

America

FEBRUARY 2024

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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that made basketball
history

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CATHOLIC CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM NETWORK: Panel Discussion with Cardinal Cupich
February 21
7:00 PM CST
The Athenaeum for Thought and Culture

Cardinal Blase Cupich will join a panel that highlights the work of the Catholic Criminal Justice Reform Network (CCJRN), a new movement working to bring Catholic social teaching to the discussion of reforming the criminal justice system in the United States. This event is hosted by the Lumen Christi Institute and The Hank Center and will take place at the Athenaeum Center for Thought and Culture on the campus of the historic St. Alphonsus Church in the Lakeview neighborhood.



2024 ANNUAL NEWMAN LECTURE
featuring Jason Blakely
February 27
7:00-8:30 PM CST
Loyola University Chicago
Lakeshore Campus, McCormick Lounge, Coffey Hall

In the conversionary spirit and legacy of St. John Henry Newman, the Hank Center invites scholars each spring to recount their own discovery (or rediscovery) of the Catholic intellectual heritage in light of their ongoing scholarship. This year's Newman Lecture will be given by Professor Jason Blakely from Pepperdine University. Dr. Blakely is a Political Philosopher and a leading scholar of contemporary "communitarian" and post-liberal thought, especially the work of philosophers Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor. Dr. Blakely's lecture is entitled: *Atheist!: A Story of Conversion*.

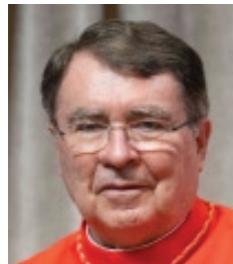


MARY LOU WILLIAMS LECTURE AND GALA PERFORMANCE
featuring Deanna Witkowski
March 21
4:00 - 5:30 PM CST
Live Performance
March 22
7:00 - 8:30 PM CST

Lecture: Loyola University Chicago Lakeshore Campus, Information Commons, 4th Floor

Performance: Loyola University Chicago Lakeshore Campus, St. Joseph's Hall, Rosary Chapel

Loyola celebrates the music of the late jazz great, Mary Lou Williams (1910-1981), in a series of events in late March. Williams, an adult convert to Catholicism, influenced such artists as Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Charlie Parker. Her personal sanctity—and her stunning liturgical music— is becoming better known. Williams scholar and jazz pianist, Deanna Witkowski, author of Williams's biography, *Mary Lou Williams: Music for the Soul*, will lead the lessons and performances.



2024 ANNUAL CARDINAL BERNARDIN LECTURE
featuring Papal Nuncio, Cardinal Christophe Pierre
April 11
7:00-8:30 PM CST

Loyola University Chicago
Lakeshore Campus, McCormick Lounge, Coffey Hall

The Cardinal Bernardin Common Cause lecture series provides Catholic prelates a platform to engage people of good will in common cause with the Church on important issues facing us today. The Hank Center is pleased to welcome 2024 Bernardin Lecturer, Cardinal Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States. Cardinal Pierre's lecture will be followed by conversation, Q&A. *Free and Open to the Public for In-Person; Registration Required for Zoom. All are Welcome.*



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The Courts Cannot Deal With Trump on Their Own

As I write this column, oral arguments have just concluded in former President Donald J. Trump's appeal asserting total immunity in the case about his attempts to falsely claim victory in the 2020 election, which culminated in the attack on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Of course, this is not Mr. Trump's only court case. In addition to the various trials about retention of classified documents, hush-money payments and conspiracy to overturn election results in Georgia, he also has also appealed the Colorado decision ruling that he is ineligible to run for president. That appeal has been accepted for hearing by the U.S. Supreme Court and is scheduled for oral argument on Feb. 8.

As Americans have learned or re-learned over the past few weeks, Section 3 of the 14th Amendment bars anyone from holding any office under the United States if they have taken an oath "to support the Constitution of the United States" and subsequently engaged in insurrection. Challenges asking for Mr. Trump to be taken off the ballot have been filed in many states, but thus far only Colorado and Maine have removed him.

It is hard to predict how the Supreme Court will respond. They could decide that since the 14th Amendment explicitly lists other federal offices but not the presidency, the president does not hold an office "under the United States" but is in some other constitutional category. Or they could hold that an election conspiracy leading to a riot at the Capitol is not equivalent to an "insurrection" in the sense meant by a post-Civil War amendment.

Or they could decide that the whole issue is a "political question" not subject to judicial resolution, or that in the absence of Congress providing a mechanism for implementing such

disqualifications, courts should not be asked to invent one.

Or the court could find that Mr. Trump is indeed ineligible to hold office under the United States because he engaged in insurrection. Whatever legal principle the Supreme Court uses to resolve this case, we should all pray the decision is as close to unanimous as possible.

But none of Mr. Trump's court cases can fully answer the challenge he has posed to American democratic norms and institutions.

During the 2020 campaign, the editors of **America** warned that Mr. Trump represented a "proven threat to the constitutional order." While we could not have predicted that threat would be as grave as it proved on Jan. 6, nothing that has happened since offers any reason to withdraw or moderate those concerns.

In order to understand why the courts alone cannot handle these issues, it is worth thinking about the various ways that a healthier American democracy might have avoided needing the court to decide how the 14th Amendment applies to Mr. Trump.

First, Mr. Trump could have followed the example of every other losing presidential candidate in modern history, and conceded his loss once it was clear that all his legal avenues for victory were exhausted. Failing that, he could have been sufficiently alarmed at the chaos and violence his lies about the election unleashed to repent of his false claims and retire from political life for the good of the country. But Mr. Trump has not shown any inclination to distinguish between what is good for the country and what is advantageous for him.

The clearest legal mechanism for avoiding the present mess would have been for the Senate to convict Mr. Trump during his second impeach-

ment and then to bar him from holding future office, as the Constitution allows them to do. But most Republican senators, following Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's lead, decided that they need not vote to convict someone who was already out of office. (At the time, Mr. McConnell argued that Mr. Trump could and should face criminal liability in the future, an outcome Mr. Trump now argues that his impeachment acquittal precludes.)

Even after the impeachment failed, Republican leaders could have isolated Mr. Trump politically, at the cost of risking rejection by his base and suffering their own electoral losses. But with a few notable exceptions, such as Liz Cheney, Mitt Romney and Chris Christie, they have not found the courage to do so.

Thus the question of Mr. Trump's attempt to overturn his 2020 loss by sending fake slates of electors to Congress and encouraging a mob that stormed the Capitol now stands before the court.

Whatever the court decides, Mr. Trump's brazen refusal to accept the will of the voters or constitutional limits on presidential power still needs to be confronted and rejected. If the court leaves him on the ballot, it will need to be rejected at the voting booth. And if the court throws him off the ballot, it will need to be rejected by the Republican Party in order to avoid a crisis over the legitimacy of the court's decision.

Mr. Trump claims immunity not only from criminal prosecution, but from the very norms that limit the power of our elected officials and secure our constitutional order. The courts, being only one part of a deliberately divided government in a tragically divided society, cannot fix that problem alone.

Sam Sawyer, S.J.



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Bishops process at the start of Mass on Jan. 1, 2024, during the SEEK24 conference at America's Center Convention Complex in St. Louis. Nearly 20,000 attended the Jan. 1-5 conference held by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students.

