND DISCUSSION: An Evening with Dr. Marco Impagliazzo
October 19, 2023
7:00 PM - 8:30 PM
Ignatius House,
Lakeshore Campus

The Hank Center, Sant'Egidio Chicago, and the Jesuit Community welcome Dr. Marco Impagliazzo, President of the Community at Loyola of Sant'Egidio, for an evening of insight and conversation. A Christian movement born in 1968, Sant'Egidio has become a network of communities in more than 70 countries of the world. Dr. Impagliazzo, a professor of History at University of Roma Tre, has modelled leadership in living out the Gospel in three different pontificates— serving people on the peripheries via Sant'Egidio and through his many appointments and service to the Curia Romana. *Free and Open to the Public. All are Welcome.*



POETS OF PRESENCE: FAITH, FORM, AND FORGING COMMUNITY
Keynote Presenter, Christian Wiman
October 27-28, 2023
Beane Hall, Lewis Towers,
Water Tower Campus

Presence is a community of writers who recognize Catholicism as fertile ground for the flourishing of contemporary poetry. This conference will consist of a series of readings, panels, reflections, and workshops— all sessions exploring the ways that poetry navigates the intersection of matter and spirit, depicts the struggle between faith and doubt, and engages the mystery of our lives in God. The gathering includes workshops on craft and coaching about how to get published. The conference concludes with a keynote address from award winning poet, Christian Wiman. This event is cosponsored by *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry* and The Curran Center at Fordham University. *Registration required. All are Welcome.*



ANNUAL TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, S.J. LECTURE: "THE SUBJECT OF PUBLIC RELIGION"
November 9, 2023
7:00 PM- 8:30 PM
McCormick Lounge, Coffey Hall,
Lakeshore Campus
In-person and Zoom

The Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., Fellowship in Catholic Studies is an annual, endowed fellowship sponsored by the Hank Center. Scholars from across disciplines and from around the world whose work intersects with the rich intellectual, artistic, and historical tradition of Roman Catholicism are invited to teach, research, and deliver a major lecture. This year's Teilhard Lecture, "The Subject of Public Religion," will be given by 2023 Teilhard Fellow, Fr. Paddy Gilger, S.J. *Free and Open to the Public for In-Person; Registration Required for Zoom. All are Welcome.*



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A High-Speed Autumn for Pope Francis

Pope Francis, who will celebrate his 87th birthday on Dec. 17, is now one of the oldest popes in history. He is in good health for a man of his age. The surgeon who operated on him a couple of months ago to treat an abdominal hernia said his heart, lungs, kidneys and other vital organs are in good shape, and he has the mental abilities of a 60-year-old. His main problem is mobility issues caused by his right knee, but thanks to therapy and weight loss, this has improved in recent months.

Francis appears determined to continue working at high speed in this final stretch of his ministry. He hopes to close the two-session synod on synodality at the end of October 2024 and to open the Jubilee Year of 2025.

In the meantime, he has many important events on his agenda between now and Dec. 31. I will mention the main ones—aware that Francis could spring surprises, just as he did with the nomination of 21 new cardinals, for whom he will hold a consistory on Sept. 30. Eighteen are electors with the right to vote in a conclave to choose his successor. On that date, close to 73 percent of the electors will have been chosen by him, increasing the likelihood that the next pope will be a man who shares his vision of a synodal church.

After that, the pope will open the two-session Synod on Synodality on Oct. 4 and attend its plenary sessions and greet the participants individually. He will close this first session on Oct. 29. As I have stated before, I believe this synod could well be the most transformative event in the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. It is the central event of the reform envisaged by Pope Francis; its roots can be found in “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (“The

Joy of the Gospel”), the programmatic document of this pontificate.

Between Sept. 1 and Dec. 31, Francis will also no doubt give much thought and prayer to the appointments he will make this fall to the Roman Curia, nunciatures (Vatican diplomatic missions) and dioceses worldwide. He is expected to replace some senior officials in the Curia, including those who have passed the retirement age of 75—among them Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, who heads the Apostolic Penitentiary, which is the supreme tribunal of the Vatican and is responsible for granting pardons to penitents in particular cases. (Francis calls it “the mercy court.”) He might also replace the secretaries of some dicasteries.

No fewer than 13 nunciatures are vacant today, and the men Francis assigns to those missions will significantly affect the life of the local churches. Many in Rome expect him to also appoint new nuncios to the United States and perhaps Italy before the end of the year, replacing the cardinals-elect Christophe Pierre and Emil Paul Tscherrig, who are both over the age of 75.

He will nominate many new bishops, again with particular attention to archbishops in several countries, including the United States, to succeed those who have reached the age of 75, just as he did earlier this year in Brussels, Buenos Aires, Madrid and Toronto.

A significant change already occurred this year on July 1, when Francis appointed the Argentine archbishop-theologian Victor Manuel Fernandez, now cardinal-elect, as the new prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. This Vatican office has two sections: one relating to theology, the other to disciplinary

questions. More than 80 percent of the disciplinary section’s work now involves cases of abuse in the church, but in a letter accompanying the appointment, Francis said he wants the new prefect to focus on theological issues and let the doctrinal section deal with the abuse issues.

Vatican sources now believe that Francis may wish to conduct a review of the doctrinal section of the dicastery, since the Pontifical Council for the Protection of Minors became part of that section when reform of the Curia took effect in June 2002. Since then, serious questions have been raised regarding the council’s management and direction, and sources expect Francis to intervene and address these.

Pope Francis will also certainly pay attention to the “trial of the century,” in which the Vatican chief prosecutor has asked for prison sentences for Cardinal Angelo Becciu, former chief of staff to Benedict XVI and Francis, and nine others accused of financial crimes relating to the purchase of a London property with Vatican funds in 2012. The three lay judges expect to deliver their verdict before Christmas.

The first Jesuit pope was scheduled to set out on his 43rd foreign trip at the end of August to visit Mongolia, the 61st country he will have visited. He is also considering visiting Kosovo next, but it is not clear if that will happen this year.

Last but not least, Francis will continue to devote time and attention to exploring ways to help end the war in Ukraine and ensure a just peace for that martyred nation.

Gerard O’Connell is *America’s Vatican correspondent*. Twitter: @gerryrome.



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Above: Pope Francis waves to the crowd at the end of the closing Mass for World Youth Day at Tejo Park in Lisbon, Portugal, Aug. 6.

Cover: A painting of Jesus and Lazarus featured in *Come Forth: The Promise of Jesus's Greatest Miracle*, by James Martin, S.J. Art by Julius Spradley, Contemplative Icons.

Creating a church that welcomes L.G.B.T. Catholics

In her feature in the last issue of **America**, Eve Tushnet describes a curriculum she is creating to welcome young L.G.B.T. Catholics. “Our hope is that, 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,” she writes, later noting that those contributing resources to the project “accept Catholic teaching in full.” The article elicited numerous responses from our readers.

This is a beautiful article filled with hope. But as a former religion teacher in a Catholic high school, I have to say that what a teacher says in class is subject to the local bishop’s approval or disapproval. So the author’s curriculum would have to have the approval of the bishop, and there are some bishops who would not allow for a more compassionate way of addressing homosexuality and gender issues. Our diocese does hire homosexual teachers but only on the condition that they do not share their sexual identity with students.

Ethel Sutherland

As a gay man (and former Catholic) growing up in the 1960s, I have my own “scars” from the Catholic Church. The teaching that it was not a sin to be homosexual but a sin to perform homosexual acts left a seemingly indelible stain on my psyche, which took years for me to heal from.

I admire and support L.G.B.T.Q.+ Catholics who have been able to reconcile with the church or faith of their childhood. In my own attempts to do so, and after much soul searching, I’ve concluded that I cannot belong to a church that offers me only conditional acceptance, a church that says I’m welcome yet tells me I’m wrong for expressing my sexuality.

It is my hope that in the efforts as described in this article, more dialogue will continue until such time as awareness will transcend traditions, doctrine and dogma, and the true teachings of Jesus about God’s all-encompassing and unconditional love will be revealed and taught. It is accessible to all who have the courage and willingness to look within.

Jack Daniel

As a gay Catholic who has pondered long and ever so hard about leaving the church, I can only envision entering any Catholic forum with the defensive posture of a pugilist. For the life of me, I can’t see how Ms. Tushnet’s initiative is going to sweep into view and with a creative flourish pull

this off. But I am old now, and correspondingly corroded by my tumultuous time on earth and in the church. I lack their spiritual vision. I have scant wisdom. So, I’ll sit in the shade reserved for the elders and watch to see how this is done.

Stephen Golden

Jesus told us not to judge others. Unfortunately, some self-described “orthodox” Catholics come across as not having grasped what Jesus himself taught, through words and through his actions. They seem to think it’s all about “right” beliefs, rather than about “right” actions. And since Jesus never mentioned homosexuality, today’s condemnation of homosexuality may not really be “right” belief. Maybe it’s time that those who are so quick to condemn L.G.B.T.Q. people change focus. Maybe they should find another place to direct their efforts. There are many worthy causes.

Anne Chapman

The notion that a sexual desire is a core part of a person’s identity is wrong. It should not be celebrated or promoted by any Catholic school. Reducing a human being to a sexual orientation makes no sense from a Catholic perspective.

Peter Paulson

Although there is an aching need for all Christians to practice radical forms of hospitality, the fundamental issue we need to address is related to identity. How, very specifically, do L.G.B.T.Q. people identify themselves? This helps to determine the “welcome” they will be afforded. Are they Catholics who are L.G.B.T.Q. people, or are they L.G.B.T.Q. people who want to be Catholic—but on their own terms? If they truly identify as the former, a greater receptivity can be attained. If they put L.G.B.T.Q. first, making this their primary identity, and not Christ, then further conversation and catechesis is required. A Christian’s primary identity is Christ, and all other identities serve this priority.

Donald Richmond

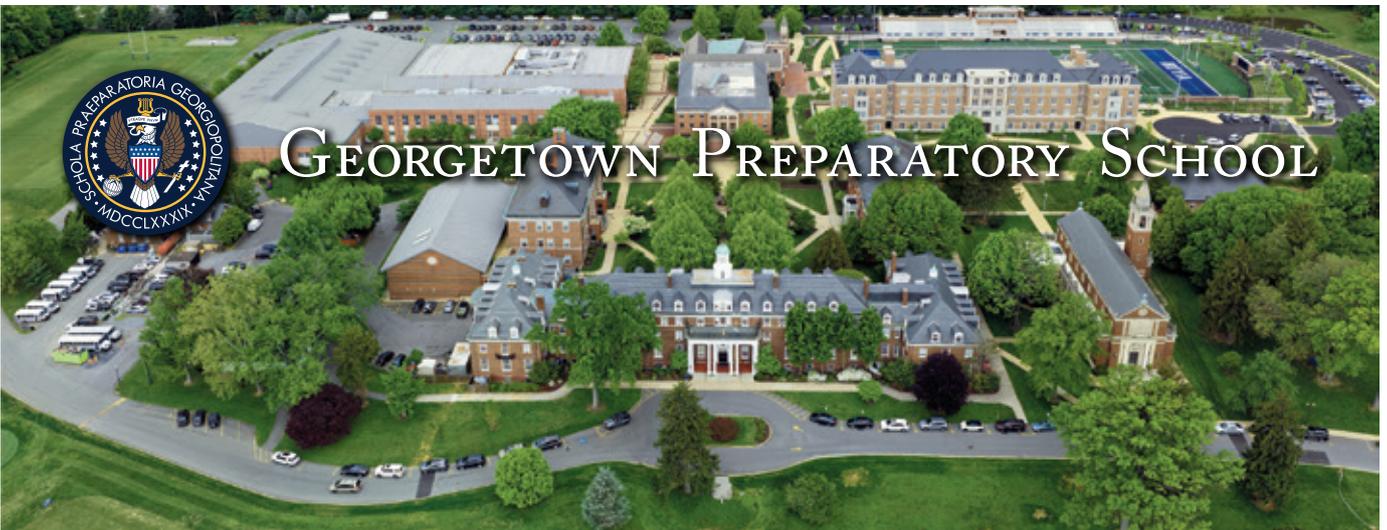


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www.gprep.org

Listen to the Young!

Pope Francis traveled to Lisbon, Portugal, this summer for his fourth World Youth Day, to listen to the hopes, challenges and questions of over one million young Catholics from every corner of the global church. He met with sexual abuse survivors, Ukrainian pilgrims, university students, young people suffering from illness; and he challenged them all to work for a “hope-filled future.”

A much smaller contingent of young people will have the pope’s ear this October in Rome at the first of two monthlong meetings in 2023 and 2024 of the Synod on Synodality on the themes of communion, participation and mission. For the first time in history, laypeople will have the right to vote in a synod, and among the voting members are college students and men and women in their 20s and 30s.

The pope has said, “Synod means walking on the same road, walking together.” As we embark on this new path in the life of the church, what are some guidelines to consider when thinking about listening to, and walking with, young people?

Young people are not a monolith. It can be unhelpful and reductive to speak about any group in the church as a unified bloc. In a similar way, we should avoid speaking of “young people” as if they all share a common perspective on or experience of church.

There are young Catholics who are drawn to more traditional liturgies and those who feel at home in a Catholic Worker House, and some find deep meaning in both. There are young Catholics who feel hurt and alienated by the church’s teaching on sexuality and others who see the church’s countercultural witness as a bulwark in a destabilizing, relativistic world. There are hundreds of thousands more who

have not set foot in a church since their baptism or confirmation. Outside the U.S. church, there are young people fighting in and fleeing from the war in Ukraine; young migrants risking their lives in the Mediterranean and on the Rio Grande; and others struggling in refugee camps across the Middle East and Africa.

When framed in this way, “listening to young people” can start to seem an impossible task. But this way of speaking may also shed some light on the sometimes opaque concept of synodality. If we are to truly listen to all these young voices, it will take more than a Vatican meeting or survey. It will require a new way of being church, a church that accompanies its people and is attuned to their hopes, doubts and lived experiences.

The church must admit its failures and offer something different. The working document for the synod says that a synodal church is one that “seeks to widen the scope of communion, but which must come to terms with the contradictions, limits and wounds of history.” Most young Catholics today have known only a church marred by the sexual abuse scandal—but that does not mean they see it as ancient history. While the church has made great strides in the protection of children and vulnerable adults, the revelations remain shocking for each new generation of Catholics as they mature. Church leaders must be forthright with young Catholics about past failures and transparent in their ongoing efforts to hold accountable those who covered up abuse. For young people to show up at the table, they have to trust they are speaking with adults who have their best interests at heart.

But the church has failed young people in other more subtle ways. It

can be easy to blame secular culture, or even young people themselves, for the exodus of millennials and Gen Zers from the pews. And there is plenty to critique about modern society. But we should ask ourselves: Have we failed to offer something different? Studies show that Gen Z is the loneliest generation. If these young people are not finding community in parishes, have we been bold enough in searching for new models of relationship? In a country marked by deep polarization, have Catholics too often indulged in those divides instead of seeking to be agents of reconciliation?

Young people today are hungry for authentic communion, both with other people and with God, but they are skeptical of institutions and allergic to hypocrisy. To be credible in their eyes, Catholics should be honest about our shortcomings but unafraid to go against the grain of an increasingly flattened, materialistic world.

Listening to young people does not mean idolizing youth. In his book *God Is Young*, Pope Francis writes: “Adolescents seek confrontation, they ask questions, they challenge everything, they look for answers. I can’t stress enough how important it is to question everything.” But he has also said that the church cannot think “she is young because she accepts everything the world offers her, thinking that she is renewed because she sets her message aside and acts like everybody else.”

There are many young people in the church—and many more who have left—who want to see church teaching, especially where it relates to women, L.G.B.T. people and divorced Catholics, better aligned with more modern values. Those voices will be represented at the synod and should be listened to, not for show but with an ear for

where the Holy Spirit may be working through them. Serious discernment will be needed to find our way forward, and that will require the wisdom from within the church that has spanned the ages, too.

Ask for more, not less, from young people. Among the delegates from the United States who will have the right to vote in October's synod is Julia Oseka, a junior at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. When asked what emerged from her synodal conversations over the past two years, she said, "[T]he feeling that young people are not merely the future of the church, but also the now of the church." While much discussion around the synod has rightly focused on Catholics with one foot in and one foot out of the church, we should not neglect the millions of young people already active in the church who are eager for their gifts to be more often accepted.

There are small steps we can take today, like making sure young people are invited to serve on parish councils—and that parish meetings accommodate the schedules of working adults and young parents—that could foster greater involvement among young people. But as the synod looks at more fundamental structural reforms to church governance, participants should not overlook or underestimate the skills, energy and dedication young people are already prepared to offer the church.

Young people will always be among us, and as Pope Francis said at his first World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro in 2013, they are sometimes called to "make a mess." The church's job is not to clean up after them but to harness their restless, creative energy in service of the kingdom.

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To save their missions, Catholic colleges must learn to do less

Catholic colleges and universities talk a lot about “mission.” The word comes up in hiring decisions, in long-term planning and in debates over religious identity. Missions often connect institutions to their founding religious orders or to actual missionaries posted to what was once a far-flung region. Ideally, a strong sense of mission inspires all who learn and work at a university to attain common goals.

But as a handful of Catholic colleges have closed this year, the question of mission is becoming an existential one. “The unstated mission of small Catholic colleges is to stay open,” a former professor at one such college recently told me in an interview. “It’s very hard for them to pay attention to anything else.”

The more than 200 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States are under pressure. Like all educational institutions, they continue to dig out from the Covid-19 pandemic’s disruption of work and learning. In addition, there are signs that Americans are becoming skeptical of the value of higher education. Like their institutional peers, Catholic colleges, especially in the Northeast and Midwest, are competing for a shrinking pool of prospective students.

In such difficult circumstances, anything that might keep an institution going can seem like a smart move. The choice is often between doing more and doing less. University leaders can create new programs, increase workloads and acquire more buildings to house more students. Or they can cut programs and budgets.

Because cuts are painful to anyone who is laid off and can harm the morale of those who remain, many colleges and universities understandably try to solve their financial problems by attempting to do more. But an

expansive agenda, even if undertaken in the name of continuing the mission, is counterproductive, in the view of the Harvard researchers Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner. In their book *The Real World of College*, they coin the term *projectitis* to describe “the rapid increase of centers, staff, and initiatives that are created in efforts to achieve the raft of missions, but which all too often overwhelm and confuse students.”

Projectitis makes any institution’s mission and identity more diffuse, and it simply creates too much for people to do. This pursuit “is ultimately self-defeating, if not suicidal, for the institution,” Ms. Fischman and Mr. Gardner write. “When you seek to be ‘all things to all persons,’ you likely mean nothing that matters to anyone.”

And universities take a risk when they chase apparent growth areas. For example, over the past two decades, a looming shortage of pharmacists led dozens of U.S. universities to open pharmacy degree programs. Since 2011, though, the number of students applying to pharmacy school has fallen by 62 percent, and some programs will likely shut down.

The prudent strategy for financially precarious Catholic colleges, I am afraid, is to do less, both to conserve resources and to avoid the burnout that can come from trying to do the same things with a smaller staff. But that “less” must be guided by a principled understanding of their unique calling, not just what seems financially expedient in the moment.

Here, too, Catholic colleges and universities face a choice. They can try to compete with their public and private peers by becoming more like them, or they can identify what makes them distinctive and seek a niche where they can flourish. Pursuing

a niche will not save every troubled Catholic college—the economics for some may just be too dire—but it may be the only way, given the intense competition among schools, to make a college worth saving.

Don’t Slash Liberal Arts

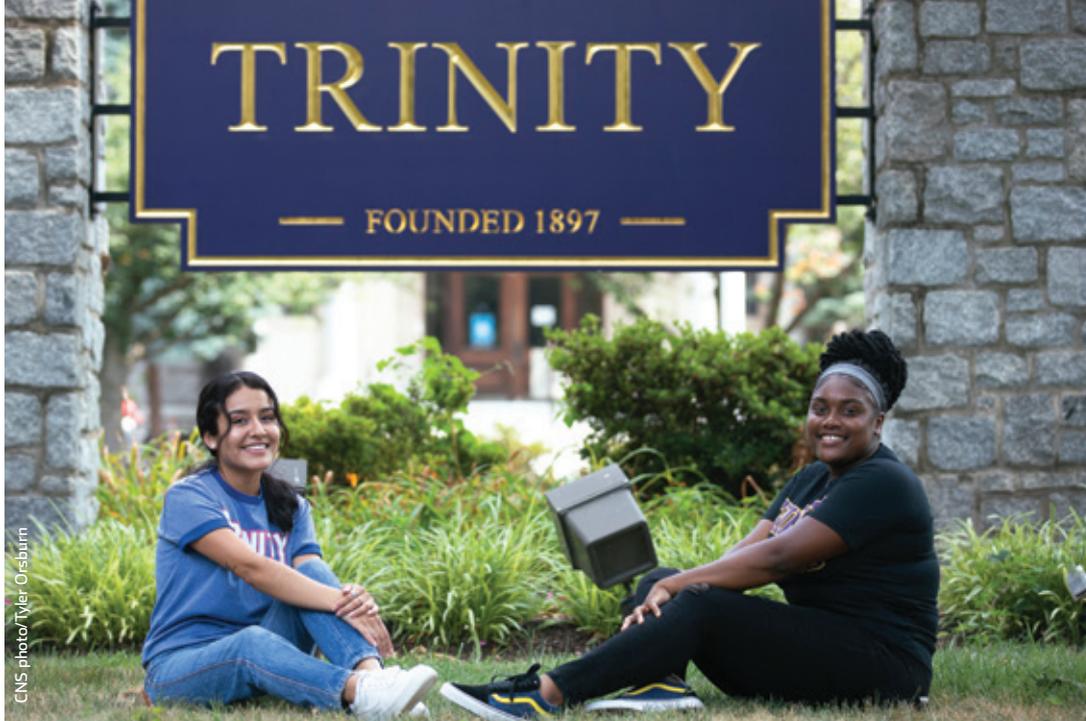
Several Catholic colleges have followed a flawed script by eliminating traditional liberal arts majors. Marymount University, in Arlington, Va., drew headlines when it cut nine undergraduate majors, including art, English, history, mathematics, philosophy, sociology and theology. Belarmine University, in Louisville, Ky., is cutting several majors, including philosophy and physics, while raising money to support its move to NCAA Division I athletics in 2020.

True, the shuttered majors had low enrollment. But by the universities’ reasoning, if few students visit the campus chapel, the school should turn it into a gym.

It is not clear that cutting liberal arts majors even helps a university stay afloat. Two years ago, the president of Cabrini University, in Radnor, Pa., said that cutting virtually all humanities programs would “enable the institution to deliver on its mission in a way that is strategic, market-driven and sustainable.” This past June, the university announced it would close.

When every small Catholic school has shifted resources from its traditional academic base in the arts and sciences to newer programs in business, engineering, nursing and cybersecurity, they become indistinguishable from one another. Why should any student enroll at *this college*, as opposed to the next one over?

A small college’s mission should be narrow, something it alone can do. When cuts are needed, the first things



CNS photo/Tyler Osburn

Trinity Washington University reversed an enrollment decline by focusing on historically underserved communities. Pictured: Trinity students Elizabeth Silva and Annissa Young in 2021.

to go should be those that do not align with the central mission. But to do that, a college or university first needs to know what its mission is.