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Cover: The 1954-55 University of San Francisco Dons basketball team. Bill Russell is in the second row, third from the left.
Courtesy of University of San Francisco Athletics

‘Why stay?’ Readers respond to an essay about keeping faith after scandal

In October, news broke that the Rev. Marko Rupnik, a former Jesuit who was credibly and publicly accused of abuse of adult women over a 40-year period, was incardinated into his home diocese in Slovenia. In December, Delaney Coyne, one of **America’s** O’Hare fellows, reflected on why she stays in a scandal-ridden church as a young woman and feminist and laid out her hopes for reform. “Not only should victims be heard,” she wrote, but “as a church, we should aim to be transformed by their testimonies and the spirit of truth working within us.” Her piece elicited reflective comments from other Catholics grappling with their faith in light of the sex abuse crisis.

I’m glad you stay, Delaney. As a 68-year-old Catholic woman, I find hope in your ability to see the realities of the systemic problems and at the same time hear the voice of God in our church. I too have stayed, even though the church and most clergy have not been honest or Christ-like toward victims of clergy sex abuse. Many survivors feel the indifference and lack of charity from our church. Many feel alone and rejected. That’s been mostly my experience as a survivor of childhood clergy sex abuse. Yet I, like you, feel the Holy Spirit, who is here with us in our Catholic Church in spite of all the problems. I hope you continue to stay. You too are the church, and for that I am grateful.

Kathy Klamka

There have been many horrendous events in history that have come from the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II offered apologies for over 100 such events. But these apologies recognize only the misbehavior of individuals, the “actions of flawed human beings,” as you wrote. Where did “clericalism” come from? Out of what system did it spawn? What supports its continued existence? As a British journalist covering the sex abuse scandal noted, the Catholic Church does not have the capacity to see its own sins. The church is also a human institution. Look at the secular manner in which it responded to the sex abuse crisis. So why stay? Because I believe that the Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ upon the unlimited and unconditional compassion, mercy and forgiveness that he displayed throughout his ministry. If the Catholic Church is saved, it will be from “the smell of the sheep” and not rigid institutional administration.

Jerry Gunville

You have expressed very clearly what I have difficulty putting into words. And may I add that women can make the same cover-up errors as men to protect the church hierarchy. It happened to me, and yet, I am still here, worshiping the Lord in the church I love.

Christauria Welland

As a 71-year-old Catholic feminist, I’ve struggled with my faith since I was in my late teens. At some point I realized that I will be the thorn in her side, rock in her shoe, the one who keeps challenging the status quo. God pulls me home every time I want to walk away. I have learned that many women, in and out of vowed life, share my hopes and dreams for our church. I will stay and support change instead of leaving!

Christine Sadlowski-Sause

The problem is not clericalism per se. The way to address the abuse crisis is, as pointed out in the article, conversion of heart—not just feelings, but not just habits or doctrine either. Self-donation (sharing so lovingly that you might forget to calculate what you’ve given) will guide us. Fighting clericalism or structure is just circling around the problem, however close you might get to its kernel. That is not the way to end this hellish, sorrowful horror of sexual (or other) abuse. Here goes the recipe for disaster: Think more than you pray (even while praying), devote to apologetics as self-defense not conversation, speak more than you listen. I think all of these things happen too often in the church. We do not need more theology. We need charity. I am shamefully guilty of that “recipe” too. On the other hand, I agree that we need “right relationships,” but we mostly need healing encounters. That’s what Jesus did. I’m hopeful, though. I think we’re slowly moving in that direction.

Maria Moukarzel

My wife, who is still working in the church after more than 43 years, sticks with it in the belief she is making a difference, no matter how small it might be. If she were to leave, who would be around to make the difference she makes? So many people walk away when things don’t go their way. Persistence (I sometimes call it obstinance) is what will make changes. At best, in our lifespan we might change a few grains of sand, but over time, that change will be noticeable.

Stephen Healy



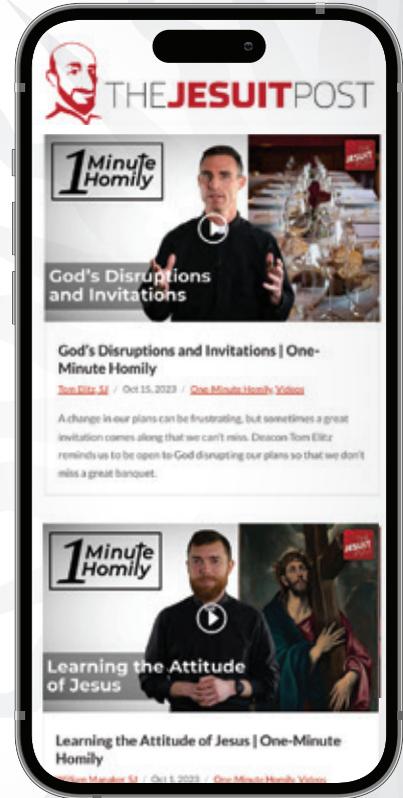
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‘Fiducia Supplicans’ Does Not Confuse Church Teaching But Deepens It

Does a new approach to blessings signal a change in church teaching on marriage? On Dec. 18, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith published “Fiducia Supplicans,” which allows for the possibility of spontaneous pastoral blessings—as distinguished from blessings within a liturgical rite—for people who are in irregular marital situations or same-sex unions. Although the document clearly says that the church’s teaching on marriage remains unchanged, many Catholics are debating precisely that question.

But while *what* the church teaches on marriage has not changed, the document does mark a development in *how* the church teaches what it has always taught. That development touches upon a deeper and more fundamental question for the church’s ministry and evangelization: How can the church unite clarity of teaching with pastoral closeness to people in their struggles? That challenge has been present throughout Pope Francis’ papal ministry and deserves deeper reflection beyond any single magisterial document.

Reactions to “Fiducia Supplicans” have been plentiful (see story on Page 12). Many welcomed the new declaration as a change in both tone and practice from a 2021 document from the same dicastery that forbade any blessing of a same-sex union and said that God “does not and cannot bless sin.” But others decried it as yet another example of “confusion” in Pope Francis’ papal teaching, a source of scandal and division in the church.

A number of bishops and ecclesial conferences criticized the new declaration or seemed to limit its application in areas under their authority. Many other critics of the declaration expressed concern that the discussion

of blessing couples led to confusion between blessing the people in an irregular or same-sex union and blessing the union itself. These reactions led to a press release from the D.D.F. on Jan. 4, which reiterated that the declaration in no way changed church teaching—and so the reactions to the document, it argued, were not about a doctrinal dispute. At the same time, the press release acknowledged that there may be a variety of local situations, especially in countries where homosexuality is criminalized, where the practical application of the document would be more complicated.

As a declaration, “Fiducia Supplicans” carries more weight than the more ordinary responses the D.D.F. issues. (The most recent declaration issued prior to this was “Dominus Iesus,” in 2000.) And a press release to clarify a declaration is novel as well, particularly when the declaration had said that “no further responses should be expected about possible ways to regulate details or practicalities regarding blessings of this type.”

But it would be a mistake to focus only on “Fiducia Supplicans” by itself. The declaration in December was part of a recent pattern of D.D.F. interventions. On Sept. 25, the dicastery published a response to some *dubia* about Communion for divorced and remarried persons, confirming Pope Francis’ call in “Amoris Laetitia” for “pastoral accompaniment for the discernment of *each unique person*” (emphasis in original). On Oct. 31, it responded to a *dubium* about the participation of transgender and homosexual persons in baptism and marriage, confirming that they could serve, under the same conditions that applied to anyone else, as sponsors for the sacrament of baptism or witnesses

to the sacrament of marriage.

And on Dec. 13, less than a week before publishing “Fiducia Supplicans,” the D.D.F. published a letter replying to a bishop in the Dominican Republic about single mothers abstaining from Communion out of a fear of judgment from priests and fellow Catholics. The D.D.F. emphasized, quoting “Amoris Laetitia,” that “in such difficult situations of need, the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort, and acceptance, rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God’s mercy.”

In each of these instances, prioritizing clarity in the church’s teaching seems to require some form of exclusion. And in each of these instances, the D.D.F. has replied not by changing the teaching, but by insisting that the church, even while teaching what it has always taught, must also draw close even to those whose lives may be visibly out of step with that teaching.

This call to closeness challenges the church in many ways. It challenges those whose instinct is that true pastoral charity can be shown only by teaching hard moral truths and calling sinners to conversion. A focus primarily on clarity of teaching could lead to the conclusion that people who feel excluded, judged or abandoned by such approaches either do not understand or refuse to accept the call to conversion. Or it could suggest that the church must begin every encounter with such persons by emphasizing repentance and reform.

But a focus on pastoral closeness insists that those feelings of exclusion cry out for concern even when they arise in response to authentic

teaching. It says that the church always has a duty to accompany people who seek God's blessing, even in morally complicated and imperfect situations.

But this call to closeness also challenges those who may assume that church teaching must change, or be on the way toward changing, in order for such accompaniment to be authentic. In the case of "Fiducia Supplicans," it says that there is no inherent contradiction between continuing to affirm the traditional understanding of marriage as the exclusive union of a man and woman and blessing a same-sex couple. It does not treat a pastoral blessing as a near-but-not-quite recognition of same-sex marriage, but instead trusts that in such a blessing, "which does not claim to sanction or legitimize anything, [people can] experience the nearness of the Father, beyond all 'merits' and 'desires.'" It recognizes that grace "works in the lives of those who do not claim to be righteous but who acknowledge themselves humbly as sinners, like everyone else."

Flannery O'Connor once wrote to someone considering conversion to Catholicism that "I think most people come to the church by means the church does not allow, else there would be no need their getting to her at all. However, this is true inside as well, as the operation of the church is entirely set up for the sinner; which creates much misunderstanding among the smug."

Advocating for greater clarity in teaching or for a development in teaching, of course, is not automatically equivalent to smugness. Nor is offering respectful criticism of papal or magisterial teaching. But we should not be too quick to measure all teaching against our own limited tolerance for confusion. It may be precisely in what we misunderstand as confusion that God is drawing us close. The successor of Peter keeps calling the church to attend to God's style of "closeness, compassion and tenderness." This is not a confusion of the church's teaching, but a deepening of it.

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A new kind of affirmative action—for students aligned with a school’s mission

Since the Supreme Court curtailed race-conscious admissions last June, Catholic colleges and universities have been strategizing on how they can continue their longstanding commitment to diversity. Many plan to rely on a narrow window in the court’s decision, allowing a college to take into account any applicant’s essay that discusses “how race affected his or her life.” But as the court cautioned in its majority opinion, any consideration of race in the admissions process must be tied to an applicant’s “experiences as an individual,” showing “*that student’s* courage and determination” in overcoming discrimination or demonstrating “*that student’s* unique ability to contribute to the university” (emphasis in the original; see sidebar on the following page).

As Catholic colleges and universities adjust to a new legal landscape, they should ask themselves how applicants might contribute in particular to *their* university.

The sociologist Natasha Warikoo, a professor at Tufts University, says the answer to that question should depend on the purpose of the university. Observing that college admissions have always been about more than high school grades or other indicators of “merit,” Professor Warikoo argues that schools should also consider how the students they enroll might advance their respective missions.

Naturally, the missions of Catholic colleges and universities are tied to their religious values, and many such schools were founded to educate the children of Catholic immigrants for whom more selective schools were out of reach. But over time, Catholic educational institutions have expanded their missions. Their curricula and ministries have increasingly emphasized the church’s social teaching,

which provides a theological framework for building a just society and promoting the common good.

In its Guide for Mission Reflection, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities states that Jesuit schools should pursue “a preferential option for those who experience poverty and marginalization.” They should also “reconstruct relationships that have been damaged by racism” and “work to repair harms done.” For example, Georgetown University has embarked on a public and painful journey to reconcile with the descendants of 272 men, women and children whom its early leaders had kept in slavery and sold to save the school from financial ruin.

Other Catholic colleges and universities pursue missions that advance the church’s social teaching. Referencing Pope Francis’ statement that “the value of our educational practices will be measured not simply by the results of standardized tests, but by the ability to affect the heart of society and to help give birth to a new culture,” DePaul University says that it pursues “thought leadership in addressing pressing issues of social justice.”

Among the myriad ways that students can “contribute to the university” is by working to advance their school’s social mission. This includes, as Professor Warikoo suggests, contributing to that mission even after they graduate. Putting it another way, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, the Jesuit superior general, once observed, “The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become.”

In this respect, students who after graduation “engage in the work of social justice” in “the Catholic social tradition” as members of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps advance their school’s mission. So do students who

go on to professions in which they alleviate racial disparities in housing, education or the criminal justice system. Through these pursuits and community volunteer involvement, students can become, in the words of the Jesuit Father General Pedro Arrupe, “agents of change in society; not merely resisting unjust structures and arrangements, but actively undertaking to reform them.”

Applicants who demonstrate the potential to advance a school’s mission in this way present particular qualifications for admission, just as other students who excel in academics, theater or sports might. Considering such qualifications in the admissions process is logical, fair and in accord with language in the Supreme Court decision that permits schools to “define their missions as they see fit.”

Considering such qualifications may also foster diversity on campus. That has been the experience of medical schools with a mission to educate doctors who will serve those most in need. To overcome persistent disparities in access to medical care, these schools identify applicants for admission who are most likely to practice medicine in rural, tribal and underserved urban communities.

They accomplish this by focusing not just on applicants’ grades and board scores but also on their socioeconomic background and experience. Studies show, for example, that students from rural settings are much more likely to practice medicine in communities that resemble where they grew up. Similarly, students who were raised in underserved urban communities, have a history of community engagement or show a desire to practice where the need is greatest may be more likely to contribute to a medical school’s social mission.



Because they weigh the potential for such contributions in the admissions process, state medical schools in California with a mission to bring health care to underserved communities are notably among the most racially diverse in the country. This is notwithstanding state laws that for decades have banned affirmative action in higher education.

Catholic colleges and universities, too, may foster greater diversity by giving preference to applicants likely to advance their social missions.

Such applicants may include, for example, the predominantly Latino and African American graduates of the 39 Cristo Rey Network schools across the country. Ninety-eight percent of the nearly 12,500 students enrolled in these Catholic, college preparatory high schools identify as students of color, all are from low-income households, and the majority are the first in their families to attend college.

Likewise, high school students in Fordham University's Corporate Communications High School Pipeline Program may advance the school's Jesuit mission after they complete their education. In collaboration with area Catholic (and public) schools, the program

offers a path for immigrant and first-generation high school students to Fordham's Gabelli School of Business.

Through their personal experiences with poverty, racial injustice, and the enforcement of immigration laws, as well as their interest in reforming unjust structures, participants in these college pathway programs may distinguish themselves from other applicants in a way that meets the new federal guidelines on college admissions following the Supreme Court decision.

Naturally, it is up to each Catholic college and university to decide its own mission. But if schools choose to bring Catholic social justice principles to the fore, they have a path to bring more historically underrepresented students of color into their future classes.

Editor's note: The author has served as a member of the board of directors of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School—Twin Cities and has contributed to diversity pipeline initiatives in the legal profession.

Stephen P. Lucke is an attorney in Minneapolis, Minn., and teaches complex litigation at the University of St. Thomas Law School.