University leaders might think of mission in terms of vocation: a singular, God-given purpose. As William C. Spohn wrote in an article for **America** 20 years ago, vocation in the Ignatian tradition “is no generic obligation, but rather a call to individuals tailored both to their talents and the community’s needs.” It is unique to who you are.

The concept of vocation can certainly be abused. If your work is a calling, some thinking goes, why not do it regardless of limits on your time or employment contract? In religious higher education, “language like *family* and *vocation* [is] used to impose vicious expectations of self-sacrifice,” wrote the University of Portland theology professors Brandy Daniels and David Farina Turnbloom in an article for the Christian magazine *The Other Journal* this spring. University administrators must not appeal to mission or vocation just to squeeze more work out of people.

A proper understanding of vocation does not mean always pushing for more. A personal vocation takes

into account one’s unique circumstances and limitations. Mr. Spohn wrote that St. Ignatius Loyola and his companions could not follow every worthwhile path open to them: Ignatius “could not be a shaggy hermit and also be of service to people in the public arena.” The first Jesuits “wanted to be itinerant preachers but found that what their world actually needed was schools and solid learning.” To fulfill their calling, they had to let some worthy activities go.

Ms. Fischman and Mr. Gardner recommend that universities sharpen their missions by focusing on high-quality academics and one other thing. That additional focus could be contemplative spirituality, or a preferential option for the poor, or great books, or the arts or athletics. But it should be *one thing* that distinguishes the university from its peers. “Then, once agreed upon,” they write, “the school needs to embody the mission—so that even a casual observer knows what College A is about and can see, hear, or feel it in action.”

A Catholic college that more clearly identifies its calling in light of its history, its location, and its strengths and weaknesses will surely leave potential sources of funding and

student markets untapped. But it may find that, with a clearer sense of purpose, new opportunities emerge.

For example, Trinity Washington University, in Washington, D.C., had long been a Catholic liberal arts college that enrolled elite, mostly white women, but by the 1980s enrollment had dwindled to only 300 students. The future looked bleak. In the 1990s, Trinity began to focus on recruiting women from nearby communities that had been historically underserved by higher education, and by last year Trinity’s enrollment was up to 1,800. A strong mission, well-lived and well-marketed, will not just react to prospective students’ preferences but shape them.

It may seem that addressing big questions about mission is a luxury pursuit, something to ignore when times are hard. But in fact, the current challenges make such questions all the more essential. If, backed into a corner, a university cannot say why it exists, then maybe it shouldn’t.

Jonathan Malesic is the author of *The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives*. He teaches writing at Southern Methodist University. Twitter: @jonmalesic.



CNS photo/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters

Can an 'Orange' holiday be proclaimed for all Ireland? July 12 offers a step toward unity

A controversy erupted in the Republic of Ireland this summer when Patrick Costello, a member of Parliament for the Green Party, proposed that July 12 be made a public holiday across Ireland.

The date is already a holiday in Northern Ireland, where it is celebrated as Orangemen's Day, or "The Twelfth," commemorating the victory of Protestant King William of Orange over Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The reality behind that battle involved a complex of continental rivalries among European powers such that the pope sided with the Protestant pretender to the British throne against a Catholic monarch. But such nuance has been forgotten over the centuries, and the day has become synonymous with sectarianism and violent unrest.

It is associated most closely with the Orange Order, a Protestant supremacist organization founded in 1795 to

oppose the United Irishmen, a revolutionary democratic movement that sought to unite Irish Catholics, Protestants and Dissenters against British rule. The Orangemen parade with their brass bands on July 12 in commemoration of William's victory, often through Catholic neighborhoods and towns in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Costello's proposal to make the 12th an all-Ireland holiday has not been met with a warm reception. A former government minister described the popular response as "a mixture of diatribe and incredulity." This position is not hard to understand. The bonfires held on the night of July 11 and the parades that follow on the 12th are often deeply offensive to Northern Irish Republicans, citizens of the Irish Republic and Catholics.

This year, for example, one bonfire in a housing estate in County Tyrone was topped by a Republic of Ireland flag,

a portrait of the Irish taoiseach (prime minister) and a boat effigy indicating a rejection of the 1998 accords that brought an end to the Northern Irish Troubles. (It carried the message: “Good Friday Agreement? That ship has sailed.”) It is not uncommon for slogans targeting “Taigs” (a slur directed at Catholics) to adorn these bonfires.

But Northern Irish Unionists—those who want to remain a part of the United Kingdom and do not want a unified Ireland—often see the extension of this holiday into the calendar of the Republic of Ireland as the low-hanging fruit of any constitutional conversation toward unity. This is the view of Claire Mitchell, an acclaimed writer known for her work on Northern Irish Protestant and Unionist communities. It is “unity 101, really,” she says.

Creating another public holiday is among the “very straightforward asks” that Unionists would make if there were a serious plan for reunification. But at the same time, she was surprised by Mr. Costello’s proposal now. “The timing was off, outside of the context of reunification.”

Ms. Mitchell has noticed that these conversations tend to generate two contrasting positions, both misguided. The first reaction was seen prominently in response to Mr. Costello’s proposal. By focusing only on the sectarian strands of the July festivities, that response effectively demonizes entire communities. The other reaction seeks to overcome the contentious dialogue required for reconciliation through a sort of rebranding exercise. We must be cautious, Ms. Mitchell warns, about “the desire to sanitize July 12th.”

In reality, the holiday is presently a chance for some organizations to indulge in vulgar and virulent bigotries that invariably spill over into heightened tensions between communities and sometimes into violence. These actions are always well publicized.

But less likely to generate headlines are the local community initiatives that perceive in July 12 festivities an opportunity to weave more inclusive narratives. In many places, the stark exclusionary culture is dissipating. Ms. Mitchell notes that it is easy to overlook “how de-escalated everything already is.” In many places, “boundaries already are very fuzzy.”

The increased seriousness with which reunification is being discussed is largely driven by the consequences of Brexit. The United Kingdom’s decision to leave the European Union in 2016 (Northern Ireland voted to remain, but that did not change the outcome) created a series of complications for the Northern Irish peace process around borders, access to the European Common Market and residency. Invariably, questions of national identity are affect-

ed by these practical policy implications.

Daniel Mulhall was the Irish ambassador to the United Kingdom during the Brexit decision. Retired from the Irish diplomatic corps, he is now serving as a fellow of Magdalene College at Cambridge University. His position is that “Brexit was deeply unhelpful and those promoting it had a callous disregard for the consequences in Northern Ireland.”

He understands the strong negative reaction to the July 12th proposals because “there are lots of raw feelings, in part because there are many victims still around.” From his perspective, the July 12th festivities are an “annual provocation” that make peace-building more difficult.

But he also thinks that “in a divided society you have to reach out to find some common ground.”

Reaching out to all communities, he says, has been the primary concern of the Irish state for decades. “It isn’t easy,” he says, to bridge the chasm between diametrically opposed ideologies. “If it was easy, we would have done it already!” But if people in the republic are sincere in their wish for a unified Ireland, he said, they must develop “a comprehensive understanding of Unionism” and find grounds for respect and dialogue.

Brexit has pressed this conversation upon the island in a new way, but for Mr. Mulhall, the Irish people will really know they are making progress when “everything is up for discussion.” That so many people rejected the July 12th proposal out of hand suggests Ireland is not quite there yet.

Ms. Mitchell sees a similar dynamic at play. The Brexit policy complications present a stark contrast between Northern Ireland—without a sitting parliament and dependent on a lagging United Kingdom for support—and the Republic of Ireland, a thriving, pluralist liberal democracy.

“In many ways Northern Ireland is a failed State,” Mr. Mitchell says, “and the vast majority of Unionists are like everyone else. If they could be guaranteed an Irish [National Health Service], safe pensions and a good welfare state, most of the ‘heavy lifting’ of unification would be done.”

Middle-class Unionists may want to keep the region’s distinctive secondary school system, and people in the Republic might be surprised by how opposed their northern neighbors are to military neutrality, Mr. Mitchell says, but those discussions will only prosper when they are set within the wider context of meaningful policy shifts orientated toward unifying the island.

Mr. Mulhall reckons that one of the major challenges will be to bring the full range of Unionist voices to the table. “It’s all very well for us to imagine how to unify,” but “we have to engineer some kind of dialogue to allow Unionists

to set out what really matters to them.”

Ms. Mitchell strongly agrees. If she were to advise political leaders in Dublin, she would warn that “the real danger is in having conversations purely with the ‘Unionist imaginary’ when the normal stuff will win the day.”

You could make concessions on everything—“the anthem, the flag, membership [in] the Commonwealth, and there would still be a contingent who would be ‘raging’” at the prospect of a unified Ireland, she says. Creating the context for constructive dialogue is the challenge facing those who do wish to see a unified Ireland.

There are already all-island bodies that overlap both jurisdictions. The most obvious are the churches. The Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church were each formalized long before independence and so remain cross-border institutions.

Each offers examples of how diversity and difference can be contained within a singular identity. Whatever surprises are ahead for the people on the island of Ireland as they contemplate unification, it is certain that Christians will have to play a central role if there is to be true reconciliation.

Starting difficult conversations is part of that work. Even if Mr. Costello’s idea was not warmly received, in the long view, his July 12 proposal might prove to be a prophetic signal for what comes next.

Kevin Hargaden *contributes from Dublin. Twitter: @kevinhargaden.*

Catholic schools in 2023 at a glance

Catholic schools have endured a whipsaw from the Covid-19 pandemic in recent years. After suffering a decline in enrollment of 6.4 percent in 2020-21 (the largest drop in nearly 50 years), the national Catholic school system enjoyed an enrollment increase in 2021-22 of 3.7 percent. The school year that recently ended brought a more modest increase of 0.3 percent, so enrollment has yet to match pre-pandemic levels. Early childhood enrollment increased from 124,134 in 2019-20 to 170,410 in 2022-23. (Read “Catholic Schools After Covid” on Page 26 of this issue to find out more about how Catholic schools are faring in the post-pandemic era.)



28—percentage of students enrolled in Catholic schools through parental choice programs. **Catholic school students in Arizona** utilized parental choice programs the most—74% of students—followed by Indiana at 53%.

44—number of school closures and consolidations in 2022-23. Down significantly from pre-pandemic averages of 100 annually.

2022-23 CATHOLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

	Number of students	Number of schools
Elementary schools	1,174,744	4,746
Secondary schools	521,749	1,174
All schools	1,693,493	5,920

CHANGE IN ENROLLMENT 2019-20 TO 2022-23

Region	% change in students	% change in schools
Southeast	1.7%	-2.2%
Plains	0.1%	0.5%
New England	-1.3%	-8.6%
Great Lakes	-2.0%	-2.3%
West/Far West	-3.3%	-3.3%
Mideast	-7.5%	10.6%

Source: National Catholic Educational Association. The Mideast region consists of Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

GOODNEWS: A place to call home for adults with autism

Kristin Thatcher knew she did not want to live in a group home.

Before 2020, the Staten Island native faced a problem that is growing for households across the country. Educational institutions provide structure and support for children and teens who are on the autism spectrum, but many of those services are less available as they transition into adulthood.

Young adults with autism have few places to turn when they “fall off the cliff,” as some professionals call the abrupt end of services autistic adults received as children. This leads many autistic adults to live at home for years with parents who worry for their children as they age.

The most recent numbers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that one in 36 children comes of age with an autism spectrum disorder in the United States. Yet despite the prevalence of the condition, the question of how to assist autistic adults remains a growing challenge, according to advocates.

Kristin lived in her childhood home into adulthood, and her mother, Lynn Thatcher, was unsure whether her daughter could live independently. “From a parent’s perspective, we always worry about what’s going to happen when we’re not here anymore,” Ms. Thatcher said.

But in January 2020, Kristin Thatcher did something she and her mother never thought she would be able to do: She moved out. ArchCare, the Archdiocese of New York’s continuing care initiative, had converted St. Teresa’s, a former convent on Staten Island, into supportive living apartments for autistic adults aged 24 to 35.

On March 1, ArchCare broke ground on the program’s second apartment building in Eastchester, N.Y., at a former convent on the grounds of Immaculate Conception Church. Donna Maxon, ArchCare’s independent housing managing agent, said the model gives a remarkable amount of autonomy to autistic adults who do not need around-the-clock care.

“Everybody, regardless of your background or your circumstances, desires to live as independently as possible in the most respectful setting as possible,” said Ms. Maxon. “And that’s what I think we create and accomplish with these housing projects.”

The building in Eastchester, like the program at St. Teresa’s, will house eight to 10 residents. Independent living means that residents have complete control over their own apartments—furniture, decorations and day-to-day decisions about meals and bedtimes.



Vincent Mazzone and Michael Prindle, tenant liaison at the ArchCare facility in Staten Island, enjoy a video game together.

Kristin said that these freedoms are exactly what she hoped for but did not imagine she would be able to find while she was researching supportive housing opportunities. “It’s really fun being able to live on my own, make my own choices, making sure my apartment is nice and clean and doing all the adult things,” she said.

Ultimately, what makes the ArchCare model work is the network of communication among the families of residents. Kristin and her mom know the other members of the community well—including Vincent Mazzone, another St. Teresa’s resident since 2020, and his mother, Millie Mazzone.

Ms. Mazzone explained that before Vincent moved to his apartment, she felt that she would always need to be close at hand in case anything happened. But in the three years since Vincent moved, Ms. Mazzone has learned to rely on the other St. Teresa’s families.

“I’ve gotten to know a lot of the kids’ siblings and their parents. We do favors for each other,” she said. “It’s nice to know you can count on more than just your family.”

That kind of relationship does require a small, tight-knit group. This reality, combined with the limited size of the convent buildings, means ArchCare cannot accept more than a handful of those who apply. Ms. Maxon said that the need for this kind of housing far outpaces what the archdiocese is able to provide, adding that for many adults with autism, this level of independence would be impossible.

But it works well for Vincent. After more than three years in the program, he continues to thrive at St. Teresa’s. His mother called the project a “godsend.”

“From the time Vincent was diagnosed, I kept wondering, ‘How long will I be here for him?’ But I have to tell you, I no longer worry about that,” Ms. Mazzone said.

Christopher Parker, *O’Hare fellow*.
Twitter: @cparkernews.



‘Push the people back into the water’ Texas bishops condemn inhumane border policies after leaked email

Operation Lone Star was launched by Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas in March 2021. A unilateral response to conditions at the border with Mexico that the Catholic governor charged had reached crisis proportions, the operation (at a cost so far of an estimated \$4.5 billion) included the enlistment of the Texas National Guard in border security efforts. Operation Lone Star has turned to increasingly controversial methods to attempt to prevent migrating people from crossing the border, including the deployment of more than 60 miles of razor wire.

“The fortification of the border in this way—with river barriers, concertina wire and deployed personnel—is profoundly concerning,” said C. Mario Russell, the executive director of the Center for Migration Studies in New York, in an email to **America**. “These look like wartime defenses, ones that now are being used to threaten and harm young families, mothers, children and men who are seeking safe haven and help.”

Operation Lone Star came under new scrutiny in July after the installation of buoys designed as water barriers in the Rio Grande that critics say will lead to the deaths of more migrating people. Even more troubling were revelations that came to light in an email exchange between

a Texas state trooper and his supervisor, reported by The Houston Chronicle. In the exchange, the trooper Nicholas Wingate, a paramedic, reported receiving orders in encounters with migrating people that he called “inhumane.”

Mr. Wingate described coming upon a group of 120 migrants, including young children and nursing mothers, on June 25 in rural Maverick County on the U.S. side of the Rio Grande. He said the group was “exhausted, hungry and tired,” but he was given orders to “push the people back into the water to go to Mexico and get into our vehicle and leave.”

In another encounter, he said, a 19-year-old woman was found bleeding and trapped in the “casualty wire,” “doubled over” in pain. After cutting her out of the razor wire, the troopers discovered she was experiencing a miscarriage.

The email chain with the trooper included a log showing 38 encounters between June 25 and July 1 with migrants in need of medical assistance, ranging from weakness to lacerations, broken limbs and drownings. A dozen of the injured migrants were less than a year old.

Responding to the trooper’s accounts of border encounters, the Texas Conference of Catholic Bishops said:

Migrants walk near concertina wire as they seek to cross the Rio Grande at the Texas-U.S. border in Eagle Pass, Tex., on July 6.

“These reports stir our hearts again for the plight of our sisters and brothers who are seeking a better life. These mothers, fathers, children, and others are doing what anyone would do to find a better life. They have moved to secure honest work and a safe community.

“The fact that they were born in a place which could not provide these basic human rights does not give anyone the right to treat them inhumanely,” the bishops said.

“People of faith and conscience cannot look away from the fact that these actions are done by government employees in our name,” Anna Gallagher, the executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, said in a statement released on July 20. “Either we believe that all people bear untouchable dignity, or we don’t. Permitting this despicable behavior denies that truth and rejects the deepest principles of our Catholic faith and our nation’s values.”

As outrage over the trooper’s accounts of migrant suffering at the border mounted on July 18, Mr. Abbott’s office issued a statement that said no orders have been given as part of Operation Lone Star “that would compromise the lives of those attempting to cross the border illegally.”

“Welcoming those in need with dignity and compassion is a core value that must inform our actions and responses,” Mr. Russell said, “even if it is simply to give each an opportunity to be heard by immigration and make their case for protection.

“The system can and must be improved. That is where to start, not with barriers and barbed wire.”

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent*. Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica. With reporting from The Associated Press.



In Jerusalem’s Old City, Christians face daily harassment

Christians and their Jewish supporters in Israel are reporting a dramatic increase in anti-Christian incidents, ranging from spitting to vandalism, especially in Jerusalem’s Old City—where Jewish, Christian and Muslim holy sites are located in close proximity to one another and where Christian clerics and religious men and women are more visible.

“This is a dramatic change,” Nikodemus Schnabel, O.S.B., said. “It is much worse than 20 years ago when I entered monastic life, when a spitting incident happened once every six months. Now...I am spit on every day.”

Since elections in November 2022 that led to a hard-right government, a number of serious attacks have been recorded against Christians. But the majority of spitting cases and individual acts of harassment go unreported to authorities, the Israeli researcher and interfaith activist Yisca Harani said, because there is a lack of confidence in the police, and foreign clergy fear having their visas revoked.

At the St. James Armenian Cathedral, adjacent to the Jewish Quarter, Christian clergy are frequent targets. Though the attacks are recorded by surveillance cameras, legal action against the perpetrators is rarely taken.

“Whenever we show police the videos, they say it is under investigation, but instead of decreasing, [spitting attacks are] increasing,” the Rev. Aghan Gogchyan, chancellor for the Armenian Patriarchate, said.

“The problem is whenever [perpetrators] don’t get a harsh punishment,” Father Gogchyan added, “they take that as encouragement that they can do it without being punished.”

Dr. Gadi Gvaryahu, chairman of Tag Meir, a civil rights coalition, told Israeli media that he felt that a restraining strap in Israeli society has been broken because of the inclusion in the government of political parties that promote Jewish supremacy.

Extremists “feel they are allowed to do anything,” he said.

Judith Sudilovsky reports from Jerusalem. Twitter: @jsudireports.



"We received some food that really helped us, but what I value the most is the way they (JRS) approached us and cared for us, we received — and still receive — the emotional support we needed."

Abed, after the Syrian Earthquake destroyed his family home

"the more" *"the greater good"*

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Pope Francis

Our Programs:

As a Catholic organization and a work of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), JRS is inspired by the compassion and love of Jesus for the poor and excluded. **We believe that education, learning together, and sharing knowledge are vital ingredients to nourish hope in people.**

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Our Values:

Dignity

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Solidarity

JRS is a work of the Society of Jesus, carrying out the Society's mission of faith and justice through humble and respectful service in solidarity with refugees from diverse cultures, nationalities and religions.

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JRS upholds the principle of subsidiarity, endeavouring to be openly accountable for its work and transparent in its decision-making. We work in partnership with other religious congregations, humanitarian organizations, and with refugees themselves, encouraging co-responsibility, discernment, and participative decision-making.

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The JRS mission is built on our faith in God who is present in human history, even in its most tragic moments. We are inspired by this faith and by core values that inform all the work we do.

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Learning to Be a Better Church

Renewal can begin by embracing a cosmic spirit

By Cecilia González-Andrieu

Forgive the assumption, but if you are reading this, you likely identify as belonging to the church. Or, at the very least, you are curious about conversations involving religious traditions. You are probably also aware that these days, the percentage of religiously unaffiliated persons in the United States (often called “nones”) is now larger than the number of Catholics and is growing at a much faster rate. Young people, especially, are walking away.

But even those of us who call ourselves Catholic have our doubts. A 2020 report called “The State of Religion & Young People,” published by the Springtide Research Institute, reveals that over half of young people who identify as religiously affiliated report low levels of trust in religious institutions. According to truly sobering data from the Public Religion Research Institute’s “2022 Health of Congregations Survey,”

among those who have switched from their childhood religion to “none,” 39 percent were Catholic. As they leave, these former Catholics are heartbreakingly but accurately often referred to as “dones.”

As multiple studies also show, many of these nones or dones continue to wrestle with pressing questions about the meaning of life. They express a desire to relate to the world in ways that are expansive and compassionate; they just find no link between their concerns and religious faith. At a talk I gave recently, I asked hundreds of Latino Catholics for a show of hands if the issue of the ecology and the papal encyclical “Laudato Si” had been engaged in their parishes. I counted the positive responses on one hand. And yet, we know from recent surveys that climate change is a major source of concern for young people. Pope Francis knows the importance of ecological awareness and



The moon over Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming; CNS photo/Go Nakamura, Reuters

The Holy Spirit's work in the world is to orient and nurture creation continually toward the God of life and beauty.

activism, encourages it and nurtures this planetary attentiveness. The majority of our U.S. parishes apparently do not. When we fail to connect faith and action, the reign of God seems very far indeed.

The Response of Mercy

What this (admittedly oversimplified) picture reveals is that we who are still active members of the church must do our best to connect the Gospel message with our everyday lives; we must live out that message authentically and lovingly. And, as part of this effort, we are called to respond to those who have left (or are struggling to remain) with mercy. The Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino defines mercy as “a reaction in the face of the suffering of another, which one has interiorized.” If we attune our hearts to our present reality, we must grieve with those who have left the church

or are trying to find a reason to remain in the church. Their experiences require our attention, and it is crucial that we respond not with temporary bandages but by asking fundamental questions.

The heart of these efforts is not about filling the pews, but about learning to be a better church precisely because we dare feel the sting of the collective loss we are experiencing. There are many lessons to be learned from those on the margins. In exhorting the church to go out to the peripheries, Pope Francis offers the central insight that “to embrace the margins is to expand our horizons, for we see more clearly and broadly from the edges of society.” This holds not just for the broader society but for our church, too.

To take seriously what is being revealed from our peripheries and beyond them is good for the life of the church. First, it helps us define why we even *want* to be



In our exceptionally complicated time, what does the reign of God require?

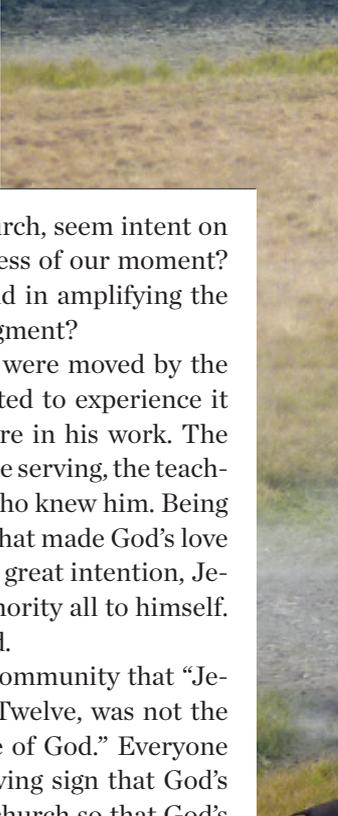
church. Second, it helps us see our present moment with more clarity. And third, it reveals new possibilities.

Why Be Church?

In his insightful book *Who Is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology*, the theologian Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., issues a warning: “Catholics move too quickly from Jesus to the Church.” He cautions that such facile identification ignores the historical circumstances of Jesus’ life and the real human communities that formed as a response. When we read Jesus through post-resurrection lenses, we too often jump to an assumption that the way the church operates now was the way it always has been. But if we also take the time to read ourselves today through the context of Jesus’ historical experience, we may get back to why any of us even bother to belong to this faith, to be a part of an institution.

First, what we call the community of the church has always been in flux. Our church is not a phenomenon outside of history but a community dynamically enmeshed in the demands of history. As Father Sobrino stresses, the constant revelation of what is real in the world (*la realidad*) requires our response, and for him this response is an act of faith. “Spirituality,” he tells us, “is the spirit with which we confront the concrete history in which we live with all its complexity.”

Jesus and his friends lived during difficult times, politically, religiously and economically. So do we. Their world, for all its difficulties, was quite small, and most scholars agree that Jesus was centered on renewing his Jewish religious community. Jesus confronted the reality of suffering not in generalities but in particular circumstances; and he did so primarily by expressing God’s being as pure unconditional love. Is that a reason to be church? Are we here to form a community that can effectively confront the accelerating chaos of history with the spirit of constant love? What about the difficult demands this makes? Are people



leaving the church because we, as church, seem intent on looking away from the stark brokenness of our moment? Or worse yet, because we have a hand in amplifying the pain through our divisiveness and judgment?

Second, Jesus invited those who were moved by the vision of God’s abundance he presented to experience it flowing through him and then to share in his work. The feeding, the healing, the welcoming, the serving, the teaching—this was work to be done by all who knew him. Being sent meant doing something specific that made God’s love constantly present in the world. With great intention, Jesus did not keep his ministry and authority all to himself. He shared it, he guided, he empowered.

Father Rausch stresses that the community that “Jesus founded when he appointed the Twelve, was not the Church but the eschatological people of God.” Everyone who shares in his work becomes a living sign that God’s reign is arriving. Are we called to be church so that God’s abundance for us may flow into the world multiplied by our hands? Are people walking away because we hide behind layers of exclusionary rules (something Jesus also bristled against) rather than inviting them to become the gifts for others God needs them to be?

Remarkably, the “Health of Congregations Survey” also points to a group for whom Christian faith continues to be the most important influence in their lives. This group asserts that the church should offer the community guidance on social concerns, and unlike other U.S. groups, a sizable majority affirm that “Congregations should get involved in social issues, even if that means having challenging conversations about politics.” This group is Black Protestants, Christians who understand that addressing painful issues by the light of faith is essential to the very faith they profess.

As Father Sobrino exhorts, “the mystery of God” becomes “present in concrete reality. Transcendence becomes present in history.” The Black church carries the memory of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s skillful linking of the love expressed in the Christian Gospel to the demands of human rights. And they continue this vibrant work with social movements like the Poor People’s Campaign, a national movement “rooted in a moral analysis based on our deepest religious and constitutional values that demand justice for all.” Christianity is intensely alive in this community because Jesus accompanies their struggles and the Spirit inspires them. As Dr. King insisted, to work against racism was not his idea but was faithfulness to God’s vision for reality.



Bison in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming; CNS photo/Katherine Nuss

We must reckon with the tragedy that humans—creatures made in God’s image—are the ones mercilessly destroying everything God so lovingly made.

Why Be Church Now?

In a conversation recorded almost a century ago, Mahatma Gandhi said: “I like your Christ, but not your Christianity. I believe in the teachings of Christ, but you on the other side of the world do not. I read the Bible faithfully and see little in Christendom that those who profess faith pretend to see.” He said these words in 1927. With the horrors of the First World War still fresh and World War II not yet on the horizon, Gandhi described Christians as “the most warlike people” of the world and connected this to insatiable greed.

So let us imagine Jesus and his friends actually in our midst right now. What would their reaction be to our current era? Would their hearts break because we are running out of clean water? *Jesus Christ, Water of Life, have mercy on us.*

Would they knock over the tables of our skyscraper temples to profit? Would they be scandalized that rather than feeding the 5,000 (Mt 14:13-21), some of us hoard every fish and loaf of bread, while the 4,999 starve? *Jesus Christ, Bread of Life, have mercy on us.*

How loudly might they weep for the millions without access to health care, or education, or a living wage? *Jesus Christ, Light of the World, have mercy on us.*

How could they make sense of a world where we seem willing to give up our freedom to think, make moral judgments and create so that something we call artificial intelligence can do the work for us? Where bombs rain down on the innocent, children are gunned down in schools, and strangers are turned away in their suffering? *Jesus Christ, Wisdom of God, grant us peace.*

So many young people in our world are longing for an invitation to go into the streets ready to right these wrongs. In this desire, aren’t they sharing in Jesus’ ministry and enacting Christ’s power-for-others? Does our collective inaction in the face of so much suffering communicate that, as a church, we don’t know who this Christ we proclaim really is? That we have not taken this message to heart?

If we did, who would not want to be part of that?

This is Christianity’s largely unrealized potential; the world-transforming power Gandhi saw squandered. This is the truth that Dr. King, Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day and many women and men before and since have understood. God is love; when love is denied to one another and to our fragile common home, we have denied God (1Jn 4:7-9). Our God has died and continues to die by our hand, repeating over and over again that fateful day at Calvary.

Where to Begin?

Jon Sobrino tells us that if we look with honesty at what is happening around us and respond with mercy, we will realize that “love and hope mean helping to bring to light the better, the more humane, presently gestating in the womb of reality.” The confrontation with the loss of so many of our kin (both in lives lost before their time and as they leave our faith) must break our hearts enough for mercy to flow into action.

As Pope Francis explains in *Let Us Dream*, the sacred Scriptures are full of stories revealing “that crisis is a time of purification. [These stories] bring us to the same place, to a shaming of our arrogance and a trusting in God.” In this



Everyone who shares in Jesus' work becomes a living sign that God's reign is arriving.

"Cosmic Cliffs" of the Carina Nebula; OSV News photo/NASA Video and Image Library

sense, to open our eyes to the pain of those who are leaving our communities requires us to listen to the promptings of the Spirit. Through the pain of this communal wound brought by the loss of so many people of good will, we are invited to a creative and fearless commitment to what Jesus wants us to know: The reign of God is breaking in and the reign of God needs us. It needs us now.

In our exceptionally complicated time, what does the reign of God require? In *The Garden of God*, the theologian and physicist Alejandro García-Rivera answers this with simplicity: "The church must expand its cosmic awareness." Inspired by another scientist/theologian, the Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, García-Rivera writes:

As we run out of room for an ever-growing population, as the polar caps melt into the sea and the weather becomes more unpredictable and hostile, as we continue to consume ourselves into extinction, can theology not see their eschatological import?... Why doesn't [the church] see itself not only as one, holy, catholic and apostolic but also as cosmic?

García-Rivera wrote this almost two decades ago, anticipating that the church would have to "turn to cosmology as a way to address the grave crisis we are experiencing today." I believe that in many ways Pope Francis has been pointing us in the same direction. With their help, let me suggest some of the contours of what this cosmic thrust for the church may mean.

Both Ancient and New. First, a cosmic awareness in

Christianity is not new. García-Rivera argues that the cosmic dimension, which is not myopically only about humans but about creation writ large as Creation, permeates the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and the writings of the early church. Second, the cosmic dimension of the church entails recovering the link between the melting ice caps and the "cosmic Christ through whom all things were made." Third, the Holy Spirit's work in the world is to orient and nurture creation continually toward the God of life and beauty. Nothing is more opposed to both life and beauty, as Pope Francis repeatedly points out, than the joint cry of the earth and the poor. Fourth, we must reckon with the tragedy that humans, creatures made in God's image—which means having the responsibility to image God in reality—are the same ones mercilessly destroying everything God so lovingly made. A cosmic mark for the church means that our relationship to the cosmos, to the entirety of the gift that has come from God's hands, has to be redefined.

The Human and the Cosmos. One of Teilhard's key insights is that as part of nature, human beings are ultimately disclosive of creation's purposes. As creatures evolve, consciousness becomes self-consciousness; humans grow to be able to contemplate and reflect back nature, transformed through a process of creativity. As Pope John Paul II put it in his "Letter to Artists" in 1999, it is in the process of being creative that human beings appear "more than ever 'in the image of God.'"

As humans discover their potential for creativity, they unleash a process of a cosmos that is self-aware. It is this role we need to take up again guided by the Spirit. García-Rivera stresses the church's cosmic dimension as a

The theologian and physicist Alejandro García-Rivera stressed the church's cosmic dimension as a bridge between the mysteries of the cosmos (heaven) and the needs of creation (earth).

bridge between the mysteries of the cosmos (heaven) and the needs of creation (earth). He also insists these are not two different realities, but one open and dynamic system.

Yet we know ourselves capable of betraying all God has made in ways our ancestors could never imagine. Our sacred Scriptures do not know humans will pour deadly sludge into the seas and poison our air. Our early church did not know we would crack the mystery of the atom and build the deadliest weapon imaginable. Our ancestors from just a couple of centuries ago could not foretell that today we would be ready to give up the human gift to think, reflect and imagine so that machines will do it for us in a wholesale revocation of our humanity we euphemistically call "artificial intelligence." Teilhard thought we were better than this. García-Rivera feared for us. He writes, "At stake is God's integrity. In the openness of God's own cosmic creativity, a frail creature was allowed to possess an extremely dangerous creativity."

The Frail and Dangerous Creature That Is Us. In our greed, in the lack of patience needed so that we might reflect on the consequences of our actions, in our misguided quest for autonomy and individuality and in our thirst for power, what Teilhard called "the human phenomenon" has turned on creation. Rather than building a bridge toward a deeper unity with God that builds God's reign, we are busy destroying it. Those who leave Christianity are a potent sign that we, as church, are failing our cosmos. The Christian story, with all its difficult demands of selflessness, service, kinship and community, must be harnessed in defense of God's cosmic gift. Beyond the global awareness forced upon us by the 20th century, in this 21st century we must cultivate a truly fearless cosmic wakefulness. García-Rivera provides a key to what this means: "We are to find in our frailty, the strength of the Lord."

The Cosmic Enigma. What is this strength the cosmic church is called to? García-Rivera insists that the church must shift our emphasis from the idea of time to focus on place. A cosmos is not just a collection of data, but a gift. God's reign is not in some far-off future; it is groaning to become here. More enigmatically, this connection is understood by creatures because it is beautiful, because "beauty is a sign of abundant life known only by being enjoyed." Beauty ties the human heart to God. Scientists and artists are recognizing this, as environmental awareness sparks movements bringing together scientific data and art. Some of the practitioners of this science and art collaboration, motivated by the affective depth and connection to the nat-

ural world that beauty engenders, recognize its potential.

Theologically, to join data with art makes our world paradoxically both more mysterious and more intelligible. We know it better, but we are also confronted by our human limitations to know it fully. Or, as C. S. Lewis put it, we are surprised by a deep longing that transcends us.

One recent art and science collaboration, which premiered at the South by Southwest EDU conference in Austin, Tex., involved a performance by a flutist. The notes she played were generated by a process developed by a scientist that turned particle physics into data. The data then became musical notes, and all of this was performed live. As the musician read and performed the notes, the composition was being generated by our planet, which was revealing itself in the movements of tectonic plates beneath Yellowstone.

I can imagine how excited García-Rivera, who died in 2010, would have been by this project. It would have proved his hypothesis that "although God transcends the cosmos, God created the cosmos with an immanent rationality that allows the cosmos to be known out of its own natural processes." The project speaks with a reverence for all that God has made that many "people of faith" have forgotten. As reported by NPR, the artists and scientists involved "say they're driven by a desire to deepen our understanding of the world and to give people a way to appreciate the beauty all around us, even if it's underground, underwater or [in the case of tectonic plates] unimaginably far away."

As surveys proliferate telling us Christianity is in deep trouble, let us open our eyes and see: Yes, it really is. But there is much we can do in response. I want to give the last word to Teilhard, whose spirit of confronting reality in mercy hoped that "The day will come when, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire."

Cecilia González-Andrieu is a professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, Calif., and a contributing writer for *America*.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AFTER COVID

The pandemic saw an increase in enrollment. What lessons can be learned?

By Maggie Phillips

The first day of school at JSerra High School in San Juan Capistrano, Calif., was a little over a month away, but Eileen McKeagney was already looking forward to teaching her English II Honors class. After 14 years of teaching at the school and 20 years as a teacher, “the excitement’s still there,” she said over the phone. “Teenagers don’t change that much.” Girls still roll up their uniform skirts to shorten the hem lines, she said with a laugh, something her 81-year-old mother used to do at Catholic school, too.

Teenagers may or may not change, but the world around them has changed, especially in recent years. The school reopened in the fall of 2021 after pivoting to online education in the spring of 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and returning to in-person instruction with masks and reduced class sizes for the remainder of the school year in September 2020. Today, JSerra, which enrolls just under 1,300 students, receives a flood of applications each year—far more students than they could ever admit.

Since the reopening, “I just feel a great appreciation, generally speaking,” Ms. McKeagney said, “That the Catholic schools stayed open, that they recognized the value, not just of the child, but of the community.

If the numbers are any indication, many parents shared McKeagney’s appreciation, at least initially. In the immediate wake of ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, Catholic school enrollment spiked. The bump in national enrollment inspired optimism in school choice advocates and Catholic school boosters alike: a 3.7 percent increase from fall 2020 to fall 2021, according to the National Catholic Education Association. However, the most recent N.C.E.A. data indicates that growth slowed to 0.3 percent from fall 2021 to fall 2022, and overall enrollment remains below



pre-pandemic levels, having dropped by 6.4 percent between fall 2019 and fall 2020.

The decline of regular Mass attendance—a trend observed before the 2020 shutdowns—has also continued apace. There is a consensus that many parents were attracted to Catholic schools during the height of the pandemic because almost all remained open for in-person instruction, while public schools were more likely to opt for virtual-only learning. The Covid era has ended, however, leaving a lingering question: If parents left public schools because they were dissatisfied, what happens when and if public schools take steps to win back those families?

Catholic schools confront challenging realities as they contend with how to maintain and grow their recent gains. Among them are geographic population shifts, questions about affordability and a generation of parents who are less likely to participate in Catholic life than their parents or grandparents were. Many Catholic education administrators and advocates believe the key to overcoming these challenges is putting the schools’ Catholic identity front and center.

“What’s the value add?” asked Terence Sweeney, a Catholic theologian and philosopher at the University of Pennsylvania, in an online interview. “What about a Cath-



An all-school Mass at JSerra Catholic High School in San Juan Capistrano, Calif., in 2021

moving to (and away from),” said Mark Gray, director of polling for the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, in an email to **America**. School closures in one state or diocese sometimes lead to increased enrollment elsewhere: CARA numbers show that overall, the number of Catholic elementary schools in the United States fell by 6 percent between 2019 and 2023. But school closures can tell a different story than enrollment. N.C.E.A. numbers show that enrollment growth for the 2022-23 school year was up by 1.7 percent in the Southeast, particularly Virginia and the Carolinas, even as Delaware, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania saw a cumulative 7.5% decrease in enrollment.

These shifts mimic a larger trend: people leaving large urban centers—often on the coasts—for Sun Belt states, something that has been happening at varying speeds for decades but has been especially noticeable since the pandemic. In some large cities where Catholic school enrollment has declined, like Los Angeles and New York City, the public school enrollment numbers have also dropped dramatically. Such changes, according to Lincoln Snyder, president of the National Catholic Educational Association, account for the uneven picture of Catholic school enrollment nationwide.

Mr. Gray said that how schools are funded is another factor in their viability, noting that “[tuition] affordability is a major issue.”

“Catholic education’s always been really expensive,” said Mr. Snyder, “The question’s been, who’s paying for it?”

“Seventy years ago,” he added, “the person paying for Catholic education was the religious sister that was essentially working for free.”

Since schools are no longer able to hold down labor costs by employing men and women religious, they rely more on the financial contribution of students and their families. Mr. Snyder argues that the broader Catholic community should also feel a communal responsibility for Catholic schools.

“Church teaching in the United States is very clear that Catholic education is supposed to be something for the entire parish,” he said, “and also the responsibility of the entire parish, and not just for the parents who are paying for tuition.” Mr. Snyder contends that even states with generous school choice subsidies are no substitute for community involvement. The laity must all see themselves as stakeholders: “We can’t depend on parents being the only ones to bear the cost,” he said. “Honestly, that’s never been the way we’ve operated as church.”

olic education is better?”

“The church does not run educational institutions just for kicks,” he said. While he acknowledges providing schools as a work of mercy is important, Dr. Sweeney adds the caveat that the Second Vatican Council states that “the purpose of Catholic education is for building up human virtue in this life and our ultimate ends of union with God in the next.”

“So if that’s why we have Catholic schools,” he said, “That should be kind of the center of what we’re thinking and what we’re doing.” The key, he said, is specificity: “You’re going to learn about saints, you’re going to read a little bit about Augustine in your high school.”

Many people I spoke to hope that the mission and ministry of the school will help to inform how Catholic schools address the many practical questions that come with putting mission into action.

Finances and Stewardship

One indirect effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on Catholic schools comes from population shifts within the United States, including Americans taking advantage of remote work to move to another state.

“You have to account for areas where families are



The broader Catholic community should also feel a communal responsibility for Catholic schools.

The stewardship model of the Diocese of Wichita, Kan., is one such comprehensive, whole-parish approach. Among the typical social and spiritual ministries, the diocese also boasts tuition-free Catholic education, made possible by its unique model of parishioner participation. The stewardship program, which will be 40 years old in 2025, is a “way of life for the entire parish,” said the diocesan stewardship director, the Rev. John Jirak, in a phone interview. At Father Jirak’s parish, the Church of the Magdalen, new parishioners meet with an assigned parish staff member, who explains the parishioner-led, parishioner-run model. Rather than simply fill out a registration form, they fill out a stewardship form to help discern where they are being called to give of their time, talent and treasure. Parishioners pledge regular Mass attendance, active participation in church ministries and 10 percent giving, divided between their church and other charitable giving. According to Father Jirak, 150 new families registered for the stewardship program last year.

Although Father Jirak describes the schools as an “accident” of a fruitful diocese-wide program, he is also candid that they also serve as an evangelization tool. He acknowledges that it is unrealistic to expect pure altruism when people first join a stewardship parish, and the diocesan schools, he said, have a degree of excellence that draws people in.

“We don’t dilute,” he said, “Everything has got to be next level” in terms of quality. Father Jirak said there are Catholic school classes in the diocese with waiting lists, and one Catholic high school is anticipating its largest freshman class ever. “Our schools are really outstanding,” he said.

And the families who are attracted to the schools, said Father Jirak, tend to stay for the spiritual benefits they experience. He notes that the families joining parishes today are not part of the Greatest Generation cohort who began

Wichita’s stewardship program and who had a sense of duty to institutions that their children and grandchildren don’t necessarily share. Subsequent generations require more accompaniment, which he describes as an ongoing process. The stewardship concept is woven into the preaching from the pulpit, parishioners partake in an annual stewardship commitment renewal, and there is regular outreach from a stewardship council and an accompaniment team. All of this amounts to what Father Jirak concedes is perhaps an “over-explaining” of the stewardship concept throughout the various parishioner-led ministries. But for these younger generations, he said, accompaniment “looks like evangelization.”

The Heart of the Matter

Many Catholic education administrators and advocates have had a similar realization about the need for evangelization and what Dr. Sweeney identifies as the importance of formation to the Catholic school mission. Dr. Todd Flanders is the headmaster of Providence Academy in the Diocese of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn., which opened in 2001 and continues to attract new students, even post-Covid. At the time of our interview in May, he said work was scheduled to begin over the summer to build 11 additional classrooms.

“It’s not about Covid anymore,” he said in a phone interview, referring to the attraction of Catholic schools that stayed open during the pandemic. “It’s about mission.”

In his estimation, what has held back investment in Catholic education by the wider community is that most people in the pews don’t realize what the Catholic schools are doing in the areas not only of education, but of catechesis and formation. The solution, he believes, is “clarity about mission.”

Providence Academy is a member of Duc in Altum, a Catholic school collaborative that Kyle Pietrantonio, its executive director, described in a phone interview as using the New Evangelization to develop the “strong community of faith that can and ought to exist in vibrant, faith-forward Catholic schools.” The vision is to rethink Catholic schools as dynamic networks that include not just students and faculty, but families and alumni, communities that are “almost what the parish was” in previous decades, he said. The collaborative began a decade ago with five school presidents who shared a vision to use K-12 Catholic education as a vehicle to, in Mr. Pietrantonio’s words, “rechurch our church.” Today it consists of member schools representing 45 U.S. states, which meet annually for a three-day conference to share best practices.



Courtesy of Providence Academy

Providence Academy's second graders led the way at the school's May Crowning.



Courtesy of Providence Academy

Ninth graders relax on the campus of Providence Academy in Plymouth, Minn.

Duc in Altum (Latin for “Cast out into the deep”) recognizes that many parents with students enrolled in Catholic schools are millennials who are disaffiliated from the faith. Mr. Pietrantonio said he has found that many parents “didn’t have a lot of catechesis and strong formation,” so his organization places emphasis on leveraging leadership, religion teachers and ministry teams in Catholic schools “to really start putting together parent formation programs” to meet the parents where they are.

Mr. Pietrantonio noted examples of schools with parent faith-sharing and Bible studies groups, family service and outreach projects in communities and abroad, which weave in the sacraments where possible. One Duc in Altum member school, JSerra, for example, offers an adult spiritual formation and personal development initiative called Adelante (“Forward” in Spanish). Adelante is aimed at, but not limited to, school parents. Under the initiative’s auspices is “The Search,” an evening spiritual development session offered monthly and featuring food, a short film and group discussion.

A few generations ago, Mr. Snyder says, Catholic school students had more exposure and familiarity with Catholic teaching and tradition, through both their families and the parish, but that can no longer be taken for granted.

“Just looking at the data, our Catholic schools really are our best chance, not just at catechesis, but evangelization for students,” he said. “You have to evangelize before you catechize.”