Supreme Court: Look at applicants' experience, not race

*The following is an excerpt from the Supreme Court's majority decision in *Students for Fair Admissions Inc. versus President and Fellows of Harvard College*. Chief Justice John Roberts wrote the opinion.*

...the Harvard [College] and [University of North Carolina] admissions programs cannot be reconciled with the guarantees of the Equal Protection Clause. Both programs lack sufficiently focused and measurable objectives warranting the use of race, unavoidably employ race in a negative manner, involve racial stereotyping, and lack meaningful end points. We have never permitted admissions programs to work in that way, and we will not do so today.

At the same time, as all parties agree, nothing in this opinion should be construed as prohibiting universities from considering an applicant's discussion of how race affected his or her life, be it through discrimination, inspiration, or otherwise.... [But] universities may not simply establish through application essays or other means the regime we hold unlawful today.... A benefit to a student who overcame racial discrimination, for example, must be tied to *that student's* courage and determination. Or a benefit to a student whose heritage or culture motivated him or her to assume a leadership role or attain a particular goal must be tied to *that student's* unique ability to contribute to the university. In other words, the student must be treated based on his or her experiences as an individual—not on the basis of race.

Many universities have for too long done just the opposite. And in doing so, they have concluded, wrongly, that the touchstone of an individual's identity is not challenges bested, skills built, or lessons learned but the color of their skin. Our constitutional history does not tolerate that choice.



AP Photo/Martin Meissner, File

Vatican decree on blessing people in same-sex or 'irregular' relationships gets mixed global response

By Michael J. O'Loughlin

Global reaction among bishops has varied in response to the Vatican's declaration that priests may now bless same-sex couples and other Catholics living in "irregular" situations, like those cohabiting or divorced and remarried Catholics.

Bishops from some Western European countries, where some priests have long called for the official approval to bless same-sex couples, welcomed the news. Several bishops' conferences in Africa, however, condemned the document and stated that they would bar priests from offering such blessings, citing both church teaching and local laws that criminalize homosexuality. But the Vatican pushed back, stating in a document released on Jan. 4 that while local culture may affect to what extent the new decree is implemented, bishops could not ban priests outright from offering such blessings.

The Vatican released "Fiducia Supplicans" on Dec. 18,

giving priests permission for the first time to bless same-sex couples, albeit with significant stipulations attached. The blessings must be spontaneous, rather than deriving from a prepared rite, and cannot be attached to a civil wedding ceremony. Further, they must not give the impression that they are akin to a wedding blessing, which the church reserves for a relationship between one man and one woman.

In the United States, reactions ranged from enthusiastic embrace of the new instruction to tepid acknowledgment to outright condemnation. Some Catholics see the move as a step forward for L.G.B.T.Q. people in the church, while others are worried about the watering down of traditional church teaching, with some also concerned about potential church schism.

Greg Krajewski, a gay, civilly married Catholic living in Chicago, said when he and his husband married, they did not

approach a priest for a blessing because they did not want to put anyone in an awkward spot. But now that priests are allowed to bless same-sex couples, he said, they will seek one “in the most casual way possible,” which would adhere to the document’s provision that blessings not be part of a formal liturgical service.

“This is the first time that the Vatican has come out in a real way and said, ‘We want you here. Your pursuit of God, your pursuit of the goodness that comes from being in the Catholic Church is a good thing,’” Mr. Krajewski, 34, told **America**. He added that he and his husband would like to receive a blessing because they share a desire to grow closer to Christ and see a blessing as a tangible tool in that journey.

“That desire to reach out to God, to ask him to be with us—I think that matters,” he said.

Some theologians worried that the language in the document might not be clear enough to avoid confusion. Ulrich L. Lehner, a theologian at the University of Notre Dame, said in a statement released to the media that the declaration’s “imprecise language” will create confusion, calling the language an “invitation to schism.”

While praising the document because it may encourage same-sex couples to seek God’s help, Mr. Lehner added, “Some bishops will use it as a pretext to do what the document explicitly forbids.”

Some bishops in Germany have for years encouraged the blessings of same-sex unions, and bishops in Belgium published a guide in 2022 that could be used for such prayer ceremonies. “Fiducia Supplicans” in some ways restrains priests from offering the kinds of blessings being offered in those countries, but the document was greeted warmly by some German and Belgian church leaders.

“It is surprising and positive news,” Bishop Johan Bonny, the bishop of Antwerp, Belgium, said in an interview with a European radio station. “No one expected this to be decided now. It’s been talked about for years. Such blessings have also been given for years, in an unofficial way.”

But another prominent German cardinal and former head of the Vatican’s doctrine office released a lengthy essay on Dec. 20 condemning the declaration. Cardinal Gerhard Müller called the document “self-contradictory” and called on diocesan bishops to ban the blessings.

“As pastor of his local church, he is obliged to prevent these sacrilegious acts, otherwise he would become an accomplice to them and would deny the mandate given to him by Christ to confirm his brethren in the faith,” the cardinal wrote.

Some other European bishops also shared disappointment in the document. Bishops in Ukraine released a state-

ment calling the declaration “vague” and lamenting that it fails to state explicitly “that the Gospel calls sinners to conversion, and without a call to leave the sinful life of homosexual couples, the blessing may look like an approval.”

Homosexual activity is illegal in about 30 African countries, punishable by death in some instances, and bishops in some of those nations released statements distancing themselves from the document. Bishops in Malawi released a joint statement on Dec. 19 in which they said any blessings to same-sex couples by priests would be prohibited.

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith acknowledged differing cultural norms but said in the press release on Jan. 4: “Prudence and attention to the ecclesial context and to the local culture could allow for different methods of application, but not a total or definitive denial of this path that is opposed to priests.”

The statement says that the Vatican document is not meant to expand who is eligible for a blessing but instead reiterates what the church believes about marriage and reminds Catholics that they are eligible to ask for blessings for any number of reasons.

“It is in this context that same-sex union couples or those living in irregular unions can ask and access non-liturgical ordinary blessings which the Church has always given to whoever asks of them,” the bishops said. Homosexuality is illegal in Malawi.

Priests in Zambia, where homosexuality is also illegal, will also be prohibited from imparting blessings to same-sex couples. A statement from bishops there called homosexual acts a “grave depravity” and cited church teaching that calls them “intrinsically disordered and contrary to natural law.” In order “to avoid pastoral confusion” and so as “not to break the law of our country,” the Zambian bishops continue, the Vatican declaration is to be the basis for “further reflection and not for implementation in Zambia.”

As in Zambia, homosexuality is illegal in Nigeria, and bishops there released a statement detailing their understanding of “Fiducia Supplicans” and declaring that there remained “no possibility in the Church of blessing same-sex unions and activities.”

Such blessings, the statement continued, “would go against God’s law, the teachings of the Church, the laws of our nation and the cultural sensibilities of our people.” The bishops also instructed priests “to continue in all they do to sustain the sacrament of holy matrimony and never to do anything that would detract from the sacredness of this sacrament.”

In Kenya, meanwhile, political leaders are pushing for a crackdown on L.G.B.T.Q. people, and the bishops’ confer-

ence there released a statement that reiterated the document's prohibition on blessing same-sex unions and sought to contextualize what is now allowed. "The church seeks to reach out to all individuals, in order to stir them to the path of conversion and salvation," it reads.

The Kenyan document seems written to allay concerns that the Vatican document is trying to normalize same-sex relationships.

"In blessing persons we do not bless the immoral actions they may perform," the statement continues, "but hope that the blessings and prayers offered over them as human persons will provoke them to conversion and to return to the ways of the Lord."