Looking at the parents who have entrusted their children to Catholic schools, Mr. Snyder said he sees “the hearts are wide open now,” offering an opportunity to the church.

He gives some examples of ways Catholic schools are acting on this opportunity, including virtue education in

younger grades to shape the Catholic ethos and mindset, more intentionality in providing retreats to students at the secondary levels, and ensuring the quality of the teachers imparting the education. “It’s not just what’s taught, but who’s teaching it,” he said.

The cultural shift these approaches represent, as Dr. Flanders and Mr. Pietrantonio both assert, are different ways of showing students “what the Catholic worldview is and why it’s special, and why it’s a good way for them to live, too.” According to Mr. Snyder, even students who may step away from the faith as young adults often “come back because they realize what the adults in school were modeling for them, in hindsight.”

“We don’t, in real life, compartmentalize our mental, emotional and spiritual experiences,” said Dr. Flanders. “It is cross-disciplinary.” At Providence Academy, for example, incoming seniors read Alduous Huxley’s *Brave New World* over the summer as both an English and a religion course requirement.

Dr. Sweeney sees the infusion of the Catholic faith throughout the curriculum as a key benefit for students receiving a Catholic education. Rather than treating it as “public school plus 40 minutes of religion class,” he says, Catholic schools should lean into robust humanities and science and math curricula that are also “uniquely Catholic” and which aspire to “aim to be different.”

“We’re in a culture that loves to talk about difference,” he said, “but actually, our educational institutions are constantly sliding toward sameness, so Catholic schools have the chance and the courage to be different.”

The Broader Catholic Family

The difference is not just attractive to Catholic families. Just as Catholic families’ enrolling their children in Cath-



It's not about Covid anymore. It's about mission.

olic schools can no longer be taken for granted, parents of other faiths who once would never dream of enrolling their students in a Catholic school are increasingly willing to enroll their children. Non-Catholic student enrollment in U.S. Catholic schools has been on an upward trajectory since 1972, when non-Catholics accounted for 4.7 percent of Catholic school students. Today, 22 percent of students in Catholic schools are non-Catholics, up from just under 20 percent pre-pandemic.

Kathleen Porter-Magee is the superintendent of Partnership Schools, a private school management organization that operates as an independent 501(c)3 corporation. Formed in 2010 by the merger of two Catholic education initiatives within the Archdiocese of New York, and granted full operational control of six preK-8 Catholic schools across Harlem and the South Bronx in 2013, Partnership Schools embraces a mission “to develop outstanding Catholic elementary schools that provide students from underserved communities with the academic preparation, values, and skills they need to break the cycle of poverty and lead fulfilling, productive lives.” Asked whether parents enrolling their children in Partnership Schools are choosing Catholic education for the faith aspect, Ms. Porter-McGee said, “I think the short answer is yes.” Cautioning that her response is anecdotal, she added, “I think it becomes an even stronger ‘yes’ if, when you ask that question, you mean ‘Are people drawn to the values that are sort of core to a faith-based education?’”

Ms. Porter-Magee, a fellow at the Manhattan Institute, co-authored a study for the think tank in 2022 on the increase in Catholic school enrollment as the pandemic continued. The study noted that the Diocese of Arlington in particular was responsible for “the lion’s share” of Virginia’s 8.8 percent Catholic school enrollment increase from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 school years. It is this diocese, the study states, that includes many of the cities and counties that were “the epicenter” of much of the controversy amid school reopenings in 2021. Yet even as Catholic

school enrollment grew in the diocese, in October of that same school year, weekly Mass attendance in its churches remained depressed below pre-pandemic levels.

Ms. Porter-Magee said the Manhattan Institute Study did not survey families on the reasons for choosing Catholic schools, but she suspects a preference, even among non-Catholics, for schools more aligned with their values, particularly in areas of the country where the public schools espouse values parents perceive to contradict their own.

“If you use Northern Virginia as an interesting case study,” Ms. Porter-McGee said, “over the course of the pandemic, you saw the perfect storm.” Parents were looking to escape one or both of two factors, she said. First was the prolonged closure of public schools in the Diocese of Arlington, “almost longer than any other in the country.” A second possible factor was the raging “culture war” debates in places like Loudoun County, located in Northern Virginia, where critical race theory, mask mandates and bathroom policies for transgender students ignited passions.

Ms. Porter-Magee’s theorizing over motivations comes from a place of experience. Notably, while just over half of the students in New York Partnership Schools for the 2022-23 school year were Catholic (53 percent), in Cleveland, only 9 percent of the student body were Catholic. The Cleveland schools are majority Black (70 percent) and the New York City schools majority Hispanic (57 percent). The N.C.E.A. reports that overall statistics for the 2022-23 school year show that 8 percent of Catholic school students are Black, and just under 20 percent are Hispanic.

Access to a quality education and school safety are drivers for many of the parents, she said. “But it’s also the faith and values piece,” as well as school safety. If a public school passes from what Ms. Porter-Magee calls a “tipping point” from being merely secular to an environment where “it feels like your children are being educated in a community that is either not open to you or maybe in some cases, overtly denigrating something that you believe is really important to your children’s upbringing, then you’re going to start to seek out alternatives. And that is, I think, in pockets of the country, what we’re starting to see.”

Retaining Families, Fostering Belief

Twenty-two percent of students in Catholic schools are not Catholic, according to the N.C.E.A.’s data brief on school enrollment for the 2022-23 school year. “Our non-Catholic population is higher than ever,” Mr. Snyder said. But this percentage ranges widely for individual schools.

Although many families chose Catholic schools because they were open during the pandemic, Catholic



Courtesy of Duc in Altum Schools Collaborative

Students observe Ash Wednesday at St. James Academy in Lenexa, Kans., in 2019.

schools have retained “a vast majority” of them, Mr. Snyder said, adding that 60 percent of U.S. dioceses’ enrollment remained stable or even increased. When these parents had the opportunity to return to tuition-free public schools, they did not do so. “The top reasons they gave were falling in love with the teachers and the instruction their kids were receiving, and then falling in love with the communities,” he said. “Even for our non-Catholic families, they’ve noted the difference about being in a loving, Catholic environment.”

Providence Academy’s student body has been two-thirds Catholic, one-third non-Catholic for its two decades. Now it is scrambling to accommodate an influx of new students, many of whom are from evangelical or other Protestant backgrounds.

Dr. Flanders attributes the boost in enrollment for the 2020-21 school year—there were 250 applicants, of which they were able to admit only around 50—to the school’s flexibility in addressing the challenges of remote learning and the needs of the students, efforts meant to show “that child, and school, and family are one.” Interest in the school dropped off slightly for the coming year, he said, but it remains high.

Mr. Pietrantonio said he hopes that some students will enter the faith while attending Catholic school, and parents may have conversions or reversions. Some schools have permission from their local ordinaries to provide the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, as well as parent ambassadors charged with inviting new parents to attend liturgies and the sacramental life in the life of the school. “More and more dioceses are offering school-focused programs that then bring the family more into observance through the

school,” said Mr. Snyder.

There are conversions and reversions? “Oh, every year,” he said, including students, families, and alumni. Providence Academy boasts an adult Bible study for student and alumni parents with a membership of over 60 that meets weekly, led by a teacher with a Ph.D. in philosophy.

As the leader of a Catholic school in an urban area, Dr. Flanders said he sees particular benefits for disadvantaged and immigrant students. “Catholic schooling just becomes an absolute key to giving a future and a hope,” when rooted in a Catholic understanding of solidarity and concern for the poor, he said, “so the idea of equipping Catholic schools in disadvantaged areas is just huge.”

“Utter fidelity [to the faith and church traditions] is key,” Dr. Flanders said. “I think that there’s so much yearning out there in the world, and this is among secular people as well, yearning for some grounding, some reality, something to stand on, something that they can rely on for the safety and formation of their children,” he said. “The educational philosophy, therefore, must be rooted in the person of Jesus Christ and the recognition that in him, truth, justice and goodness are ultimately one.”

This approach meshes with Terrence Sweeney’s vision of a curriculum steeped in the faith, in which an invitation to encountering “great texts” in a classical education program, for example, does not equal identification with the Republican Party or political conservatism but something altogether more interesting and challenging. “A Catholic education model in general should make students uncomfortable with lots of political options,” he said. “If you really read Augustine on poverty, you’re going to be uncomfort-



Students from Sacred Heart School in the Bronx, N.Y., in 2022

able with certain aspects of contemporary American capitalist life.”

But the survival of Catholic schools depends, in part, on adapting to the realities of American capitalist life.

This framework is encapsulated in an anecdote Mr. Pietrantonio tells, in which a parent donated the funds to replace old, tattered hymnals in a school with new, better-looking ones, filled with what he called “beautiful hymns.” This is something that would not have been possible, he notes, had the school not opened up its regular Masses to the parents in its community.

“This goes back to funding,” he said.

“There are Catholic philanthropists that do see [Catholic schools] as a great mechanism by which the church can be reborn,” he said. “Of course, philanthropists want to support a winning team. And so when philanthropy sees that fruit is being born and it’s on mission, these schools then get to see some development revenue and support that they haven’t seen.”

Partnership Schools appears to bear this out. Donations from individuals, trustees and foundations have increased 120 percent in the past five years. Both the New York City and Cleveland networks saw notable increases in giving between 2021 and 2022 (69 percent and 76 percent, respectively). And the nonprofit has continued to expand: An additional Catholic school was added to its New York network in 2019, and four Catholic schools were added in Cleveland, Ohio, between 2020 and 2022. Both schools are majority minority, and 79 percent of students receive free or reduced lunch in New York, and 93 percent in Cleveland.

Hope for the Future

Even if Mass attendance remains down, “the schools have

a very special role right now within the church,” said Mr. Snyder. “We trust the church is going to see that for the opportunity that it is.”

N.C.E.A.’s numbers show a total of just under 1.7 million students at diocesan, religious order and independent Catholic schools. However, “even for the families that are still affiliated with the church and that are reporting that they’re Catholic, observance is not what it was 20 years ago for

everybody,” said Mr. Snyder. No one I spoke to had exact data on the faith of cradle Catholic parents enrolling their children at Catholic Schools, but “anecdotally,” Mr. Snyder said in reference to larger Catholic high schools, “school leaders are reporting that in many cases, the majority of the kids, while Catholic, don’t go to Mass every Sunday.”

Families at Catholic elementary schools tend to have higher levels of religious observance, according to Mr. Snyder. He said he remembers Mass being offered only once a month, during his own experience attending Catholic schools in Sacramento in the 1980s, but that in recent years “a recognition that observance was falling,” lead to “a big shift” intended “to keep kids plugged into sacramental observance, and learning about why is it so important to participate in the sacraments.” Now many schools offer weekly school Masses, and make confession available during the school day.

The average age of disaffiliation from the faith is 13, said Mr. Snyder, and “Our kids in Catholic school are not entirely immune from these broader trends.” However, he notes the rate of observance among children in Catholic schools remains higher than among the general population.

Among the best practices Mr. Pietrantonio describes from Duc in Altum schools is maintaining a dynamic alumni network, especially for the most recent graduates, offering silent retreats, faculty talks and alumni Masses for them when they return home on breaks from college. The Catholic school, he said, can remain instrumental in forming these young people at a time when many begin to disaffiliate.

It is an approach that parents and students alike continue to reward. Dr. Flanders said funding for Providence Academy’s new classrooms came from parents, alumni and

AMERICA'S GUIDE TO CATHOLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION

There are few values American society prizes more than independence. We pride ourselves on being able to say that we've pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps, and a good education is often seen as the foundation for getting ahead. But a good education also should remind us that none of us really get where we're going on our own.

Perhaps nowhere is this combination of values, both secular and spiritual, more evident than in our Catholic schools. Our church has built schools that have a long history of pulling together the best values of the church and of the American experiment. Through our nation's history and our church's history they have worked to welcome all disciples; encourage students to build up a life of love doing good, seek justice, right wrongs, defend the vulnerable.

Through strong curricula, and even stronger community, they help young people to build their faith in God and in others. They work to create citizens who are open, humble and unafraid of starting anew. At their best, Catholic schools help build a foundation that allows its students to let go of the idols to which we so often cling and to see the real needs of the world before us. They help to put all of us on a path of truth and light and to "make justice [our] aim."

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(314) 256-8854 • ai.edu • kostello@ai.edu

Impelled by the Catholic faith and our 800-year-old Dominican mission, Aquinas Institute of Theology educates men and women to preach, teach, minister, and lead. We do this through our graduate degree programs and our newly established continuing education programs: the Center for Community Engagement and Evangelization and the New Frontiers in Preaching Academy. Please join us for an information session about Aquinas' programs, exclusively for *America* readers on November 13, 2023, at 7 p.m.



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(408) 294-9224 • bcp.org • admissions@bcp.org

Bellarmino College Preparatory, a Catholic secondary school located in San Jose, California, has been educating in the Jesuit tradition of the development of the full person since 1851. Bellarmine is a vibrant community comprised of students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, and friends. The unique Bellarmine experience involves a rigorous academic curriculum, championship co-curricular programs including athletics, speech and debate, and robotics; and transformative spiritual, service, and immersion opportunities. A Bellarmine education assists in developing men who are "for and with others" and who possess a faith that does justice. Contact Bellarmine for information and updates regarding its Admissions Open House.



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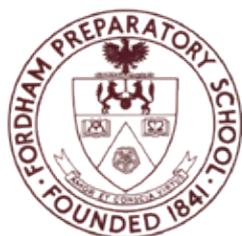
Fairfield College Preparatory School is the Jesuit, Catholic school of Connecticut, forming young men of intellectual competence who possess the conscience to make wise decisions, a compassion for others, and a commitment to global justice. In a community of faith, our students develop their relationship with God and one another.



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Fordham Preparatory School

(718) 367-7500 • fordhamprep.org admissions@fordhamprep.org

Fordham Preparatory School is a Catholic, all-male, Jesuit, college preparatory school. Our commitment to education is shaped by the spirituality and pedagogical tradition of the Society of Jesus. Our mission is to form leaders in to faith, scholarship, and service through a college preparatory education in the Catholic Jesuit tradition.



Georgetown Preparatory School

(301) 493-5000 • gprep.org • admissions@gprep.org

Founded in 1789, Georgetown Preparatory School is America's oldest Catholic boarding and day school for young men in grades 9 through 12, and the only Jesuit boarding school in the country. Situated on 93 acres in suburban Washington, D.C., Prep's mission is to form men of competence, conscience, courage, and compassion; men of faith and men for others.



Loyola Academy

(847) 256-1100 • goramblers.org

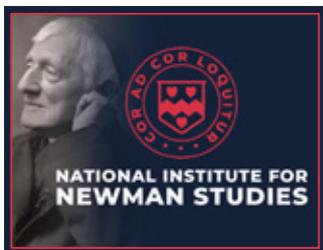
Located outside Chicago, Loyola is a vibrant community committed to responding to God's call to be women and men for others. Founded in 1909, Loyola has a rich tradition of excellence in academics, athletics, and co-curricular opportunities. Annually, we welcome approximately 500 students per grade from 90+ zip codes, making Loyola one of the largest Jesuit secondary schools in the nation.



Loyola School

(646) 346-8131 • loyolanyc.org • admissions@loyolanyc.org

Loyola School is the only co-ed, Jesuit, and independent high school in New York City. As a Catholic, independent, coeducational, college preparatory, urban, secondary day school, rooted in the Jesuit tradition, Loyola School challenges its students religiously, intellectually, aesthetically, physically, and socially.



National Institute for Newman Studies

(412) 681-4375 • newmanstudies.org/2023-fall-symposium
ehuddleston@newmanstudies.org

"*Newman and the Sensus Fidei: Tradition, Development, Synodality*". 16-17 October 2023.

Speakers:

Keynote: Grant Kaplan / Saint Louis University

Anthony Godzieba / Villanova University

Jennifer Newsome Martin / University of Notre Dame

This symposium will be held both in person and via Zoom internet.

Registration prior to the symposium is required.



Nativity Miguel Coalition

646-567-9065 • nativitymiguel.org • info@nativitymiguel.org

The NativityMiguel Coalition (NMC) is an alliance of fifty nonpublic schools serving students from pre-k through twelfth grade in the U.S. and Canada that work together to bring equity to all students through education. Investing in the fundamental belief that every student deserves the opportunity to become their best authentic self, the NMC provides its members with the support and structure needed to deliver a holistic education that values empathy, equality, and connection.



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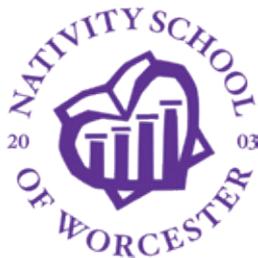
Scranton Preparatory School
 (570) 941-7737 Ext. 1141 • scrantonprep.org
admissions@scrantonprep.org

As a Catholic and Jesuit college preparatory school, Scranton Prep's mission is to help families form young people who are well prepared for college and who will live lives that give greater glory to God. Accordingly, we seek to form graduates who are intellectually competent, open to growth, religious, loving and committed to doing justice. In doing so, we seek to prepare our students for college, life, and eternity.



St. Ignatius College Preparatory
 (415) 731-7500 • siprep.org • admissions@siprep.org

Through an integrated program of academic, spiritual, and co-curricular activities, St. Ignatius College Preparatory, San Francisco's Jesuit high school, challenges its students to become lifelong learners who develop their individual talents for the greater glory of God. Ignatian Education is defined by cura personalis, care for the whole person. It means we embrace the Jesuit call to live with and for others while striving to be a community of well-rounded people who seek excellence in everything we do.



The Nativity School of Worcester
nativityworcester.org • advancement@nativityworcester.org

Founded in 2003, Nativity School of Worcester is an accredited, independent, Jesuit middle school that provides a quality, tuition-free education to boys from under-resourced families in Worcester. Drawing upon four pillars – strength, scholarship, character, and service – a Nativity education inspires self-discovery, responsibility, spiritual growth, and a lifelong dedication to learning. Nativity's community-centered programming, Jesuit values, co-teaching model, and individualized approach to education allows students to become their best authentic selves.



Xavier High School
 (212) 924-7900 • xavierhs.org • admissions@xavierhs.org

Founded in 1847, Xavier High School is an academically rigorous, Catholic, Jesuit, college preparatory school in New York City that educates intelligent, motivated young men of diverse backgrounds and means. Xavier teaches students to take responsibility for their lives, to lead with integrity, to act justly in service of others, to pursue excellence in every endeavor and to deepen their relationship with God. Ultimately, Xavier forms young men who will go forth to transform the world for God's greater glory.

Many believe the key to overcoming these challenges is putting the schools' Catholic identity front and center.

Continued from Page 32

alumni parents. The alumni connection, he said, “is getting really exciting.”

The school’s first students to begin their PreK through 12 education there in 2001 graduated in 2015, and those students, now adults establishing careers and families of their own, demonstrate “a fierce loyalty to the old school,” he said. Parishes, as well, experience the benefits. He said pastors in the surrounding parishes tell him that Providence Academy’s student participation in parish programs adds a solid understanding of the faith to efforts like charitable outreach.

When asked whether the siphoning of students off into Catholic school systems threatens to silo Americans when many are already sorting themselves ideologically, Ms. Porter-Magee is careful to note that while correlation does not equal causation, today’s fractious social discourse is happening at a time when there are fewer children being educated in Catholic schools than in previous decades. But far from cloistering students, Ms. Porter-Magee said, “Catholic schools in particular have an amazing track record at civic education.”

Research by Notre Dame’s Cardus Religious Schools Initiative within the past decade supports Ms. Porter-Magee’s statement, especially when contrasted with Catholic schools’ two major competitors for students: public school and homeschool. A C.R.S.I. study in 2014 found that homeschool graduates, even religious ones, are less likely to volunteer outside of their congregations, or to have given to a charitable organization in the previous 12 months, than are public school graduates. By comparison, a C.R.S.I. report in 2017 found that Catholic school graduates volunteer for a greater number of organizations on average than public school graduates, and are also more than 40 percent more likely to donate to poverty relief charities and 30 percent more likely to donate to health care causes. Researchers



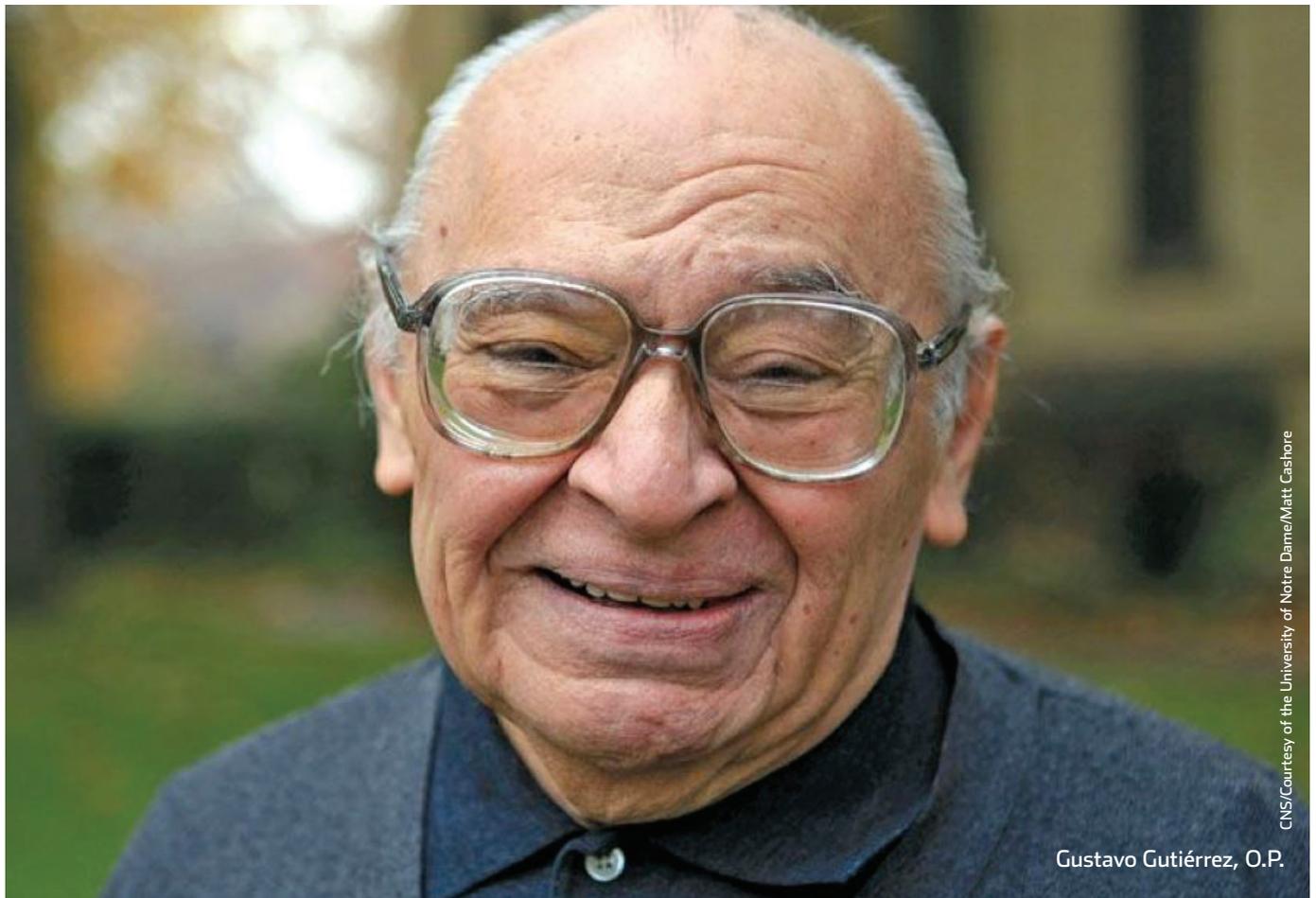
A classroom at Immaculate Conception School in the Bronx, N.Y., in October 2020

were struck by the way that Catholic school graduates’ pattern of giving and volunteering—focused on these areas, as well as on education, youth, and family services—reflected Catholic social teaching.

Catholic school is “an investment in the future of the church,” said Mr. Snyder. “We’re building a bench for the world, but we’re also building the bench for the church,” he added, sounding as much like a coach as an administrator, “We know that many of our leaders and many of the observant Catholics in a generation are going to be kids who graduated from Catholic school.

“We do a great job of forming servant leaders,” he said. “We actually do a really good job of teaching students how to talk to one another, especially how to discuss and discourse with people who have different views than they do.” These are things, he said, “you learn in community, and not just from a curriculum.”

—
Maggie Phillips writes *Tablet Magazine’s Religious Literacy series*, a multi-year project about religious, political and cultural issues in communities of faith in the United States, funded by a grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations.



CNS/Courtesy of the University of Notre Dame/Matt Cashore

Gustavo Gutiérrez, O.P.

A NEW KIND OF THEOLOGIAN

Discerning the impact of Gustavo Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation*

By Leo Guardado

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the publication in English of Gustavo Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation*. That first edition of Gutiérrez's book served as a primary introduction to a new way of doing theology and becoming church with the poor and insignificant.

A Theology of Liberation is a significant book about the insignificant ones of history who live in insignificant worlds. Insignificance is the prism for grasping what is at the heart of the book, what it points to, what it resignifies. For something or someone to be considered significant

means that it is recognized as something known, confirmed as something important. Conversely, that which is insignificant lacks meaning, does not convey anything of importance, does not transcend itself in signification. Insignificant ones exist without leaving a mark in history, and ultimately, they lack historical presence.

A Theology of Liberation discerned the irruption of the presence of the poor into a world of signification, with the biblical claim that it is insignificant persons who most signify and make present the presence of God. In the orig-

inal Spanish introduction to the book, Gutiérrez clarified that the book's real question is the theological status of the process of liberation; phrased differently, it is about the deep meaning of faith and the mission of the church in a world of captivity. To be Christian, to be church, the book argued, is to live permanently a process of liberation whose referent is always the mystery of God made flesh, who in radical freedom chooses what is insignificant for God's own revelation. To grasp the irruption of the presence of the poor, one must undergo an epistemological rupture, a new way of encountering and reading reality through faith in the living God.

In a new introduction titled "Mirar Lejos" ("to see far"—the English translation calls it "Expanding the View") that Gutiérrez wrote for a later edition in the late 1980s, he invites us to rethink our notion of historical time in relation to the process of liberation, and not to lose sight of three points that are basic to liberation theology: the viewpoint of the poor, the doing of theology and the proclamation of the reign of life. The following three organizing principles are the pillars of Gutiérrez's work and fundamental for any assessment of the book.

1.) The perspective of the poor requires being close to the real poverty that overdetermines their life. Gutiérrez refers to this poverty as a universe that exceeds socioeconomic aspects. To be poor and insignificant is to exist in proximity to death. The perspective of the poor, however, also includes their struggle for justice and peace, for life and freedom, for joy, for presence in a society that eradicates their right to exist.

2.) To do theology—"el quehacer teológico," in Gutiérrez's words—from the perspective of the poor is to affirm the right of the poor to *think faith* from their own experience. Doing theology is a necessary element of a community of faith that is attempting to understand their joys and sorrows, their prayers and commitments, their encounter with the Spirit of the Living God manifest in their own story. Thinking faith in the midst of poverty and insignificance is a process of discerning how the God of life is already laboring in that history.

3.) To proclaim the reign of life is to commit one's life with other communities in the transformation of institutionalized violence that brings death. Ultimately, to proclaim life is to join in the work of sanctification, a hallowing of earth and all creation, fully aware that the God of creation is the God of liberation who sets a people free. But as the title of the 1988 introduction to *A Theology of Liberation* states, we must learn to *see far* lest we

mistakenly confuse and identify God's freedom to create and liberate with our own limited historical projects and timelines.

Dead Ends and Conversion

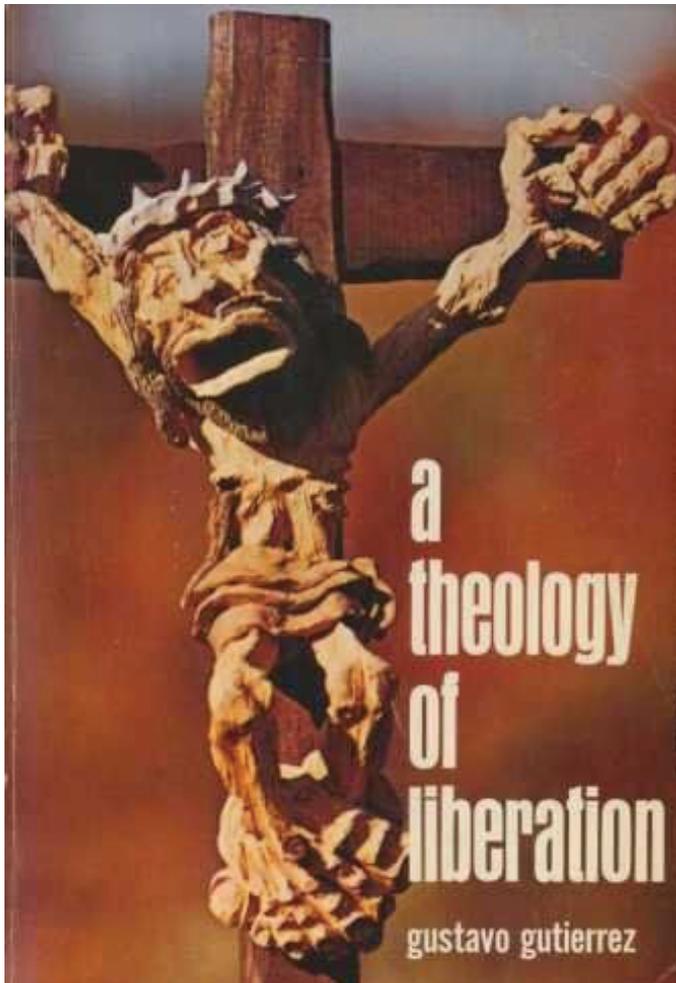
The theology of liberation that emerged 50 years ago was the fruit of a lived spirituality centered on the following of Jesus. The methodology for reading the signs of the times structures the book, which allows Gutiérrez to discern the dead ends (practical and theoretical) that no longer responded—or perhaps that never responded—to an understanding of faith. The following of Jesus required making sense of a new historical context—a new epoch—where a people had become aware of the radical inequality and oppression that dictated their everyday life and condemned them by the millions to an early death before their time.

The first half of the book assesses previously given responses to the relationships between faith and politics, liberation and notions of salvation, pastoral work and theological reflection, the transformation of history and the reign of God. The second half offers Gutiérrez's creative reconfiguration of the classical axes of theology, inviting a rethinking of the very foundations of how to do theology, of how to say something coherent and credible that arises from, and responds to, the density of one's historical present.

The book is unambiguous about the confrontation that marks the following of Jesus. To transform persons and structures that generate poverty and the conditions that keep a people in captivity (Lk 4:18) required a break that was nothing less than a conversion (see the document on "Justice" from the 1968 Latin American Bishops Conference in Medellín, Colombia). Turning one's life around to follow Jesus is not the choosing of a new religious brand, but is rather a transformed way of living and loving, and "to wish to accomplish it without conflict is to deceive oneself and others."

I will quote Gutiérrez at length because his words on conversion go to the core of what is also at stake for the church 50 years later in the midst of a synodal transformation that is bringing to the surface ecclesial conflicts and confrontations that have been suppressed for far too long. In *A Theology of Liberation*, he writes:

We have to break with our mental categories, with the way we relate to others, with our way of identifying with the Lord, with our cultural mi-



Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation* was first released in English 50 years ago.

behind a trail of death, the carcasses of worlds deemed insignificant.

Remembering With God

In 1971, the first edition of *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas* was printed at the Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones in Lima, Peru, a publishing house that Gutiérrez and friends started in 1970 with the aim of contributing to the construction of a world with more solidarity and justice. The book was then translated into English in 1973 as *A Theology of Liberation* and published by Orbis Books, which is releasing a 50th-anniversary edition this year.

In light of Peru's contemporary reality, and the state of the world more broadly, one can raise the question of whether or how Gutiérrez's seminal book and liberation theology as a whole have affected sociopolitical structures. In the past five years Peru's democracy has had six different presidents, more Covid-19 deaths per 100,000 people than any other country in the world, and massive ongoing protests by Indigenous communities who are tired of the contempt and disdain they receive from their own government. Certainly, if one were to measure the impact of this book by the effect it has had on that country's (or on the world's) sociopolitical liberation, or by the reduced percentage of people who are living in poverty, then arguably it has failed to make a significant impact.

The impact and significance of the book, however, cannot be measured by creating such facile causal links, as others have attempted to do in prior decades. To do so would be like saying that the truth of Christ is determined by the church, which would be a failure in understanding the basic relationship and difference between Christ and the church. *A Theology of Liberation* is not a political or economic manual for eradicating poverty and social insignificance. *A Theology of Liberation* is not a way of "baptizing the revolution" or of placing an ecclesial flag on the highest standard that goes off to the latest war of liberation, no matter how just the war may be considered. Gutiérrez firmly criticized these misinterpretations of liberation theology in his 1979 book *The Power of the Poor in History*. No, *A Theology of Liberation* is what the title claims: a theology, a reflection, God-talk that arises from the historical struggle for freedom and what that struggle tells us about the freedom of God.

For all of the great insights and contributions that can

lieu, with our social class, in other words, with all that can stand in the way of a real, profound solidarity with those who suffer, in the first place, from misery and injustice. Only thus, and not through purely interior and spiritual attitudes, will the "new person" arise from the ashes of the "old."

Gutiérrez's formulation of liberation theology is a vital reminder that the community called church exists to the degree that it lets itself be formed and transformed by the presence of the Spirit of God active in history. His formulation invites the church into the agonizing crucible where God's good creation—human and more than human—is being destroyed by structures of sin. The destruction of cultures, of languages, of humanizing values and traditions, of social bonds and integral relationships with all creatures—all of this is the loss of whole worlds that have been deemed insignificant by what Pope Francis has called in "Laudato Si'" the technocratic paradigm of modernity. The colonial destruction of past centuries continues in our day, leaving

be attributed to this book, it remains a book, and a book of theology at that, but this is in fact its greatest revolutionary gift. In the brief conclusion, Gutiérrez himself specifies how we are to evaluate theological reflection, and thus how to evaluate *A Theology of Liberation*:

If theological reflection does not vitalize the action of the Christian community in the world by making its commitment to charity [love] fuller and more radical, if—more concretely—in Latin America it does not lead the Church to be on the side of the oppressed classes and dominated peoples, clearly and without qualifications, then this theological reflection will have been of little value. Worse yet, it will have served only to justify half-measures and ineffective approaches and to rationalize a departure from the Gospel.

The true significance of *A Theology of Liberation* can be measured only in relation to the church, for its subject is a people of faith attempting to remember their fidelity to the mystery that orients their most profound longings. It is in relation to the church, as community and institution, that we can ask more specifically about the impact of the book, about the ways in which it has helped to transform or convert the church away from the dominant worlds of signification and toward the universe of the God of the insignificant.

In assessing the degree of the church's conversion, we cannot forget the countless number of people who have offered their life in love, in commitment with and for the poor. Some of these martyrs are known, but most are unknown, *desconocidos*, killed for contributing to the construction of solidarity and justice with the forgotten.

The Invitation of Jesus

Those who shape the dominant narratives of history and who also influence the dominant narrative of the church desire the erasure of the memory of the struggle—of what has been fought and who has been lost in the process of ecclesial conversion. But as Bartolomé de las Casas once wrote, God has a fresh and living memory of the smallest and most forgotten. God remembers, and the ongoing transformation and conversion of the church depends on our capacity to remember with God.

Since the bishops' conference in Medellín in 1968 and the early days of liberation theology, a profound transformation has indeed taken place in the Latin American church. It is one that has also affected the global church, most recently through the papacy of Francis and the "*sabor*

and *saber*"—the flavor and the knowledge—with which he is transforming the structures of the church.

At the conclusion to his book *On Job* (1985), Gutiérrez asks a version of the question that shows up in all his writings, the question that has guided his life and that he asks of us all: "How are we to do theology while Ayacucho lasts? How are we to proclaim the resurrection of the Lord where death reigns, and especially the death of children, women, the poor, indigenes, and the 'unimportant' members of our society?" Ayacucho is one of the poorest indigenous regions in Peru and is symbolic of every place where humanity is confronted with the death that oppression brings. Our response to his question must have its own accent, according to the needs of every particular time and place. At the root, we are faced with an invitation that all followers of Jesus must confront and for which we must give an account.

A Theology of Liberation was Gutiérrez's first major account of his faith, of the faith of his people, of the faith of the church. Fifty years later, that account is a significant contribution to help us remember how to be and become church with and for the poor and insignificant. Its impact is just beginning to be felt globally within the structures of the church as we live into the maturation and ecclesial conversion that is required for any genuine following of Jesus Christ.

Leo Guardado is an assistant professor of theology at Fordham University and a fellow of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at the University of Southern California. He is editing Gustavo Gutiérrez's most recent monograph, to be published in late 2023 in Spanish.



"The Raising of Lazarus"
by Sebastiano del Piombo

In Every Death, a Rising

What the story of Lazarus can teach us about new life

By James Martin

The dying is not the most important part of the Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus, which is traditionally called Jesus' "greatest miracle" and which, in John's Gospel, will ultimately lead to Jesus's crucifixion.

Everyone dies. People in first-century Bethany, the site of this story (now current-day Al-Eizariya, in Palestinian territory), knew this. Because of the poor sanitary conditions and only rudimentary medicine, death was a constant companion. But rising from the dead? In Jesus' ministry this had happened only twice before, once with the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue official, and again with the son of the widow of Nain. But neither of those was as dramatic as the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus's rising is the point of the story.

The most important part of this story for John is that the sign of the raising of Lazarus prompts people to believe or not believe. It is what the Greeks would call a "crisis," a time for a decision. (The word *krisis* comes from *krinein*, meaning "to decide.") For all who saw it, Lazarus's rising would have forced the question: Do I believe in Jesus or not?

In our own time, most of you reading the story of

Lazarus have probably already made your choice for Jesus. The crisis for you may be different: Do you believe that Jesus can give you new life—not in the way that he gave it to Lazarus, but in your life as you live it?

The final act in the story of Lazarus is not about death, but about life. And moving toward life is more than simply letting something die in the tomb. Or even dying to self. Because neither are things that we do. Rather, God invites us to let go in order that we might receive new life. For every death to self there is a rising. And we have to let go.

But the real work—the raising—*is done by God*.

It is also important to remember the cost to Jesus of doing this. As Brendan Byrne points out in his book *Come to the Light: Reflections on the Gospel of John*, Jesus had put his own life at risk by leaving a region of safety (across the Jordan) to travel to Judea to raise Lazarus, which reveals something important for all of us: "Here lies the most profound truth of the sequence: Lazarus stands in for each one of us. Each one of us is 'Lazarus': the 'friend' of Jesus, 'the one whom he loved.' For each one of us he left the 'safe country' of his existence with the Father in order, at the cost of his own life, to rescue us from death."

What does this mean in practice? None of us is going to be raised from the dead as Lazarus was. But we are invited to accept not only that God *can* give us new life, not only

that God *wants* to give us new life, but that God *is* giving us new life. In many ways.

‘When Really You’re Fine’

Sometimes new life is a matter of a new perspective. Recently I was offered a beautiful image of that.

Out of the blue I got an email from a friend of a friend. Chiara was the niece of an elderly priest who had worked for decades in Catholic parishes in Brooklyn and Queens, and whom I had never met. Now, at age 73, Father Andrew was near death, having come to the end of lengthy cancer treatments. Over the years, he had read some of my books, and his niece asked if I might meet with him virtually, over the internet, since he was struggling with his prayer. She asked if I might do a guided meditation with him. I said I was happy to.

Father Andrew and Chiara appeared onscreen a few days later, the priest lying in a comfortable recliner on the first floor of his rectory, an oxygen mask strapped to his face, alongside his smiling niece and another, younger, priest, who had been mentored by Father Andrew as a youth.

Father Andrew was a kind and gentle soul whom I liked immediately. Over the next hour, I led him through a simple guided meditation, inviting him to imagine himself at his favorite place, which turned out to be a beach on the southern shore of Long Island, and envision Jesus coming to speak with him. Afterward, I told him that he could do that meditation whenever he wanted. Eight days later, his niece told me that he had died.

The day after we met, Chiara sent me a note along with this reminiscence. She gave me permission to share it with you.

A few weeks ago, my husband and I brought my uncle to the beach. We put him in his wheelchair and walked him up and down the boardwalk. For a while, he and I sat there looking out at the ocean. We saw these two big ocean liners that looked like they were about to collide. Uncle reminded me that they were fine, it was just our perception. We spoke about how things appear one way from afar but then as you get closer—it’s totally different. Sometimes it seems like you are on a collision course, when really you’re fine.

Chiara wrote to me again a few weeks after her uncle died:

Maybe it’s hindsight, but I believe that when we had that conversation at Rockaway Beach about the ocean liners, we both knew that they repre-

sented death, though neither of us articulated it.

From my perspective, it seemed so far away, out in the distant future, not just a month away. I guess I’ll never quite know how he felt, but I do know that while he expressed some anxiety to me about death in those weeks, he also was at peace and even cracked jokes about it.

This is an example of how even the slightest shift in perspective can mean new life.

Remember Who Is Calling You

Living as a “raised person” will feel strange at first. As it probably did to Lazarus.

In Richard Zimler’s beautiful novel *The Gospel According to Lazarus*, the raised man is dazed after his time in the tomb. Initially he can barely remember the miracle. Jesus, touchingly, asks for forgiveness for arriving late. “Too late for what?” Lazarus says to himself.

In time, his family helps restore him to full health. But it takes him a while to live fully; at first, he walks on “unsteady” legs. In two dramas, William Butler Yeats’s play “Calvary” and Kahlil Gibran’s play “Lazarus and His Beloved,” Lazarus even prefers to stay in the tomb.

It can feel like that at first. We hear the invitation to die to self and to experience new life, and we try to let go of the past. We see things, like Father Andrew’s boats, from a new perspective and suddenly things seem new.

Yet we wonder how to walk into the future, how to embrace the new life that God has given us.

Initially it will feel unnatural, uncertain, unsteady, sometimes even false. Who are we to live in the new life? Who are we to say that we have been freed when we see so many people still in their tombs? (My friend Joseph McAuley said to me, “If we all knew what was to happen after we were born, we might want to stay in the womb!”) It’s natural for us to feel this way, to ask such questions. Yet this is where God wants us.

This may sound abstract. What might it mean in the concrete? Let’s take a specific case and a general case. Both are common in the spiritual life.

Let’s say that you feel an invitation to be kinder. You’re not a hardened criminal or a moral monster, but you’ve been, at times, cruel. You wield a sharp tongue with glee. Other people even praise you for your sarcasm. Whether out of spite, vengefulness or a desire not to let anyone take advantage of you, you’re sometimes pretty mean to other people. You’ve always made excuses: “They deserved it.” “No one should get the better of me.” “It’s a dog-eat-dog world.” Or maybe you think you are a great wit, cutting people down to size, à la Oscar Wilde.



The tomb of Lazarus in Al Eizariya (current-day Bethany), Israel

Catholic Travel Centre

But at heart you have to face it: Sometimes you're mean.

Then something happens—a look of hurt on someone's face, a chance conversation, a friend challenging you, a family member hurt by what you said, a therapist helping you see things in a new light, an experience on a retreat, a sudden insight in prayer—that makes you realize that you're being called to let that die.

Losing a Part of Yourself

A Jesuit once described for me a biting remark he made about another Jesuit, who would often write (very good) articles about the same topic. My friend walked into a room and said, "Oh, I see that **America** magazine published your article—again!" When the assembled crowd laughed, my friend saw the other Jesuit's face crumple in embarrassment. It was then that he saw he had to be kinder.

That part of you—the mean part—is not what God wants for you. You realize that simply being kind is an enormous part of the Christian life—of any moral life. It does not comprise a complete moral system (at some point one has to look beyond just individual kindness and into larger social questions of justice), but it is an essential part of living a moral life. Being kind, which may sound banal, now takes on greater import.

You realize that you need to stop bad-mouthing people behind their backs, spreading negative stories about them; you need to be more patient when people are rude to you;

you need to lend a helping hand more often to your friends and family who are in need; you need to listen more; you need to be more attentive—to be, in a word, kind. It suddenly seems like the most important thing in the world. Your heart quickens when you think of changing. You *want* to change, as my friend told me that he did.

You trust that God wants you to let that other part of you go, once and for all. It *has* to go.

But there's a problem: You're not sure how to do it. The negative trait has been so much a part of you that it almost feels like giving up a limb. You wonder: What will my friends think if I suddenly become nicer? If I lose my famous sarcasm? For that matter, what will happen if I let down the armor that I've been using to protect myself? Like Lazarus, you emerge, probably blinking in the sunlight of God's love.

Or perhaps your desire to change is not focused on a particular failing but is a more universal desire, something that affects almost every aspect of life.

Perhaps you feel that it's finally time to become an adult. You've been handling things for so long the way that you did when you were a child or an adolescent. Perhaps you react to difficult things the way a child would: with impatience, petulance or simply a desire that those things would just go away. You often respond purely out of emotion: raging at people when they contradict you, sulking when you are criticized and being resentful when things don't go your way, much as a small child would. Maybe

you're tired of your childish attitudes and behaviors. It's the way you've always lived, but you want to change. You want to become more adult.

Or perhaps you shirk responsibilities, preferring to let others do the hard work in your family, among your friends or on the job. In Ronald Rolheiser's superb book *Sacred Fire*, which lays out a spirituality for "Christian maturity," he speaks about the responsibilities of middle age. In this phase of life, you've made choices and commitments and carry "major responsibilities." In his vivid words, "We carry the car keys, the house keys, and the debt for both."

Staying the Course

Sacred Fire brought together much of what I had been thinking as I turned 50, when for many people life can seem an endless round of responsibilities, work and stress, especially after we have taken on the commitment of marriage or parenthood or even priesthood. Rolheiser says that this is the time when we are called to an adult embrace of even the "boredom, the longing for a second honeymoon, mid-life crisis, misunderstanding, disillusionment and numerous other things that eat away at our fidelity like rust on iron."