"Fiducia Supplicans" indeed lays out a positive case for allowing priests to offer such blessings:

"Ultimately, a blessing offers people a means to increase their trust in God. The request for a blessing, thus, expresses and nurtures openness to the transcendence, mercy, and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live. It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered" (No. 33)

The Rev. Satish Joseph ministers to L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics in Dayton, Ohio. He told **America** that he welcomed the news of the declaration because being able to offer a blessing to same-sex couples is a pastoral tool that he hopes

makes the church feel more welcoming.

L.G.B.T.Q. people, he said, often "run away from the church because they already feel that they are not going to be accepted and in some cases, even treated badly." Being able to offer a blessing to same-sex couples, he said, "can make young people, or anybody who's discerning their orientation, feel that the church is not completely rejecting them."

"The church should be the place where they find comfort, where they find hope, where they find life," Father Joseph said. "And now hopefully this blessing can help us to not be primarily seen as an institution of rejection."

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a brief statement on Dec. 18, acknowledging the declaration but focusing mostly on its assertion that same-sex couples remain ineligible for liturgical blessings and reiterating the church's position on marriage.

"The Church's teaching on marriage has not changed, and this declaration affirms that, while also making an effort to accompany people through the imparting of pastoral blessings because each of us needs God's healing love and mercy in our lives," the U.S. bishops said.

Michael J. O'Loughlin, *national correspondent*. Material from the German Catholic news agency KNA was used in this report. Colleen Dulle, *associate editor*, contributed to this story.

Where sexual orientation and gender expression can be a crime...

Some of the strongest responses to "Fiducia Supplicans" came from bishops in Africa, home to 265 million Catholics, or nearly a quarter of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics. Many of those Catholics live and their churches operate in societies where homosexuality is condemned and outlawed. Out of the continent's 54 countries, 31 have laws criminalizing homosexuality, more than any other continent.

Source: International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA)



Argentina's new president moderates his anti-pope rhetoric. Will it last?

Two days after he swept into power in Argentina following a run-off election on Nov. 19, President-elect Javier Milei received an unexpected phone call. He interrupted a television interview to speak with Pope Francis, a fellow Argentine he previously had maligned as a “filthy leftist” and “the imbecile that’s in Rome.”

The two men spoke for roughly eight minutes. Pope Francis congratulated Mr. Milei on his victory. The president-elect extended an invitation to the pope to visit his native country.

“The Argentine church received a message with the call to Javier Milei: Lay off this guy,” and “contribute to social peace,” said Fabián Calle, a professor of political science at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina.

An anarcho-capitalist with a vituperative persona, Mr. Milei trounced the ruling Peronist coalition candidate, the economy minister Sergio Massa, in the presidential runoff election, winning in 20 of Argentina’s 23 provinces. Mr. Milei was able to capitalize on Argentine voters’ weariness with recurring economic crises in an election year that saw inflation head north of 140 percent and with poverty afflicting 45 percent of the population.

But even before his inauguration on Dec. 10, Mr. Milei, 53, had started walking back some of his more controversial positions, like swapping out the beleaguered Argentine peso for the U.S. dollar and shutting down the nation’s central bank. His rhetorical moderation has stoked questions over what kind of government Mr. Milei might actually oversee.

“The question that remains is: ‘Who is Milei?’ Is he an actor? Or is he a guy, as the Peronists said, who is crazy?” asked José María Poirier, editor of the Argentine magazine *Criterio*. “What’s happening is that he’s suddenly presenting himself as a pragmatist, [someone] much more interested in dialogue.”

Mr. Milei’s rebranding effort appears to include his attitude toward the Catholic Church and the personal animus he appeared to have for Pope Francis, though local political observers credit the pope for handling the president-elect deftly by consistently taking the high road and not responding to Mr. Milei’s provocations.

The phone call particularly “was a very smart move because it forced Milei to have an exchange of words with a person [the president-elect] has characterized as the devil,” said Mariano De Vedia, religion writer at the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Nación*.

“The most important signal” would be whether or not



OSV New photo/Agustín Marcarian, Reuters

Javier Milei addresses supporters in Buenos Aires on Nov. 19 after winning Argentina’s runoff presidential election.

a visit by the pope to Argentina is actually confirmed, Mr. De Vedia said.

Francis has not returned to Argentina since his election to the papacy in 2013. Vatican observers say the pope has stayed away because of the messiness of Argentine politics. All sides in Argentina’s deeply divided political culture will likely attempt to appropriate the pope for their own purposes. But many Argentine Catholics see a papal visit as an important means to address those divisions.

An organization for fighting drug addiction sponsored by the *curas villeros*—the priests who minister in Buenos Aires’ shanty towns who were close to then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio—organized a Mass on Nov. 10, urging the pope to pay a visit.

“His words, his gestures, his presence will do us good because we desire a country full of love and social justice,” organizers said in a statement.

It remains to be seen if Pope Francis can fully mend fences with Mr. Milei and if the Argentine church will be able to work with the new government—especially in areas where priests and religious work with the poor, sponsoring pastoral and service outreach like soup kitchens and child-care and drug-rehabilitation centers.

“I believe that there will be a cordial coexistence in some things but great difficulty in everything [related to] the services or social activities provided by the church,” said the Rev. Roberto Ferrari, a priest in suburban Buenos Aires, who is part of the group Priests for the Option for the Poor.

“Within all the places where Catholic Church services are provided, and there are many, if there are cuts...then we are going to have problems,” he said. “But I think we are going to have more problems with [Mr. Milei’s] discourse.”

David Agren reports from Mexico City.



After 18 centuries, will Christians leave Gaza forever?

The Most Rev. William Shomali, 73, the Palestinian-born auxiliary bishop of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, worries that after the war between the Israel Defense Forces and Hamas concludes in Gaza, the Strip's remaining Christians may leave and never return. In this exclusive interview, conducted by email on Dec. 13, Bishop Shomali lamented the failure of the United Nations to achieve a cease-fire but expressed his conviction that the 75-year-old conflict could be brought to an end by the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel.

You have been to Gaza many times. How would you describe the situation there today?

Gaza today looks like the German cities destroyed during the Second World War. Thousands of houses are destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people are homeless. Only 20 percent of the population has access to clean water. Diseases are spreading. Hospitals need fuel. Panic and fear prevail. Fear prevails also in the Israeli cities near the Gaza border. Most of the inhabitants were obliged to leave their homes.

Besides the material damage, the war has generated more hatred, which will not heal easily. Killing does not bring peace but generates more violence in the future. I hope that at this point the two sides understand that the road to peace is in respecting the U.N. resolutions and implementing them through serious negotiations.

I fear that the Christians of Gaza, who are suffering more than in any other previous war, may leave the district for good after the end of the war. Some 60 [out of approximately 1,000] have already left. Twenty were killed [since the war started]. After this war, I fear there will be no more Christians in Gaza after a continuous presence of more than 18 centuries.

What do you think about the response of the international community to this war and the humanitarian crisis it has caused?

The response to the humanitarian crisis was excellent. But the number of trucks approved to enter [Gaza] through the Rafah district [crossing] is much less than the real needs. People need much more help than what is allowed in every day.

On the diplomatic level, I regret that the U.N. role in this conflict was a failure. The U.N. became a forum for rhetoric, during which mutual accusations were exchanged, but not a place where pragmatic decisions were taken and implemented. The American veto in the U.N. [Security Council] paralyzed the attempt to impose a humanitarian cease-fire.

You are the Latin patriarchal vicar for Palestine. How do you read the situation in the West Bank after numerous raids by Israeli forces and settlers since Oct. 7?

Life in the West Bank is not normal. The 160,000 Palestinians who used to work in Israel are now unemployed. A lot

Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip on Dec. 18

of people live under the poverty line. The employees of the Palestinian Authority receive only part of their stipend because the government does not have enough to pay them. Many Christians started to leave the country, and many more are thinking the same way. Their departure will render the situation more vulnerable for those who remain.