In those times, says Rolheiser, "real life depends on staying the course." Many years ago, when I was in a time of discernment over a course of action, my brother Jesuit Daniel Berrigan wrote a letter to me reminding me that I was a Jesuit "for the long haul" and to make decisions with that in mind. Both he and Rolheiser were getting at the same thing: the need for fidelity, keeping promises and honoring commitments that you have made. This also means a certain amount of letting go of other possibilities. Every choice, as my current spiritual director says, is a renunciation of sorts.

Father Rolheiser poses a question that a gifted counselor might pose to an adult facing the temptation to walk away from the life of an adult: "What do you really want to do here?" He notes that this question works on three levels, but it is the last one "upon which life-giving decisions most often turn: What do I think is the *wisest thing to do* here? What would I *most like to do* here? What do I *have to do* here?" All these questions are part of the adult way of life, which you now feel invited to live.

To return to the image of Lazarus, you feel the call to come out of the tomb, to live in a new way, whether it's letting go of a particular habit, like being mean, or moving into a whole new way of approaching life, like being more of an adult. You feel it's an invitation from God to emerge from the tomb—and it is.

As you first emerge, it's natural to feel unsteady. You've been in the dark for so long that the light will seem strange. The tomb feels safe and the outside feels dangerous. Death feels like life and life feels like death. But this is a lie, one

way that you are kept away from God. And the voice that says, "You can't do this" or "You'll never get out of here" or "This isn't real" is not coming from God.

Then you take the first tentative step out of the tomb. You try to live as if you were free of your grave cloths. You curb your tongue and find that you're still alive. You try to be kind and find that it feels good. The mean thoughts and sarcastic quips come into your mind, but you are getting better at letting them die within you. Some days you fail.

This is when we are called to remember that we are not simply engaged in a self-improvement project, noble as that may be. Our change is also not simply something that we realized in therapy, as important as that is too. Nor is it simply something that came up in our prayer, or read in a book, or that a trusted friend or spiritual adviser suggested. All these things are important in themselves. But something else is going on. We are responding to God's *call*. We know that God wants us to do this, wants us to change, and wants us to succeed.

But the process can be difficult. And it is then that we must remember *who* is calling us.

In our reflections on this Gospel passage, we may have downplayed something important: Lazarus's role. Now, I won't speculate on where Lazarus was during those four days—heaven, hell, purgatory or some other place—which is unknowable this side of the grave. All we know is that, as Jesus told the disciples emphatically, he was dead.

But after being called from that mysterious place, Lazarus must make a decision: to listen to Jesus' voice, to rise from the stone bed on which he lay, and to walk out covered with his grave cloths, wondering what will await him; or to remain inside his tomb.

Lazarus is not passive: He must *act*. Lazarus had a choice. So do we.

This is our call, as we try to move toward the light that is offered to us. And, like us, Lazarus can only "come forth" because he knows and trusts in the person who calls him. He not only hears the words coming from the entrance to his tomb, but he recognizes the distinctive voice, and trusts the person speaking to him.

This is our task as well: to remember who is saying to us, "Come forth!"

James Martin, S.J., is a Jesuit priest and editor at large at *America*. He is the author of many books, including most recently *Come Forth: The Promise of Jesus's Greatest Miracle (HarperOne)*, from which this article is excerpted. Copyright by HarperOne Books.



Saying Goodbye to St. Gabriel's

When schools close, is our church dying or being reborn?

By Maurice Timothy Reidy

Heather Vallin

What I will remember most are the pads on the gym wall.

If you graduated from St. Gabriel's School in the Bronx, you know exactly what I am talking about. For those who have not had the privilege, an explanation is in order.

The St. Gabriel's gym, where I attended many basketball games, a few school graduations and the occasional Mass, is not, properly speaking, a gym. To be precise, it is not large enough to accommodate a standard basketball court. The court's boundaries run perilously close to the walls beneath each basket, which is why some wise soul installed foam pads on the walls. I assume the sign came later. It reads: "Do not jump on padding."

The warning, as you might have guessed, was sometimes ignored.

I share this bit of New York Catholic school trivia because St. Gabriel's closed in June after 80 years of service to South Riverdale, a neighborhood that sits just north of the Henry Hudson Bridge connecting Manhattan and the

Bronx. It is one of 12 Catholic schools closed this spring in the Archdiocese of New York.

We also recently learned that the Sisters of Charity of New York, who had taught for many years at St. Gabriel's and who were there in force when my father graduated in 1955, have recently decided to stop accepting new members, thus beginning their "path to completion." (See "Nerves, Tears and Chanting," **America**, July/August 2023.)

So this is an essay about endings. But first, let's go back to the beginning.

An Ad Hoc Church

St. Gabriel's School was founded in 1941—shortly after the Henry Hudson Bridge was built, bringing more housing, and more Catholics, to the neighborhood. Before that time, the neighborhood was largely known for the tuberculosis hospital that sat on a hill looking west toward the Hudson River, named after St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. The school was

built with a church on the first floor, and the plan, from what I understand, was to then build a larger church in the lot next door. But that never happened, which is why the church (which remains open) retains an ad hoc flavor. To enter, you have to walk down a few steps. The altar sits at the crux of an L-shaped sanctuary and faces a set of large sliding doors that open up into the gym.

My grandfather moved into the neighborhood in 1940 or so, around the time he was married. He grew up near Fordham Road, also in the Bronx, and I imagine the tree-lined streets of Riverdale appealed to him. Fifteen years later, he bought some land on the other side of the Henry Hudson Parkway, and there he stayed until his death. My father lived there, too, for most of his life and graduated from St. Gabriel's in 1955. There was no question where I would go to school when he moved back to the area in 1980.

I graduated in 1989. My nephew, a member of the last class, graduated this spring. Much remains unchanged. The classrooms look largely the same, and recess is still a raucous affair played out in the large parking lot next door. Annual rituals continued with reassuring familiarity: the car wash fundraiser, the 24-hour basketball marathon, Friday nights in the gym and holy days of obligation observed at a weekday morning Mass. Save for the post-Vatican II vibe of the church itself, it could be 1955 on West 235th Street and Netherland Avenue.

But change was happening, if you looked close enough. Class sizes waxed and waned. More students began coming from outside the neighborhood. And the Sisters of Charity left the school many years ago.

Officially, St. Gabriel's is merging with a school just to the north, St. Margaret of Cortona. I imagine some students will make the move, but many will not. And some teachers will lose their jobs. As you can imagine, people are sad and angry, including members of my family. This is entirely understandable. The closing of a school or a church is like a death, and we should not pretend otherwise. It is not something I ever imagined happening when I was a student, when Catholic culture in New York was thick.

A Hinge of History

The older I grow, the more I begin to reflect on what it means to live at this hinge point in U.S. Catholic history. It seems to be the lot of my generation—born after the Second Vatican Council, old enough to feel the brunt force of the sexual abuse crisis—to be part of a church forever in transition. Is it our role to serve as witness to the death of something: a church, a school, a religious order? Or should we instead be

the ones forging ahead to create something new?

I suspect that this may be an easier question for millennials or Gen Z to answer. They are young enough—and bold enough—to want to look forward and not backward. But it is more difficult for those who have deep ties to the way things used to be. I feel torn between a desire to honor the places that formed me and the need to try to find a new way to be Catholic in the 21st century.

Pope Francis has said that we are living through “not an era of change, but a change of era.” The historian John McGreevy quotes this line in his new book, *Catholicism: A Global History From the French Revolution to Pope Francis*. Reading Mr. McGreevy, it becomes apparent that the church, at least in the West, is reaching the end of an age of religious fervor that began in the 18th century and stretched all the way to Vatican II. It is a story that began in villages of France after the revolution and was still playing out in the Bronx two centuries later. It is an inspiring tale. I just don't know what I think about living at the end of it. Sometimes it feels like our church is disappearing one parish or school or congregation at a time.

Back to the St. Gabe's gym. That awkward space is the source of many happy memories. Here's one: Msgr. John Doherty stands in the stairwell, taking in the crowd with a smile. One of the class mothers sits behind a folding table by the entrance, selling tickets. The buzzer (always too loud) brings an end to the second quarter. The teams march off to the locker room (which is actually a kitchen) for halftime. There's no beer to be had, but hot dogs are only a dollar.

It wasn't much to look at, but it was a place to be together.

This is the lesson I carry with me as we seek to figure out what comes next for the church in New York and beyond. For those of us who were lucky enough to live in this Catholic enclave at this time in history, grace could often be found in the most unlikely of places: in a too-small gym, in an ad hoc locker room, in a church that was poorly lit and overly carpeted.

Which is to say: We should not get hung up on one image of what church should be. It may no longer be the parish we knew and it may no longer be a school. It just has to be a place where two or three people are gathered in his name.

Maurice Timothy Reidy is the deputy editor in chief of *America*.



Students from Fordham Prep and other Viva House volunteers join Brendan Walsh, at left in dark blue shirt, and his wife Willa Bickham, standing below, on the steps of Viva House in Baltimore, Md., in March 2023.

JP Feighery, director of alumni engagement

Healing Old Wounds

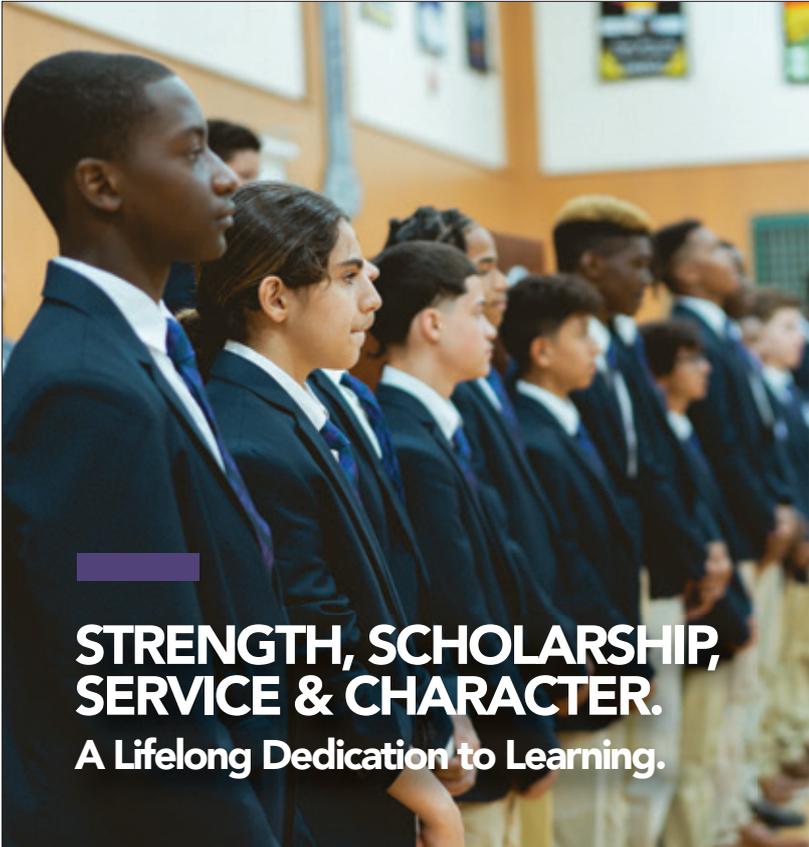
Three graduates of Fordham Prep took divergent paths during the Vietnam War

By Michael G. Considine

In 1960, three young men graduated from Fordham Preparatory School, a Jesuit high school nestled on the historic Rose Hill campus in the Bronx alongside Fordham University, and set out on paths that would painfully clash as the Vietnam War unfolded. Jack Geraghty ventured south to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., and Jack Bergen headed north to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. Brendan Walsh enrolled at LeMoyne College in Syracuse, N.Y., where he studied under a pacifist faculty member, Daniel J. Berrigan, S.J.

After leaving the seminary in 1967, Mr. Walsh relocated to Baltimore, where he worked with his former teacher's brother, Philip Berrigan, who was then a Josephite priest, and became active in the antiwar movement. Mr. Walsh married Willa Bickham, a former nun, registered nurse and kindred spirit. It was Mr. Walsh who drove the Cantonsville Nine to the Selective Services Office on May 17, 1968, where they stole hundreds of draft files and burned them in the agency parking lot. They were all arrested for their antiwar activities.

In 1968, Mr. Walsh and Ms. Bickham turned their house, an outpost of the antiwar movement, into a Catholic Worker house



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One remains a pacifist; the other two continue to honor friends and academy classmates who died in Vietnam.

of hospitality called Viva House. Their very first visitor was reportedly Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. Mr. Walsh embarked on a life focused on the plight of the marginalized in Baltimore.

By that time, Mr. Geraghty had become captain of a Swift Boat in the treacherous rivers of the Mekong Delta, while Mr. Bergen had joined a South Vietnamese battalion in the hills north of Danang as an Army Ranger. Both returned from the war with Bronze Stars.

After the war, their lives continued on different courses. Mr. Geraghty left the Navy and became a successful Wall Street executive. Mr. Bergen continued an Army career that ended in the Pentagon, where he was the speechwriter for Caspar Weinberger, secretary of defense in the Reagan administration. Later, he became an executive at CBS and Alcoa.

More than a half century later, Mr. Walsh and Ms. Bickham are still working and living in Viva House, which has remained a beacon of hope in Baltimore. They have served millions of meals, provided temporary emergency shelter to countless individuals and families displaced by tragedy and violence, and distributed tons of groceries to local residents. Their home has been a focal point for residents, volunteers, and local and national leaders, who meet there to discuss and tackle the complex problems of poverty and violence.

In their 2017 book, *The Long Loneliness in Baltimore: Stories Along the Way*, Mr. Walsh and Ms. Bickham describe the steady destructiveness of urban poverty and hunger. Describing its impact on families, they observe: “At one time, Viva House served mostly older men with drug or drinking problems; now we see young families with children.” They admit their work has become more challenging of late: “[T]he soup pots and canned goods feel heavier, while the lines for the kitchen and pantry seem endless.”

Notwithstanding their differences, in 2021, Mr. Bergen and Mr. Geraghty nominated Mr. Walsh for a coveted award at Fordham Prep for Mr. Walsh’s 50-year effort to combat poverty in the city of Baltimore. Their Jesuit high school periodically recognizes in its Hall of Honor those

“men and women for others” selected from the school’s community who deploy their talents to make a difference in the world. Past inductees include a governor of New York; the founder of Operation Smile; the founder of a middle school for girls in the inner city of Hartford; a fireman felled on Sept. 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center; and a general who served in the Civil War.

In Mr. Bergen’s speech at the Hall of Honor induction ceremony in 2022, he acknowledged the incongruity “of those who fought in Vietnam supporting a classmate who was burning draft cards and spilling blood on the steps of the Pentagon.” He and Mr. Geraghty never wavered from their decision to serve in the Vietnam War despite the withering antiwar criticism from groups with which Mr. Walsh was associated. Yet they found peace in the healing power of the passage of time and in a visceral respect for Mr. Walsh’s selfless service.

“Most of us,” Mr. Bergen noted, “think we’ve lived a good life and give credit to Fordham Prep for our success... and have been given frequent credit and recognition from family and peers for that success. Despite Brendan showing a dedication, persistence and courage that exceeds anything I can claim in my own life, I’ll bet he got far less encouragement or recognition.”

Recognizing the value of Mr. Walsh’s service, Mr. Geraghty and Mr. Bergen seeded an endowment in Mr. Walsh’s name to support the school’s numerous service program initiatives. Many of their classmates and other alumni have pledged to support the endowment.

Earlier this year, eight students and two staffers traveled to Viva House to meet Mr. Walsh and hear his story. They also hand-delivered more than 150 bags of food collected by the student body during the school’s annual Hunger Awareness Month. And the Prep’s 2023 graduating class voted to donate their class gift to the Brendan Walsh Service Endowment.

Fifty-five years ago, three men were willing to die or go to prison for their vastly opposing views. Today, one remains a pacifist; the other two continue to honor friends and academy classmates who died in Vietnam (and a Prep classmate, Eugene Pabst, who remains missing in action). While Mr. Geraghty and Mr. Bergen remain proud of their military service, by honoring Walsh’s contributions to a different life of service, they have found a way to heal old wounds and join him in a cause important to their alma mater and vital to the community.

Michael G. Considine is a partner at Seward and Kissel in New York City and a former board member of Fordham Preparatory School.

POEM POEM POEM

SIN OF OMISSION

By Lee Nash

Nine o'clock: the host has not been put away.
The church decants its parishioners,
leaving the *Saint-Sacrement* unadored, trapped
in the wide-angled eye of its monstrance.
The priest forgot, distracted by the fire
in the presbytery, the church triathlon,
and social media posts of the diverting kind.
All night, God peers from his gilded case,
nothing to do but wait for morning
and soak up the prayers of the world—
*Help me, Lord—I'm trapped in the boondocks,
in the city, in a sump of a marriage, in a toxic job,
in the clamp of debt, in sickness. Don't forget me.*—
then to be sheepishly rescued and, quite understanding,
wafted back to the ambry, safe in human hands.

Lee Nash's work has been featured in several journals and anthologies including *Acorn*, *Reflect Fiction*, *Ambit* and *The Best Small Fictions* 2019. Her poetry chapbook, *Ash Keys*, was published by *Flutter Press* in 2017 and a translation, *Un Rhinocéros en Opération Sauvetage*, was published in 2021.

MEN OF CLAY

By Shann Ray

1/ We who are brothers
will live forever.

You held me when we were young.
Older, when I saw you in pain
I placed my hand on your chest
to free you from sorrow.

The river south of our single-wide trailer
was deep and marred with deadwood.
The future was like the crow we found
neck askew in the barrow pit, or the two
black oiled feathers we lifted
and silently placed in our pockets.
Miraculously, we made it into life
and the blessing
of children. I still picture us going out
into the world like warriors, your jawline an arrow,
and how in the evening we would lie on our father's bed,
our feet made of clay when he turned our wrists, gently,
in order to kiss the lifeline.

2/ His kiss was not unlike the kiss of God,
the imprint on our wrists our bond and
also the hint of the unforeseen.
Now that he's gone, and now that you've
taken your life
I'm reminded how you said God dwells
in the thick darkness and how
in the Beartooth Range
each winter was followed by our father greeting
us again.

Shann Ray teaches leadership and forgiveness studies at Gonzaga University and poetry at Stanford. He is a National Endowment for the Arts fellow.



The Case Against ‘Dead Poets Society’

By Elizabeth Grace Matthew

“Dead Poets Society” (1989) is a beautifully filmed and affecting movie that was nominated for several Academy Awards and won the award for best original screenplay. The film, which stars the late Robin Williams as an energetic and innovative English teacher named John Keating, is set in the late 1950s at an elite boys’ boarding school in New England: the fictional Dalton Academy.

At Dalton, boys are offered a rigorous and traditional education. They are drilled in Latin verbs; they solve advanced math problems; they memorize historical facts. In what was by 1989 a reductionist and ideological rendering of a 1950s educational setting, Dalton students are never explicitly encouraged to find joy in any of their scholastic pursuits. Or, really, in anything.

That is, until Williams’s young Mr. Keating—himself

a Dalton graduate, a well-regarded English teacher and a student of romantic poetry—arrives on the scene.

At Dalton, Keating’s first class consists of walking his pupils into the school’s hallway to peruse framed photographs of Dalton alumni. There, Keating tells the students that they may henceforth address him not as Mr. Keating but as “O Captain, My Captain!”—a reference to Walt Whitman’s 1865 poem about the death of President Abraham Lincoln. Then, maintaining the class’s focus on the photographs of Dalton students of yore, Keating recites the first line of Robert Herrick’s 1648 poem, “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time”: “gather ye rosebuds while ye may.” The boys must, Keating tells them, “seize the day,” because mortality looms. “We are food for worms, lads,” says Keating, so live for the moment. *Carpe diem*.



Alamy

Before Mr. John Keating (played by Robin Williams) exerts his influence, Dalton, the fictional private school in “Dead Poets Society,” is a place where many boys are thriving.

Keating’s second lesson for the Dalton students involves literally ripping out of their poetry books an essay by a scholar named J. Evans Pritchard titled “Understanding Poetry.” This essay purports to offer a graphing formula by which one can ascertain any given poem’s so-called greatness by plotting its “artfulness” on one axis and its “importance” on the other. The exercise conveys Keating’s conviction that the pedagogical and academic theory called New Criticism, which emphasized close reading and aesthetics (and which dominated instruction in literature from the 1940s until the late 1960s), is in fact “excrement.” In his class, Keating tells his pupils, there will be no “armies of academics going forward, measuring poetry...you will learn to think for yourselves.”

It’s all very heady stuff. The boys begin meeting in a cave at night to read poetry to one another in an attempt to resurrect the forbidden Dead Poets Society, in which Mr. Keating participated as a Dalton student. The teens are mesmerized and inspired by Keating, just as generations of viewers have been mesmerized and inspired by the film of the same name. I confess to having been so myself when I first saw the film at age 15. Especially for those of us who came early to a love of literature, Keating’s semantic brilliance and theatrical self-assur-

ance make his philosophy go down like the coolest, sweetest beverage on a hot summer day.

The problem? The film’s fictional Keating and his real-life counterparts—who now dominate secondary and post-secondary education—mostly poison the young people whose intellectual and spiritual thirst they mean to quench.

Healthy Order and Healthy Disorder

Before Keating exerts his influence, Dalton is a place where many boys are thriving. We see boys sneaking transistor radios into dorms, boys contemplating how to steal the girlfriends of public-school athletes, boys forming regular study groups and occasional cheating alliances, boys bustling with the restless physical energy that, more than any other characteristic, defines male youth.

That is, we see boys pushing against the boundaries that their parents and teachers have set—exactly as healthy

teens should.

Are those boundaries overly narrow and constraining, and therefore due for reform? In some cases, absolutely—and tragically so. Animated by class anxiety and therefore deeply concerned about his son’s academic performance and professional trajectory, Mr. Perry, the father of a boy named Neil, forces his son to withdraw from a position as assistant editor of Dalton’s yearbook so that he can focus exclusively on his course work. Worse, given Neil’s deep penchant for acting, Perry forbids his son from participating in a local production of Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” Neil defies his father by participating in the play anyway and ultimately commits suicide when his parents fail to understand the depth of his commitment to the theater and continue to insist that he become a doctor.

In the wake of Neil’s death, the Dalton administration dismisses Mr. Keating, blaming his unorthodox instructional methods and the Dead Poets Society for the tragedy. This is, of course, unfair to the well-intentioned Keating, who was trying to help Neil explain to his father just how much he loves acting.

Still, as anyone who has spent any time around teenagers (especially teenage boys) knows, their primary limitation is not an inability to seize the day; it is an inability to plan for the future. Indeed, teens’ impulsivity and recklessness is best met with exactly the kind of regimentation, order and authority that Dalton as a whole was attempting to provide.

This is the same kind of regimentation, order and authority with which adults of every race, religion and class engaged with teenagers until the 1960s. And, of course, it sometimes had its excesses. Any claim to mathematically measure the “greatness” of poems is self-evidently asinine. More important, a father’s attempt to make significant life decisions for his healthy and self-aware teenage son, without his input, was bound to be counterproductive in every possible way.