What is the Catholic Church, together with the other churches, doing to respond to the conflict and the humanitarian crisis?

The heads of [the Christian] churches made several appeals for a ceasefire and a return to negotiations for a final solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The ultimate reason for the conflict comes from delaying the political solution. The two-state solution has been archived. It is time to revive it and to give Palestinians self-determination.

The date of Oct. 7 and the war that followed are important phases in this long-term conflict, which has continued for over seven decades. I am sure that if a peace treaty is signed, the two states [of Israel and Palestine] can live beside each other in peace and harmony without the need for walls and wars.

Despite all the difficulties arising from the many [Israeli] settlements built in the West Bank in recent years, the two-state solution remains the only [peace proposal] agreed upon at the international level. It should be negotiated. With good will, all the difficulties can be overcome.

Gerard O'Connell,
Vatican correspondent.



Activists at COP28 on Dec. 9, 2023

AP Photo/Peter Dejong

Faith groups helped keep hope alive at COP28 climate talks

Pope Francis had been expected to be a voice of moral reason at the COP28 climate meeting in Dubai, but a respiratory infection kept him from attending.

“Pope Francis is a voice of clarity and passion in the climate space, so his presence would certainly have just energized everything,” Gina Castillo, the chief climate policy and research advisor for Catholic Relief Services, said in an email to **America**. But even without Pope Francis, Ms. Castillo believes that the presence of representatives from different faiths around the world made a difference in the conference’s deliberations.

“Faith actors at COP28 were there to be the moral voice of the climate talks,” Ms. Castillo said, “reminding negotiators that their words, the texts that they fight about, have real consequences in people’s lives.”

“Our duty is to bring the struggles of those who are on the frontlines of the climate crisis to these spaces,” she said. “Catholic actors did that, as well as [actors from] other faiths.” The faith perspective at COP28, she added, was also “about providing hope for all generations, but especially for young people.”

COP28 drew hundreds of delegates from all over the world for two weeks of climate talks in the most populous city of the oil-rich United Arab Emirates. The conference concluded on Dec. 12 with a first-ever commitment to move away from planet-warming fossil fuels.

Jose Aguto, the executive director for Catholic Climate Covenant in Washington, called the agreement’s language “a modest rhetorical step in the right direction” but was concerned that the COP28 text lacked any substantive commitment, leaving “a lot of loopholes for continued development of some false solutions, like carbon capture and sequestration, and also an out for continued development of natural gas.”

Pope Francis noted in his recent exhortation “Laudate Deum” that 80 percent of the world’s energy is still dependent upon fossil fuels. “The challenge,” Mr. Aguto said, “is [asking] how do we pragmatically extricate ourselves from this dependence” and counter the political and economic power of fossil fuel interests who “are very canny about moving sideways to continue” extracting and commodifying fossil fuels.

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent.*

HARDWOOD

HEROES

Bill Russell, K.C. Jones and the Black players who made basketball history

By James T. Keane

An estimated 100,000 fans mobbed the streets of San Francisco on March 25, 1955, to greet the winners of the N.C.A.A. men's basketball crown. A ticker-tape parade down Market Street and through the financial district, in which each player rode in his own convertible, took "San Francisco's Finest" to City Hall, where they were feted by the city's dignitaries.

A year later the team would do it all again, part of an unprecedented 60-game winning streak and back-to-back national championships.

No small accomplishment for a school without a gym.

The team was not one of the U.C.L.A. dynasties that would later dominate college basketball; nor was it a squad from one of California's established public universities. Rather, they played for the University of San Francisco, an all-male Catholic university located in the city's Inner Richmond neighborhood. The venerable school had been founded by Italian Jesuits in 1855 and was celebrating its centennial. The entire student body only numbered around 2,000 students.

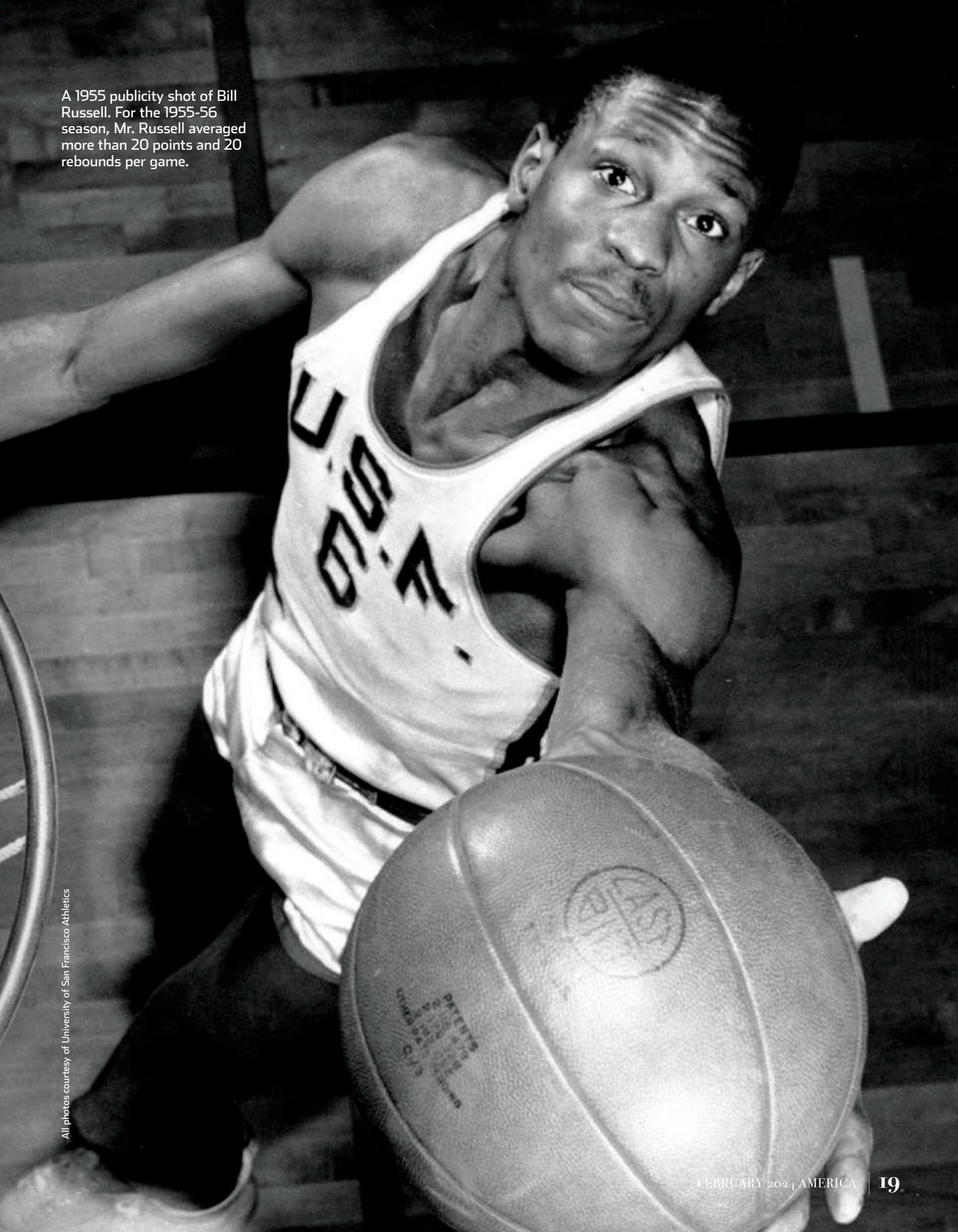
What it did have, however, was Bill Russell and K.C. Jones. And Karl Boldt, Mike Farmer, Hal Perry and Gene Brown—all stars in their own right. They also had coach Phil Woolpert, only

39 years old at the time. A high school coach just five years before, he was named national collegiate Coach of the Year by United Press International in both 1955 and 1956.