But these excesses of the 1950s educational order, as depicted in “Dead Poets Society,” are made-up exceptions that prove the overwhelming rule: Healthy teens need order if they are to court and create developmentally healthy disorder. Being without boundaries to push and structures to push against leads to exactly the type of solipsistic, faux introspection that gives rise to the existential angst for which teens have been known ever since we accepted as a cultural rule that, in the words of Bob Dylan, “mothers and fathers throughout the land” should not “criticize what you



Mr. Keating and his real-life counterparts mostly poison the kids whose intellectual and spiritual thirst they mean to quench.

can't understand."

But, of course, mothers and fathers can understand just fine. The only thing more anti-intellectual than some self-important college professor presuming to quantify the greatness of Shakespeare is some self-important English teacher presuming to teach impressionable boys to think for themselves by using them to unquestioningly validate his own credulous and oversimplified relationship to romantic verse. Keating demanded, remember, that his students rip out "Understanding Poetry" by the fictional foil, Pritchard—not that they develop arguments for refuting it or, forbid the thought, for agreeing with it. Keating does not want the boys to think for themselves—not really. He does not want them to think at all, in fact. He wants them to feel as he does.

When Keating is confronted by Dalton's headmaster, Mr. Nolan, and questioned about his unorthodox teaching methods, he replies that he "always thought the idea of educating was to learn to think for yourself." What Nolan says in response includes what are meant to be the most villainous and regressive lines of the film: "At these boys' ages! Not on your life. Tradition, John. Discipline. Prepare them for college, and the rest will take care of itself."

All reductions to absurdity and excesses notwithstanding, the fictional Nolan has it right.

'Lean on Me'

If only all the real-life Keatings had listened to voices like the fictional Nolan's for the past several decades instead of—with some notable exceptions, many of them Catholic—systematically eradicating schools' embrace of tradition and discipline, which once served as the necessary

counterweight to teens' natural drive to embrace the idea of *carpe diem*.

If they had, then another 1989 film about education, "Lean on Me," would not remain so sadly relevant. Released just three months before "Dead Poets Society," "Lean on Me" chronicles the drastic measures taken in 1987 by a real-life principal, represented in the film by the character Joe Clark (played by Morgan Freeman), to rescue an inner-city New Jersey high school. His task: to transform a "cauldron of violence" in which about one-third of the students could pass the New Jersey Minimum Basic Skills test into a safe, positive environment in which more than three-quarters of students demonstrated basic skills.

By the mid-1970s, the educational philosophy espoused by Mr. Keating in "Dead Poets Society"—that is, the hegemonic rejection of tradition and the emphasis on enthusiasm over discipline—had become normative in schools of education in American universities. Hence, ideologically motivated educational philosophies from out-of-touch academics had trickled down into the nation's primary and secondary schools, particularly those serving the neediest urban students.

When Clark arrives at Eastside High, he finds rampant violence, chaos and underachievement. He recognizes instantly that these elements of disorder have one common cause: the Eastside High teachers' unwillingness to claim discipline and order as values, and to enforce those values through legitimate authority.

By the 1980s, too many such educators had been influenced by real-life Mr. Keatings. So when Clark yells that "discipline is not the enemy of enthusiasm," his colleagues are deeply skeptical. When he assumes total authority, in deference not to the niceties of an abysmally failing status quo but to the demands of a reality he hopes to create in which "the minds of the young are set free," his colleagues find this unilateral wielding of (legitimate) power jarring.

This is unsurprising, since by the time Clark gets to Eastside, the chaos has become so intractable that he must expel 300 "incorrigible" students to protect the other 2,700. He chains school doors (in violation of the fire code) to keep drug dealers out; and, despite the overwhelming popularity of his approach among the mostly minority parents in the Eastside community, he is under constant threat from a politicized school board and a self-interested mayor.

Leading up to 1989 and through the years that followed, when it would have been difficult (but not impossible) for us as a nation to do the hard work of heeding Mr. Clark and reforming our public schools accordingly, we chose to adopt Mr. Keating's self-reverential, feel-good



When Joe Clark (played by Morgan Freeman) arrives at “Lean on Me”’s Eastside High, he finds rampant violence, chaos and underachievement.

style instead—and to do so where we could least afford it.

Absent strict boundaries and consistent discipline, privileged teens like those in “Dead Poets Society” might develop the kind of sophomoric self-importance that causes themselves angst and others annoyance. More urgently, though, for underprivileged teens like those in “Lean on Me,” the consequences of discarding time-tested rigor in favor of misguided tolerance have been truly dire.

Today, about one-third of American fourth graders overall are proficient in reading. In 2019 (before Covid-19 measures took an even further toll), in one of the poorest large cities in the nation, my native Philadelphia, exactly 20 percent of high school students proved proficient in algebra. Meanwhile, the school superintendent in a socioeconomically depressed Philadelphia suburb that has been experiencing a rise in student-perpetrated violence and bullying pleaded with district parents to “please speak to your children about appropriate conduct on their way to and from school and in school.” The district, he said, is “putting our staff, our emergency responders, and other students in potentially unsafe situations.”

The fictional Clark, by contrast, after expelling 300 troublemakers, tells the remaining students, “You will not be bothered in Joe Clark’s school” and upbraids his fellow faculty members: “This is an institution of learning, ladies and gentlemen. If you can’t control it, how can you teach?”

This kind of swift, certain and consistent discipline—

this insistence that socioeconomically disadvantaged students will not be subjected to victimization in their own schools—turned the real-life Eastside High around in the 1980s. With teachers rather than students in charge, Eastside was able to offer its students both academic rigor and supportive community. Similar reforms could yield similar results—even today.

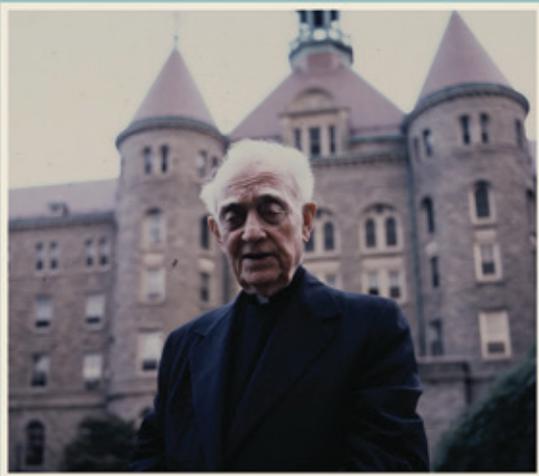
But we have little desire to work that hard or to break with conventional unwisdom. Like the boys of “Dead Poets Society,” we are too busy feeling to think—for ourselves or at all.

So across the country, we as a society do tragically little that would require authoritative, honest and unsparing action over a sustained period of time to improve the lives and prospects of the students and families who need it most. Because that would be unpleasant, plodding work and would not feel good—and who wants that, what with each of our self-serving days on earth numbered?

Carpe diem, indeed.

Elizabeth Grace Matthew is a visiting fellow at Independent Women’s Forum and a contributor to *Young Voices*. Her writing has appeared in *USA Today*, *The Hill*, *Deseret News*, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Law and Liberty*, *Real Clear Books & Culture* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

THE DEAN OF CATHOLIC HISTORY



John Tracy Ellis

An American Catholic Reformer

THOMAS J. SHELLEY

The Catholic University of America Press / 204p \$75

Msgr. John Tracy Ellis would start each semester with the same quote: “If you lack wisdom, God can give it to you; if you lack knowledge, I can provide it; if you lack common sense, nobody can help you!”

Msgr. Thomas Shelley, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York who died last year, gives us all three in *John Tracy Ellis: An American Catholic Reformer*, a well-documented yet very readable biography of the “dean” of American Catholic history. Ever faithful to his mentor, Shelley would admit that he perhaps lacks the distance and impartiality called for in a scholarly biography, as he himself was a student and friend of Ellis. Yet he gives us a fair and thorough treatment without becoming hagiographic—Ellis would cringe at such!—of this unforgettable and most influential priest, churchman and historian.

Shelley’s own track record of writings—especially his *Paul J. Hallinan: First Archbishop of Atlanta*, his history of Fordham University and his history of St. Joseph’s Seminary, to name but three from a lengthy list—displays Ellis’s

influence not only upon him, but on a distinguished and significant number of other historians trained by “the dean.” Ellis is usually listed in the trinity of normative American church historians, along with John Gilmary Shea and Peter Keenan Guilday, but Ellis had no peer.

That he was born in 1905 in a Saturday Evening Post cover town in the Midwest, Seneca, Ill., gave Ellis the impeccable manners, loyalty to family and friends, sense of responsibility and energetic work that the author often praises. From the start, through the first three and a half decades of his life, his priority was learning. He was not ordained a priest until 1938 (for the Diocese of Winona, though he would later be incardinated into the Archdiocese of Washington). An eager reader, he especially savored his years at St. Viator College, a combination high school-college in central Illinois run by the Viatorians.

While ever witty and sociable, Ellis was, as well, deeply devout. Even as a youth and a student, he depended on a regimen, fortified by Viatorian tradition, of frequent Mass and Holy Communion, regular confession, and a steady habit of prayer and spiritual reading. He came under the tutelage of priests who encouraged him in piety and learning, especially the Viatorian and historian Edward Cardinal, and other priests who would later include even Msgr. Fulton J. Sheen, with whom he lived and for whom he served as a lay secretary in the 1930s in Washington, D.C.

With these priests, he would often seek help in discerning a possible vocation to the priesthood, a decision always postponed because of his passion for learning and a longing to teach and undertake serious research. Thank God he eventually discovered the two not to be exclusive.

Shelley colorfully traces Ellis’s multiple teaching assignments, taking him from The Catholic University of America to Kansas, Illinois, Minnesota, Texas and California, always at small Catholic colleges run by religious orders. They all left him restless. His yearning from the start of his teaching was to return full time to C.U.A., where he had earned his doctorate under Msgr. Peter Guilday. Guilday’s masterful biographies of John Carroll and John England, plus his volume on the Councils of Baltimore, had a deep impact on the young Ellis, especially Guilday’s insistence on depending upon original sources.

Ellis’s own studies, as well as his teaching at these multiple tiny Catholic colleges, gave him more than immense learning. They prompted in him a stinging criticism of the church’s noble yet less-than-rigorous “higher education.” For one, he lamented from the start that there were far too many church-sponsored colleges, all of which were underfunded, with professors both underpaid and not given enough time for serious research. Far better, Ellis would



John Tracy Ellis is usually listed in the trinity of normative American church historians, but he had no peer.

constantly plead, for the church to have a few well-financed, first-rate colleges and universities than a plethora of mediocre ones. While he deeply admired the mission of the church in higher education, and respected highly the commitment of religious orders, especially of women, he felt this multiplication counterproductive, a criticism he extended to seminaries as well. Fewer but better, he argued his entire life.

Ellis also mourned the reduction of scholarly church history to defensive apologetics. Throughout his life he would cringe at well-intentioned bishops, and even fellow authors, who felt the aim of church history was to edify, never shock, God's people. "We show the mystical body of Christ, warts and all!" he would thunder to generations of students. Shelley highlights Ellis's towering esteem for two leaders who encouraged historians never to evade the facts, and to place the narrative of truth, even when it hurt, as the historian's indispensable task: Pope Leo XIII and Cardinal John Henry Newman.

This gusto for the truth, Shelley correctly notes, gave Ellis's classroom pedagogy and numerous writings a tantalizing style. History is akin to gossip with footnotes, Ellis would insist.

Ellis was also convinced that scholars, and, for that matter, all loyal Catholics, should not feel compelled to let their love for the church scare them into avoiding any honest fault-finding. This was especially poignant in an era of "ghetto Catholicism," when the church, especially in the United States, was termed "a state within a state" with a tight, cohesive culture that spawned a sense of defensiveness among Catholics, and led to critics, even sincere ones, being looked upon as disloyal.

These lifelong convictions came to national attention when, in May 1955, Ellis, then a full professor at C.U.A., editor of the prestigious Catholic Historical Review and author of the widely lauded two-volume biography of Cardinal James Gibbons (to this day unfailingly termed "magisterial"), delivered a lecture in Chicago on anti-intellectualism in American Catholic life. It became a bombshell.

Why, Ellis asked, was a church so renowned in America for its hospitals, charities, vocations, parochial vitality, strong families, patriotism, growth in numbers and rising prosperity so lackluster and stagnant in producing top-rate intellectuals? While he gave some reasons—the struggling immigrant status of Catholics, their economic woes, their penchant for action and pragmatism over advanced learning—none of these, persuasively argued Ellis, could erase the fact that the church's moribund intellectual life in America was a detriment to the Catholic future in the republic, and unworthy of a church that was the stalwart of learning and culture in Europe.

This lecture, later published in *Thought*, marked Ellis as a "liberal," a brand he later smiled at, as he considered himself quite old-fashioned; thus the title of Shelley's biography, terming Ellis a reformer. Ever careful, Shelley usually uses the adjective "balanced" when describing Ellis's advocacy and liberalism.

As the author shows, there is no doubt that Ellis was a liberal in the Newman tradition. He had a strong "commitment to truth" (the title of what might be Ellis's most moving book); he had an unwillingness to be muted on legitimate, if always reverent, criticism of the church; and he dared to step outside the obligatory defensiveness toward the dominant culture, and even to cooperate with and sympathize with some developments in the modern world, such as civil rights and issues of justice and peace.

This liberalism became even more evident in his embrace of the reforms of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, and in his frequent jabs at Rome and the American bishops for being too slow and stumbling in the council's implementation. This "reformer" would advocate for much more involvement in the church for the laity, and for priests in the choice of bishops. He was not shy in complaining about prelates who were aristocratic, unapproachable and thought themselves above criticism.

A large part of Ellis's fondness for the council was its affirmation of religious freedom, which he saw as a vindication of the American experiment, cherished and promoted by the church on these shores. Shelley's treatment of Ellis's friendship with, cooperation with and encouragement given to John Courtney Murray, S.J., the American Jesuit renowned (at much personal cost) as the advocate for the American brand of religious freedom, is especially new and illuminative.

Yet Shelley skillfully shows that Ellis was far too complicated to be fully understood only as a liberal. Close to him personally as he was, he knew Ellis to be an old-fashioned

gentleman, heartily in love with the church—"warts and all!"—pious in his spiritual regimen, polite and well mannered, loyal to church teaching on faith and morals, who had no patience at all with frenzies to the right or left. In one class, when a student asked his preference for *The Wanderer* or *The National Catholic Reporter*, Ellis shouted out, "A curse on both their houses!"

And while he began to cautiously welcome reforms on higher education—lay government, academic freedom and the downsizing in the numbers of smaller, struggling Catholic colleges—he could be heard lamenting the de-emphasis on the traditional promotion of the classics, philosophy, theology, history, languages and literature, fearing Catholic universities were losing some of their uniqueness, eager to become "Harvards with incense."

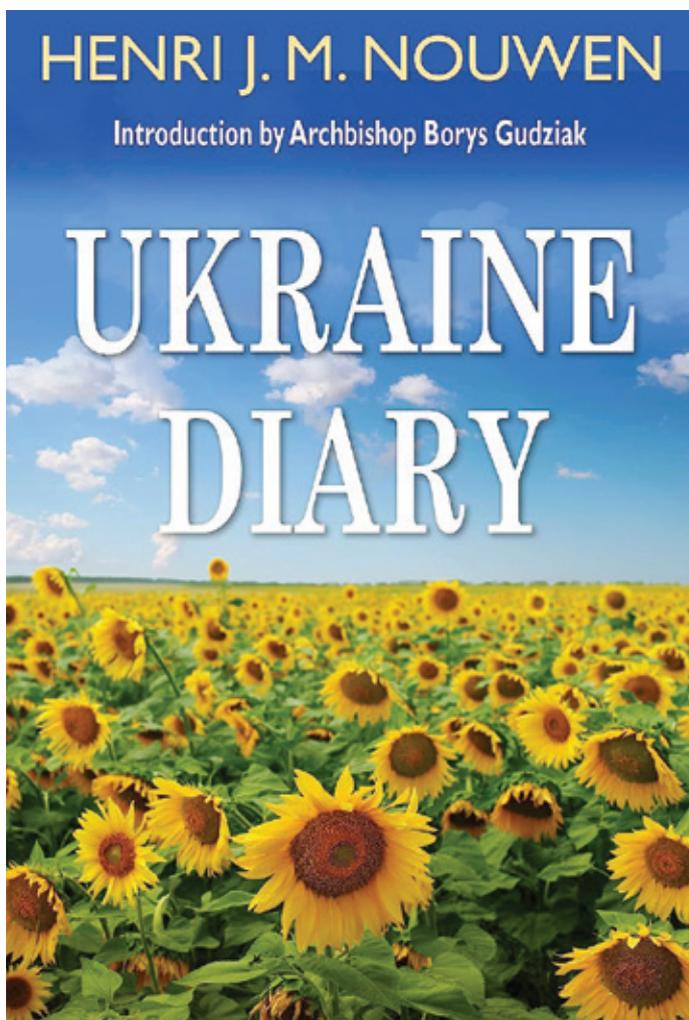
Shelley is not shy about Ellis's venial sins: that he favored excessively the institutional, or episcopal biography style of church history, instead of "history from below"; that he could have moments of tantrum, in speech and writing, against those "not his cup of tea"; and that he was easily hurt by those he believed were friends.

As is clear, this reviewer is obviously high on this book, while confessing a friendship with both the subject and the author. Mistakes? I searched for them, and, with the exception of the dates of the tenure of Archbishop Jean Jadot as apostolic delegate here in the United States, was unable to find any. Shelley does sometimes repeat himself: We hardly needed 10 mentions of Ellis's description of Msgr. George Higgins as "the best informed priest in America," true as it may have been. Shelley can also be too knee-jerk in his dependence upon terms such as *progressive* and *liberal* versus *ultraconservative* and *reactionary*, with the first group the heroes and the latter the villains.

If you were fortunate enough to have known, studied under, read or listened to John Tracy Ellis, you will find yourself smiling, sometimes tearing up, and enthusiastically nodding in agreement with Shelley's book. If you are simply interested in a deeper appreciation of 20th-century Catholicism in America, you can't go wrong with this volume.

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan is the archbishop of New York.

PROFOUND ENCOUNTERS



Orbis Books / 176p \$20

Its cover adorned by a bright blue sky overlooking a field of sunflowers, *Ukraine Diary* stood out among the books on display when I first saw it at a Catholic bookstore. When I looked more closely, I was stunned to see a familiar name: "Henri J. M. Nouwen." I thought I had extensively surveyed the English-language literature at the intersection of Ukraine and Catholicism. How had I missed an entire work on Ukraine by this renowned Catholic spiritual writer?

Quite easily, it turns out, as *Ukraine Diary* was published just this year. With an introduction by his longtime friend, Archbishop Borys Gudziak, and an afterword by his brother, Laurent Nouwen, the core of the volume is the journal Nouwen kept during his two trips to Ukraine in 1993 and 1994. These short visits had a profound impact on him, and at the time of his sudden death in 1996, he was planning to spend a semester at the school now known as Ukrainian Catholic University. Through his diary, the reader encounters Ukraine as Nouwen did, in the early years of post-Soviet



Nouwen strove to listen to the Ukrainians he met, to their history of suffering and perseverance, but above all to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit.

independence. Nouwen's observations, however, are even more relevant today than they were at the time of his writing, offering valuable insight into the ongoing tragedy of the war in Ukraine.

Part travel memoir and part prayer journal, the book chronicles both the day-to-day logistics of Nouwen's travels and his spiritual journey. Despite his initial reluctance, Nouwen accepted the invitation of Borys Gudziak (a former graduate student he had befriended while teaching at Harvard) and Zenia Kushpeta (a friend from the L'Arche Daybreak community where he served) to visit the Lviv region of Ukraine in the summer of 1993, and he returned with them again the following year. During these trips, Nouwen preached, led retreats and workshops, met with disabled persons and explored opportunities for collaboration between L'Arche Daybreak and the nascent Faith and Light communities in Ukraine.

In size and scope, this volume is modest. One might think that the book's relevance is merely a coincidence of the author's and the subject's renown as Ukraine continues to dominate the headlines. This would be a mistake. In the days preceding his first trip, Nouwen sensed the opportunity for a profound encounter, writing: "This can be just one more educational experience or it can be a chance to be touched in a vital, new way. But it is your choice." The same could be said of this volume; for the reader who chooses to approach it as such, it is an opportunity to encounter Ukraine in a "vital, new way."

As the preface notes, *Ukraine Diary* "stands as a kind of time capsule, a window on the time when it was written, which at the same time bears a message for its own time." Indeed, it contains many important messages as the United States becomes increasingly polarized around the question of support for Ukraine. On the political right, some policymakers and commentators are hesitant not only to provide Ukrainians with military aid but even to acknowledge the justice of their cause or their heroism in defending their homeland. Americans on the political left are generally supportive of Ukraine, but one often has the impression that they are conflating Ukrainians' values and motivations with a secular, progressive American agenda. Both sides are imposing preconceived ideas on Ukrainians and, in doing so, miss the true meaning behind their sacrifice. In this context, two themes in *Ukraine Diary* take on particular importance for American Catholics seeking to understand the war in Ukraine through the lens of faith.

The first of these themes is *listening*. Nouwen strove to listen to the Ukrainians he met, to their history of suffering and perseverance, but above all to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit as he encountered them. Archbishop Gudziak writes

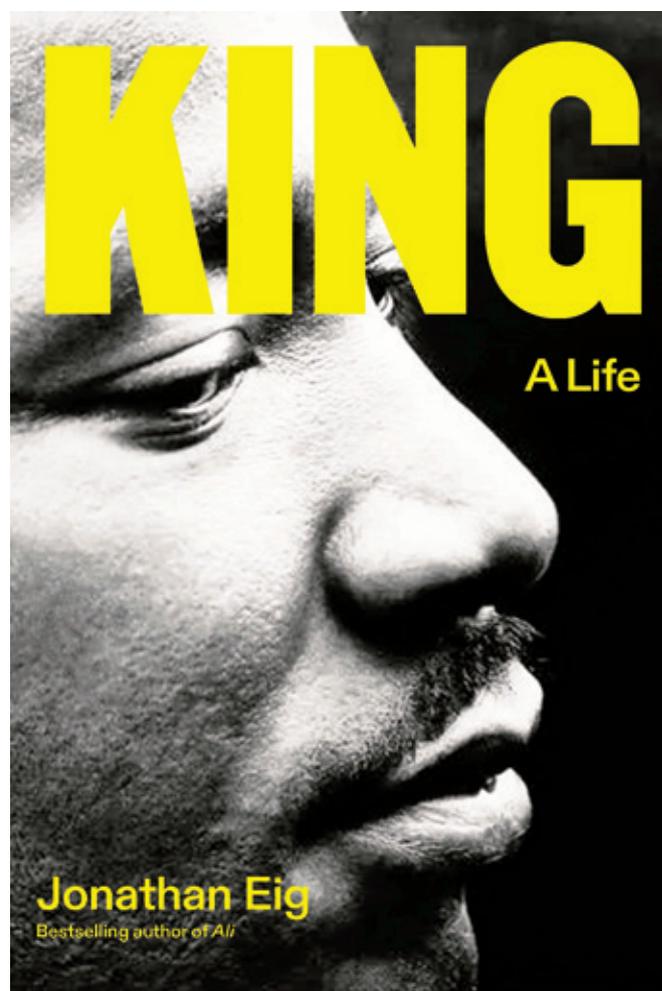
that Nouwen "sought to discern how God works in history and in the lives of human beings in whatever land they may inhabit." His attitude of listening, with both his ears and his heart, granted him remarkable insight into the character and identity of Ukrainians. Among his descriptions of daily schedules, locations and retreat programs, certain observations stand out as profound, and even prophetic.