That U.S.F. squad would not just set records and win championships, however. They also proved to be groundbreakers in American race relations for their early stands against segregation and discrimination in basketball and society. Seven decades later, they remain a legendary squad, not only for their basketball accomplishments (in 2018, ESPN ranked the 1955-56 Dons the fourth greatest men's collegiate basketball team of all time), but because they marked a change in collegiate basketball in their own time.

They are also a signal part of the story of Catholic higher education in the United States, a tale in which men's basketball—and the attendant issues of race and class—play an important part. With perhaps the exception of the University of Notre Dame's football team, basketball has always been the most Catholic of men's collegiate sports. That history "is above all a story that is both American and Catholic, despite its setting within a sport invented as a means of proselytizing by a Presbyterian from Canada," wrote John Gasaway in his 2021 book *Miracles on the Hardwood*.

A 1955 publicity shot of Bill Russell. For the 1955-56 season, Mr. Russell averaged more than 20 points and 20 rebounds per game.



All photos courtesy of University of San Francisco Athletics



U.S.F. was the first major college basketball program to start three Black players.

The Arrival of Bill Russell

Though U.S.F. had won the National Invitational Tournament in 1949 under coach Pete Newell (and the school recognizes that N.I.T. victory as a national title), the arrival of Bill Russell on campus in the fall of 1952 augured a new era for the team. A 6-foot-10 center who was born in Louisiana and raised in Oakland, Mr. Russell had starred for McClymonds High School (among his teammates was Frank Robinson, now in the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame) but was a raw recruit when he arrived at U.S.F., offering more promise than polish. He was also, he later wrote, one of only two Black students in U.S.F.'s freshman class. The other was Hal Perry, who was also on the basketball team.

"You could get a good education at USF. The Jesuits have a flair for it," Mr. Russell wrote in his memoir, *Go Up for Glory*. He remembered most of all a class in logic with a Jesuit. "I never forgot the lesson he taught me. Think." Mr. Russell's roommate was K.C. Jones, another Black player a year older. As was the case in many colleges at the time, U.S.F.'s dorms were mostly converted army barracks.

"There was a frightening feeling of unreality as I walked around that campus," Mr. Jones remembered in his memoir, *Rebound*. "I mean, what was I doing there? I was awful lonesome. I felt the glances and heard the racial wisecracks, and it didn't exactly boost my confidence level, but it surely fueled my determination to succeed."

Mr. Jones credited Phil Woolpert with making him feel at home. "The Jesuits were firm and fair. They reached out to me," he remembered, "but it was Phil who put his arm around me. From the first I knew he was color blind—when you're black, you can tell." Mr. Woolpert also helped Mr. Jones's mother find a job working as a maid at the Saint Francis Hotel in San Francisco. Though Mr. Russell later wrote that Mr. Jones spoke not a word to him for their first month as roommates, the two eventually became close friends.

In his first season, 1952-53, Mr. Russell played on

U.S.F.'s freshman team in accordance with N.C.A.A. rules at the time. The next season, he looked forward to playing with Mr. Jones and Jerry Mullen on a team with great promise. In his first varsity game, on Dec. 1, 1953, Mr. Russell was matched up against U.C. Berkeley's All-American center, Bob McKeen. Mr. Russell blocked Mr. McKeen's first shot attempt into the third row. He scored 23 points and blocked 13 shots as U.S.F. won by 19 points.

Unfortunately, Mr. Jones suffered a burst appendix the next day and missed the rest of the season. The team also struggled with internal dissension. Some of it was caused by white students and alumni (and some team members) who refused to accept Mr. Russell, Mr. Jones and the other Black team members, according to the historian Aram Goudsouzian in his article in California History, "The House That Russell Built: Bill Russell, the University of San Francisco, and the Winning Streak That Changed Basketball." "They didn't see the need to have us in the school," remembered Hal Perry.

Mr. Russell fought an upperclassman during the season; he also feuded with Mr. Woolpert, who called him a lazy player and often kicked him out of practices for loafing. The coach also tried to change his star's playing style. "I was not fond of Woolpert as a coach, but I liked him as a man... sometimes," Mr. Russell wrote. "I believed then and I believe now that he played favorites." He also felt that Mr. Woolpert gave special attention to white players.

The coach was no shrinking violet himself—he had worked as a prison guard before getting into coaching, and as a player at Loyola University in Los Angeles (now Loyola Marymount University), he was thrown out of four games for fighting. He later told *Sports Illustrated* that "Bill was a man of many moods. We had a lot of run-ins." The Dons finished that season 14-7.

A Dynasty Begins

Before the 1954-55 season began, several small but momentous changes in the Dons' starting lineup set the stage for their leap to national prominence. The team's two starting forwards, Stan Buchanan and Jerry Mullen, had both graduated, and Karl Boldt and Mike Farmer, a 6-foot-9 sophomore, moved into their spots. "When I was on the freshman team, I was the starting center," Mr. Farmer told **America** in a phone interview. "I told K.C., 'I think I can





beat out Russell at center.' He told me, 'Kid, you better find another position if you want to play this season.'"

In the second game of the season, the Dons lost to U.C.L.A. After the game, Mr. Woolpert moved Hal Perry, who had been scheduled to come off the bench, into the starting lineup at guard. It gave U.S.F. an intimidating defensive lineup: two fast guards in Hal Perry and K.C. Jones up front; Karl Boldt and Mike Farmer at the forward positions, and Bill Russell down low, dominating around the basket. As recounted in James W. Johnson's *The Dandy Dons*, the move reassured some of the Black players on the team that Mr. Woolpert was not favoring his white players at the expense of the team's fortunes.

It also gave U.S.F. a starting lineup with three Black players. This broke an unspoken rule in a still deeply segregated college basketball climate: White players should be the majority of starters. U.S.F. was the first major program to start three Black players that year (U.C.L.A. and Duquesne followed suit later that season, but many promi-

The 1954-55 University of San Francisco Dons arrive in San Francisco after winning the N.C.A.A. national championship. Holding the ball aloft is star center Bill Russell.

nent national programs remained completely white for another decade or more), and the U.S.F. players felt the ire of opposing fans and players when the groundbreaking squad became impossible to beat.

One of the team's greatest challenges came shortly after the change in lineup, when the Dons traveled to the All-College Tournament in Oklahoma City. Told by their hotel that Black players were not welcome and would have to stay in an Oklahoma City college dorm, the players voted instead to stay as a group in the dormitory. Mr. Woolpert and his top assistant, Ross Giudice, stayed with the players as well. Before the team's first game, fans began pelting them with coins as they took the floor. Mr. Farmer laughed upon remembering Bill Russell's reaction: "He told Woolpert, 'Can you pick up those coins? That's the only money I'm going to make in college.'"



In four seasons, Phil Woolpert's teams had lost a total of 10 games while winning over 100.

U.S.F. won the tournament, then swept through both their own league and the N.C.A.A. tournament. They played La Salle University of Philadelphia and its star, Tom Gola, in the championship game. La Salle was heavily favored, in part because many East Coast college coaches did not take West Coast basketball seriously. “Bill Russell was not a big name on the East Coast until they beat us in that tournament,” Mr. Gola later remembered. “In fact, I had never seen Bill Russell until we met in the lobby of the hotel.”