How he arrived at these insights is as instructive as the observations themselves, though. Nouwen teaches us by example that we must listen to the Ukrainian people before attempting to formulate policy prescriptions or make judgements about the causes and conduct of the war. We must learn their history and allow them to tell us what they need, not just physically but spiritually. We must be attentive to God's voice as we allow ourselves to see Ukrainians as they are: not as an extension of American political agendas but as human persons, beloved of God, with their own history, culture and future.

This is a difficult task, particularly because most Americans have no firsthand experience of Ukraine. How, then, can we listen to the Ukrainian people as Nouwen did? Archbishop Gudziak's powerful introduction (arguably the highlight of this volume) is a good place to start. Archbishop Gudziak places the Russia-Ukraine war in historical, political and moral context, giving voice to the deepest yearnings of the Ukrainian spirit along the way.

As he draws connections between Nouwen's insights and the current crisis in Ukraine, a second theme of particular importance emerges: God is at work in history and in Ukraine. Through their willing participation in this work, Ukrainians' suffering is endowed with Christian meaning. Archbishop Gudziak masterfully uses the language

A PROPHET'S POWER



Farrar, Straus and Giroux / 688p \$35

Martin Luther King Jr. once characterized the times in which he lived as “life’s restless sea.” His own turbulent voyage on that sea has been well documented. We know its ports of call by heart: the Montgomery bus boycott; failure in Albany, Ga.; triumph in Birmingham, Ala.; “I Have a Dream”; Selma, Ala.; Chicago; Lyndon B. Johnson and Vietnam; the Poor People’s Campaign; death at 39; “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.” They are set in stone on the Tidal Basin and inscribed in the American memory. These are the chapters of every King biography—and the challenge to every biographer.

Jonathan Eig’s new biography, *King: A Life*, is more than up to the challenge. It will take its place among the foremost of the many treatments of King. Billed as the first major biography of King in decades, it follows Taylor Branch’s magisterial 3,000-page trilogy, completed in 2006. It benefits from the revelatory contributions of historian David Garrow, whose use of F.B.I. records through the Freedom of Information Act opened new windows into

of incarnation, passion and resurrection to lead the reader toward a deeper understanding of Ukraine’s struggle: “Henri visited the land of Ukraine in its nativity. Now, in the minds of many, it is being born again. This advent, marked by pain and blood, is transforming the world.” Archbishop Gudziak’s portrayal of a people willing to insist on their God-given dignity in the face of impossible odds merits his insight that “there is something supernatural, even Christ-like, in this sacrificial love.”

Where there is Christian sacrifice, there is the possibility of redemption. Nouwen noted the deep wounds inflicted by centuries of oppression in Ukraine, but he also saw the potential for renewal. His own life bore witness to God’s ability to bring good out of evil; his untimely death, just as he was preparing to return to Ukraine, was not wasted. In the book’s afterword, Laurent Nouwen recounts how his brother’s unfinished mission inspired him to serve the poor and marginalized in Ukraine for the past 25 years. Death and destruction do not have the last word. *Ukraine Diary* shows us that, through the “self-offering” of Ukrainians, the world has an opportunity to reject the logic of “might makes right” and to embrace human dignity and solidarity.

Near the end of his diary, Nouwen remarks that “in the story of the Last Judgment, God judges not individuals, but nations.... [T]o care for the poor... means also to care for the nations that are crushed by the forces of history and live under the burden of being ignored and rejected by the international community.”

Although no longer ignored, Ukraine now suffers the consequences of centuries of rejection. While *Ukraine Diary* does not offer a specific policy prescription, it is nearly impossible to read this book without concluding that we, as Americans and as Christians, have a moral obligation to help the nation that has found itself “in the heart of history and the heart of God.” This timely book is essential reading for American Catholics, and all Christians, who wish to better understand the war in Ukraine in light of their faith.

Siobhan Heekin-Canedy is a freelance writer with a background in international affairs. She represented Ukraine as an elite-level ice dancer at the 2014 Winter Olympics.

the life of Martin Luther King Jr.

Eig has probed recently released F.B.I. sources, telephone recordings and unpublished memoirs in order to produce a moving, and in places beautiful, account of King's life. His biography reads King's life as a single story with its own inevitability of plot and character. It is driven by the expected events, of course, but even more by the character of its protagonist. It displays the complexities of a public life whose private spaces were hidden from view. Eig narrates the mysteries of King largely without theory or explanation, as if to say, "Reader, you decide."

His protagonist first appears as a talented, smooth young man who is making his way in academia and among friends by means of a charming personality. Young King is so intent on pleasing his authoritarian father that he enters the Baptist ministry. He is so intent on satisfying his professors that he plagiarizes his papers. He is so good with words, especially the words of others which he skillfully adapts to his own style, that he pleases everyone who hears him. Scholars have attempted to rationalize his practice of borrowing. Eig simply refers to it as a "bad habit" or an "old habit."

Eig does not attempt to shield the reader from King's "habits." But he also displays a depth and solidity to King that confounds our understanding of the habits themselves. Suddenly propelled to the leadership of the civil rights movement at age 26, King maintains absolute fidelity to his assigned role. Whenever he is tempted to please or accommodate others—whether sheriffs, judges or his own father—he refuses. Whenever an easy way out or an inauthentic choice beckons, he invariably chooses the hard way of principled resistance.

In Birmingham, he breaks a judicial injunction against marching, puts on his overalls and leads the charge. Despite a lifelong aversion to conflict, he develops a high tolerance for disorder and makes social conflict his bread and butter. He soldiers on in dangerous situations despite multiple death threats. He believes in something called "America" but stubbornly resists the American fetish of anti-communism and flatly refuses to abandon colleagues with communist ties. He burns his bridges to his greatest political benefactor, L.B.J., by condemning Johnson's war. It is a decision for which he will be condemned by every civil rights organization except his own and by every major news outlet in the country, including *The New York Times*.

The principles by which King fought and served came from another region of his life. When asked why he opposed the war in Vietnam, he consistently cited his vocation as a minister of the Gospel. He was formed by the raw spiritual power that pulsed through his father's church. He was

formed a second time by the Christian personalist theology he learned at Morehouse College, Crozer Theological Seminary and Boston University, where he earned a doctorate in systematic theology. At home with sermon language, he cast the civil rights movement in the mirror of biblical events and characters. His fundamental positions on violence, freedom, human dignity and hope were birthed in the sanctuaries and classrooms of his younger days.

With such commitments, he should not have been perceived as a threat to the nation.

At the insistence of F.B.I. director J. Edgar Hoover, Attorney General Robert Kennedy authorized a tap on King's home and office telephones. Taps were already in place on the phones of King's closest advisors, Stanley Levison, Bayard Rustin and others. Hoover would later install an F.B.I. informant in King's Atlanta office. His ostensible motive was to track communist infiltration of the civil rights movement. The taps never revealed a communist influence on King or his organization. What they did reveal, however, was something more salacious—and, to Hoover, the Kennedys and L.B.J., entertaining. They documented yet another contradiction.

King's network of extramarital affairs is not new information. What is new in Eig's book is the extent of his sexual contacts and their centrality in the routines of his private life. These increasingly dangerous liaisons became meat and drink to Hoover in his effort to discredit King and destroy his movement. Sixty years on, they have become the routine matter of King biographies.

Hoover's campaign to ruin King did not alter his public role, but it did break his spirit. The revelation of King's sexual activities may turn out to be the most controversial element in this book. But there is worse. Most of what we have of King's private life comes courtesy of one of the most shameful programs of domestic espionage in American history: a fanatical attempt to subvert racial justice in the United States. What was done to King and his movement was not an example of governmental "overreach" or the "dirty tricks" that would come into vogue a decade later. That we can know word-for-word what a national leader said on any given day on any given telephone call is a legacy of something far more comprehensive—and sinister.

Hoover's efforts shadow the final third of the biography, as does their effect, which was King's worsening depression. Sometimes called "fatigue" or "exhaustion," for which King was repeatedly hospitalized, its clinical name is depression. Its symptoms are everywhere in King's final years. His friend Ralph David Abernathy attempted to minister to it; his staff worried and quietly worked around it. It marred his final sermons with uncharacteristic fatal-

ism and maudlin fixations on death, including the famous “Drum Major Instinct” sermon in which he fantasized about his own funeral.

King suffered from 13 years of unrelenting conflict. The word we would use today is *trauma*. By the end of his mission, he was buffeted by violence in the cities, conflict over Vietnam, desertion by his allies, the accelerating presence of Black Power and his growing irrelevance to America’s racial conflict. But none of these bore down upon him—and *into* him—like Hoover’s efforts to desecrate his person.

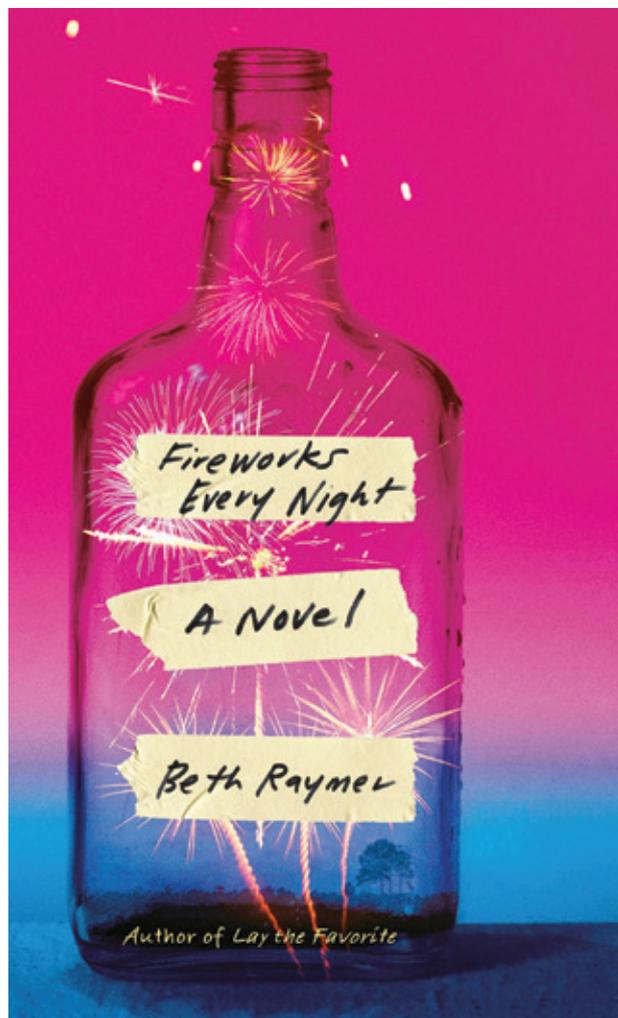
Eig notes that in the unpublished memoir by King’s wife, Coretta, she refers to her husband as “a guilt ridden” man. Throughout his public life, he was vexed by privileges not shared by the majority of his people; consequently, he refused a salary, drove a modest car and lived in a Black, middle-class neighborhood. But this *other* life, the private one, brought him low.

In this context, we must also remark on the strength and dignity demonstrated by Coretta Scott King. No single chapter is devoted to her, but her resilience—and resentment—is woven throughout the story. From the beginning she understands herself as capable of an important, policy-related role in the movement. But aside from her performance at musical concerts, she is usually relegated to background support and care of the children. Eig remarks that she bore up under her husband’s infidelity perhaps because she understood the enormous personal and symbolic importance of her support.

The day after her husband’s death, she flew to Memphis to retrieve his body. Three days later, she returned and led 40,000 marchers through the city in support of striking sanitation workers. On Mother’s Day, 38 days after her husband’s assassination, she marched with 3,000 people in support of the Poor People’s Campaign. On June 19 at the Lincoln Memorial she said the time had come to form “a solid block of woman power.” Picking up her husband’s burden, she added, “Love is the only force that can destroy hate.”

Richard Lischer is an emeritus professor at Duke Divinity School. His most recent book is *Our Hearts Are Restless: The Art of Spiritual Memoir* (Oxford University Press).

A FLORIDA FAMILY’S EXPLOSIVE LIFE



Random House / 240p \$26

In Florida, you’re more likely to die by the electric chair than by a gator attack.

So warns a middle school teacher in *Fireworks Every Night*, the debut novel by Beth Raymer. It follows the troubled girlhood of a young woman named C.C. as she grows up in a deeply rural Florida town. In Loxahatchee, gators prowl by night and wild boars live among the palms. Nonetheless, the teacher’s advice bears true; by C.C.’s sophomore year of high school, one classmate is on death row and another on trial facing the electric chair. Such is the atmosphere of Loxahatchee, where poverty and addiction are prevalent and troubled teens abound.

Fireworks Every Night follows C.C.’s dramatic family dysfunction as they cycle between abject poverty and spend-it-while-you-have-it wealth. C.C.’s dad, Calvis, had owned a car dealership in Adena, Ohio. But

both the dealership and the family's house "mysteriously" burned to the ground in the same night; it is an open secret Calvis set them alight for the insurance payout. That money is what funds the family's migration south.

Florida is meant to be a paradise for them, a magical place where there are fireworks every night. Instead, the family starts on an irreversible slide from dysfunction to destruction. At their lowest, the family lives together in a single tent in a Florida swamp. At their highest, they cruise through Palm Beach in a Corvette, running up huge restaurant bills while eating caviar. Then the cycle begins again and they return to destitution: empty cabinets, stealing from the supermarket, begging neighbors for donations.

The family dynamic in *Fireworks Every Night* is one of deep-cutting betrayal and shocking selfishness. As relationships devolve and behavior becomes increasingly erratic, the narrative becomes saturated with sex and emotional violence. Suicide by shotgun is an omnipresent threat—as is forced institutionalization for mental health.

C.C. tries to stay on the straight and narrow, excelling in basketball and trying to keep the peace in her family. Unsupported after a significant trauma, her sister Lorraine becomes rebellious and unruly, spiraling into drug addiction and pregnancy. Her mom becomes hysterical, carrying a shotgun with her throughout the house, and her dad becomes increasingly drunk and absent. Infidelity and divorce loom. Rather than give a single cent away in alimony, C.C.'s dad spends every dollar they have, bankrupting the family out of spite.

Despite the total brokenness of the home—her father's alcoholism, her mom's suicide threats, the phone lines being tapped to catch her mother cheating—C.C. tries to rationalize it all away. "We were a normal middle-class American family.... Whatever emotions I felt for my family I thought of as love."

This is one of the many ways the novel deals with themes of class. Interspersed throughout the narrative are chapters covering C.C.'s adult life after leaving Florida. Her life looks glamorous, the result of marrying into a trust fund that should ensure she will never want for anything again. But the security rings hollow for her as the scars of her childhood remain present. After a complicated relationship with her father, who both gave and took away her financial security in turn, C.C. can never be comfortable trusting somebody else's money to provide for her. She is condemned to reflect the dysfunction of her childhood like a funhouse mirror, warping and refracting but never escaping the trauma. This holds especially true



This is an ode to rattlesnakes, humid heat and Palm Beach pretensions.

as her family re-enters her adult life, her mother now long estranged and her father homeless.

These are common themes throughout the author's own life and works. Raymer is best known for her 2010 gambling memoir, *Lay the Favorite*, which follows her ascent in the shady world of high-stakes sports betting. (It was popular enough that it was adapted into a movie of the same name in 2012, starring Bruce Willis, Rebecca Hall, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Vince Vaughn.) As her first novel, *Fireworks Every Night* plays to her memoir chops, blending fiction with themes from her own life to create a novel that reads like narrative nonfiction.

Raymer herself grew up in West Palm Beach, about a 30-minute drive from Loxahatchee. She had a job in social work helping troubled teenage girls, doubtlessly informing how she wrote about C.C.'s traumatized sister and her descent into addiction. And Raymer, like C.C., had a complicated relationship with her own homeless father; both Raymer's real dad and C.C.'s fictional one were heavy drinkers, used car salesmen and divorced.

That father-daughter relationship is one of the central themes of the novel. For better or for worse, C.C. is devoted to her dad despite the trauma he puts her through. Toward the end of the novel, when their house is being foreclosed on and there is nothing to eat because her dad has intentionally bankrupted them, C.C. finds him crying.

"My instinct," C.C. says, "was to drop to my knees and cling to him, the way women did to Christ in movies." She is scared by his erratic behavior as he grabs a container of gasoline, fearing he is going to kill them both—possibly by burning their house down again. Instead, he teaches her how to use a gas-powered lawn mower, a bizarre final life lesson. Then he hops in the Corvette, the last thing they

have to their name, and abandons her.

They don't see each other again for years, until C.C. is in her trust-fund marriage and her dad is in a homeless shelter; when an unknown Florida number calls her, C.C. knows it's her father and picks up immediately. But despite her willingness to reconnect, when they first reunite, C.C. again is fleetingly afraid he might kill her. It is one of the best examples of the intertwining of family and trauma throughout the book, where love and fear go hand in hand.

Fireworks Every Night is a deeply Floridian novel. It is in some ways an ode to the rattlesnakes, the humid heat and the Palm Beach pretensions of those who out of necessity live a life apart from that glitz and glamor, trapped by their circumstances and their own toxicity. No happy stories lie here; this is not a feel-good tale of rags to riches or of overcoming adversity. But it is a compelling portrait of deep dysfunction, of the slow slide into familial destruction: not the festive lights of a paradise but the fireworks of a family exploding.

Sarah Vincent is an assistant editor at *Reader's Digest* and a former O'Hare fellow at *America*. She has been featured on *MSN.com* and has also written for *The National Catholic Reporter* and *Sojourners*.

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Forgiveness Is Given, Not Earned

September brings readings that investigate the connection between forgiveness and faith. On the Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the prophet Isaiah writes, “Our God is generous in forgiving. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord” (Is 55:7-8). When it comes to life and death or justice and mercy, God’s thinking is not our own thinking. “For to me,” reads the second reading on this Sunday, “life is Christ, and death is gain” (Phil 1:21). Paul laments his separation from Christ but also recognizes that fruitful labor in the vineyard is necessary for the benefit of his community. This spiritual reflection becomes concrete when Christians submit to the demands of their faith and forgive one another. This is what it means to “live” in Christ and to grow spiritually when we die to our own limited perception of justice.

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard closes the

church’s reflection on the Gospels this month. Matthew has complicated the idea of fairness in both the workplace and in the kingdom of heaven. In general, employees judge fairness in comparison with their coworkers and not by any individual agreement with their employer. This attitude is ingrained in human nature, and held true in the first century as much as it does today. But Jesus insists that “the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Mt 20:16). The parable, while grotesque to a modern sense of workers’ rights, expresses something essential about the kingdom of heaven: Forgiveness is given freely and not earned. This can be a message of “good news” that is hard to accept, but conditional forgiveness, or none at all, guarantees a tepid faith. When the Christian community practices unconditional forgiveness, the world is witness to faith in action.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), SEPT. 3, 2023

An Angry Prophet Who Repents to God

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), SEPT. 10, 2023

The Process of Communal Forgiveness

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), SEPT. 17, 2023

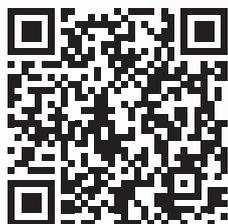
Being Asked to Forgive Seventy-Seven Times

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), SEPT. 24, 2023

Forgiveness Is Given and Not Earned



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



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The Promise of Hispanic Ministry

It can invigorate parishes and the U.S. church

By Alejandro Aguilera-Titus



On June 16, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the “National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry.” Building on the vision of a previous pastoral plan for Hispanic/Latino ministry promulgated in 1987, the plan calls for a synodal church that is more welcoming, evangelizing and missionary at all levels, and a church that can build vibrant parish communities with our Hispanic/Latino brothers and sisters in the context of a culturally diverse society.

According to a study from Boston College and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, Latinos made up about 40 percent of the U.S. Catholic population as of 2014, up from about one-quarter in the 1980s. This makes Hispanics/Latinos an emerging majority of the Catholic population in the United States. The community’s graces include an abiding love for family and community, a rich practice of Catholic traditions, an authentic Marian devotion and vibrant ecclesial movements.

Nearly 4,500 parishes across the country now have Hispanic/Latino ministries. Over 90 percent of those parishes are “shared parishes”—that is, ministries that are conducted in at least two different languages and cultural contexts. Hispanics/Latinos in those shared parishes find themselves at various degrees of ecclesial integration and inclusion, depending on how long the ministry has been in place, the level of intercultural competence of the pastor and his staff, and other factors.

The process of inclusion/inte-

gration moves people from feeling welcomed in the parish to developing a sense of *belonging* to the parish, and ultimately to a sense of ownership. The higher the level of ecclesial integration/inclusion, the higher the level of stewardship of the Hispanic/Latino community. All members of a parish should take the first step of greeting new people and asking them questions with a genuine sense of openness and curiosity. But it is also important to include representatives of all communities in the planning of parish activities and to participate in activities led by different cultural/ethnic groups.

All leaders in the church should also become more interculturally competent. Intercultural competency involves gaining knowledge, developing skills, and adopting an attitude of openness and respect for people from other cultures.

In addition, it is highly recommended to consider the Five Principles for Achieving Ecclesial Integration/Inclusion when articulating the vision and mission of your parish, school or other Catholic organization. These principles are proposed in the U.S.C.C.B. book *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers*. The following are some of the highlights of these principles in terms of what needs to be in place and what needs to be avoided.

Articulate a vision of ministry based on ecclesial integration and inclusion. Recognize and affirm cultural diversity as a gift from God, not as a problem; and avoid the temptation to expect others to assimilate into a one-

size-fits-all approach.

Foster the inculturation of the Gospel in all cultures. Commit to the ongoing transformation of all cultures by the Gospel values; and avoid the tendency to see your culture as better or more valuable than other cultures.

Plan with people, not for people. Include Hispanics/Latinos in the planning of activities and programs from the beginning, and avoid planning for others and blaming them when they do not participate.

Broaden your understanding of ministry groups and programs and cast a bigger net. Promote the formation of culturally specific groups and apostolic movements, and avoid the perception that forming culturally specific groups is divisive.

Empower people from different cultures into leadership positions. Mentor leaders for service within Hispanic/Latino ministry and the parish as a whole, and avoid a mentality of scarcity (“There is not enough for everyone”).

Let us continue walking together as we build the beloved community of missionary disciples that Jesus calls us to be. The invitation to participate in the pastoral plan is a unique opportunity to engage and form new leaders, invigorate parishes, and multiply creative pastoral responses to the growing Hispanic/Latino presence in all Catholic institutions and organizations.

Alejandro Aguilera-Titus is the assistant director for Hispanic ministry for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

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