That soon changed. Mr. Russell scored 23 points and collected 25 rebounds as U.S.F. won, 77 to 63. He was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player. Upon their return to San Francisco, the team was greeted by a raucous crowd at the airport as they descended from the plane—with a jubilant Bill Russell holding a basketball several feet over the heads of everyone on the stairs.

After the season, Mr. Russell dealt with another case of racial discrimination. Despite his and the team's achievements, he was named runner-up to Santa Clara's Kenneth “Big Cat” Sears, a white player, as 1955 Northern California Player of the Year.

Back to Back?

U.S.F. went into the 1955-56 season with far higher expectations than the year before. K.C. Jones had been granted an extra year of eligibility (with the caveat that he could not play in the postseason N.C.A.A. tourney) because he played only a single game in 1953-54. Gene Brown, a Black sophomore, had come up from the freshman team and was already challenging for a starting spot.

No longer were the Dons considered upstarts. Mr. Russell was a pre-season All-American and had gone to the White House during the off-season, meeting President Dwight Eisenhower. The team's new warmup jerseys included gold capes. U.S.F. even started raising money for a gym, though in the meantime the team continued to play in the St. Ignatius High School gym or Kezar Pavilion; big games moved to the Cow Palace, a large indoor arena in near-

by Daly City, where the team drew crowds of over 10,000.

Over the course of the year, Mr. Russell was profiled by everyone from The New York Times to Life to Time to Sports Illustrated. The legendary U.C.L.A. coach John Wooden called him “the greatest defensive man I've ever seen.” The N.C.A.A. even widened the free throw lane to 12 feet in what was seen by many as an attempt to restrain the big center's dominance.

A joke on the team at the time went thus: If the team went down in a plane crash, the headlines would read “Bill Russell Killed.” On the back pages, one would find “teammates also dead.”

With Mr. Russell averaging more than 20 points and 20 rebounds a game, the Dons finished the regular season 25 to 0, often winning by two dozen points or more. Both Mr. Russell and Mr. Jones were named first-team All-Americans.

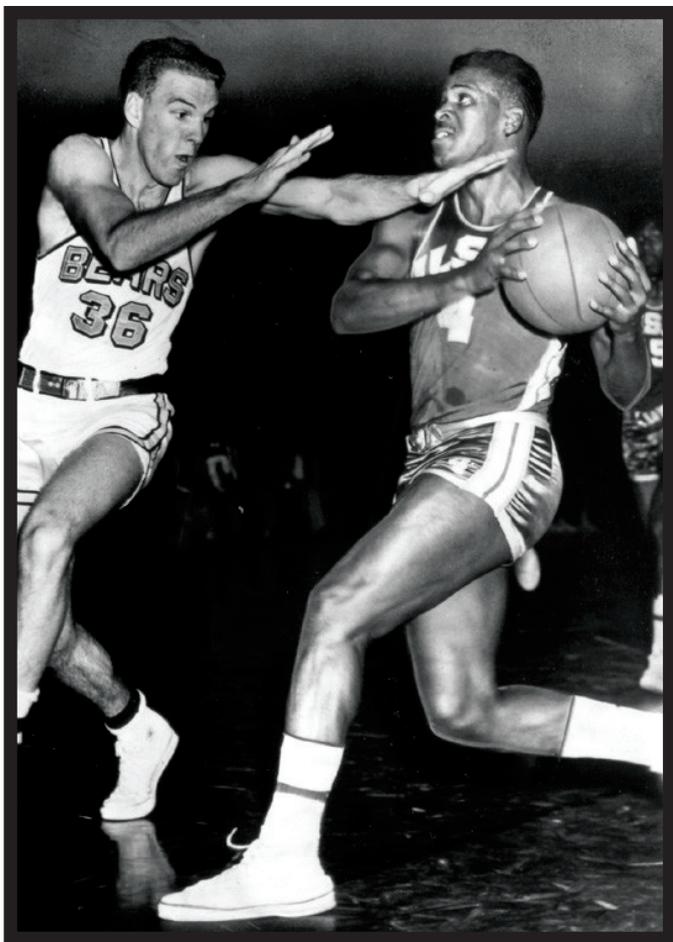
Racial segregation continued to be an issue. When the team traveled to Louisiana to play Loyola University of New Orleans two days before Christmas, they were told the Black players could not stay in the same hotel as the rest of the team. “We met as a team to discuss what we should do,” Mr. Farmer remembered. Should the team boycott the game? “But Russ and K.C. both said, ‘Let's go down there and make a statement.’” The Black players stayed at Xavier University of Louisiana, a historically Black Catholic university in New Orleans, while the white players stayed in the hotel. U.S.F. won the game by 18 points.

The N.C.A.A.'s ruling that K.C. Jones's extra season of eligibility did not extend to the postseason tournament that year made no difference: Mr. Woolpert inserted Gene Brown—whom some on the team felt should have been starting all along as a forward—at guard, and the Dons didn't miss a beat. After they crushed Southern Methodist University in a semifinal game in the N.C.A.A. tournament, S.M.U. coach Doc Hayes offered a tribute that surely resonated with a Cold War audience at the time: “San Francisco can beat any basketball team I know of. San Francisco can beat the Russians.”

The next night, U.S.F. beat Iowa for the championship and their 55th consecutive win, with Mr. Russell scoring 26 points and hauling in 27 rebounds. The Dons were the first team in the N.C.A.A. tournament era to finish its season undefeated. “This must be the finest undergraduate team since Naismith first hung the peach basket,” wrote The San Francisco Chronicle.

Further Glories

Even without his stars, Mr. Woolpert and U.S.F. had two more extraordinary seasons. In 1957, the team extended its winning streak to 60 games, and U.S.F. finished third in



K. C. Jones drives to the basket against the University of California Bears.

the N.C.A.A. tournament; in 1958, the team had a 25 to 2 record. After that season, Mike Farmer was selected with the third pick in the 1958 draft and played in the N.B.A. for seven seasons.

In four seasons, Phil Woolpert's teams had lost a total of 10 games while winning over 100.

Both Mr. Russell and Mr. Jones played for the United States in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, with the U.S. team taking home the gold medal and winning every game by at least 30 points. After flirting with the Harlem Globetrotters for a bit, Bill Russell was drafted by the Boston Celtics, while K.C. Jones went to the Minneapolis (now Los Angeles) Lakers. Both men had Hall of Fame careers in the N.B.A., and Mr. Russell went on to collect 11 championships in 13 years with the Boston Celtics. He also became the first Black coach in N.B.A. history.

Mr. Russell's relationship with U.S.F. soured after he went pro. "I was sixteen credits shy on graduation, but I had already planned on going back after my first professional year and taking the one semester I needed," he wrote in *Go Up for Glory*. He said he "planned on waiving the scholar-

ship and paying for the semester as a gesture of good will."

However, Mr. Russell found that "the gesture was unnecessary. No one offered me the remainder of the scholarship. Dear old USF charged me full retail for my tuition. The scholarship, it turned out, was only good while I was playing basketball." A Jesuit teaching at U.S.F. who later became the school's president, John Lo Schiavo, S.J., blamed the incident on the university treasurer, "a cranky old Jesuit priest." The university tried over the years to make it up to Mr. Russell but found him uninterested.

"The school did everything it could to get him back involved," Mr. Farmer told *The San Francisco Chronicle* after Mr. Russell's death. "But Russ had made up his mind, and that was it. I think he took it to the extreme, but that was him."

Bill Russell's legend in the N.B.A. looms over the game to such an extent that every single team in the N.B.A. has retired his jersey, Jackie Robinson style: Never again will a player wear No. 6 in an N.B.A. game. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama in 2011.

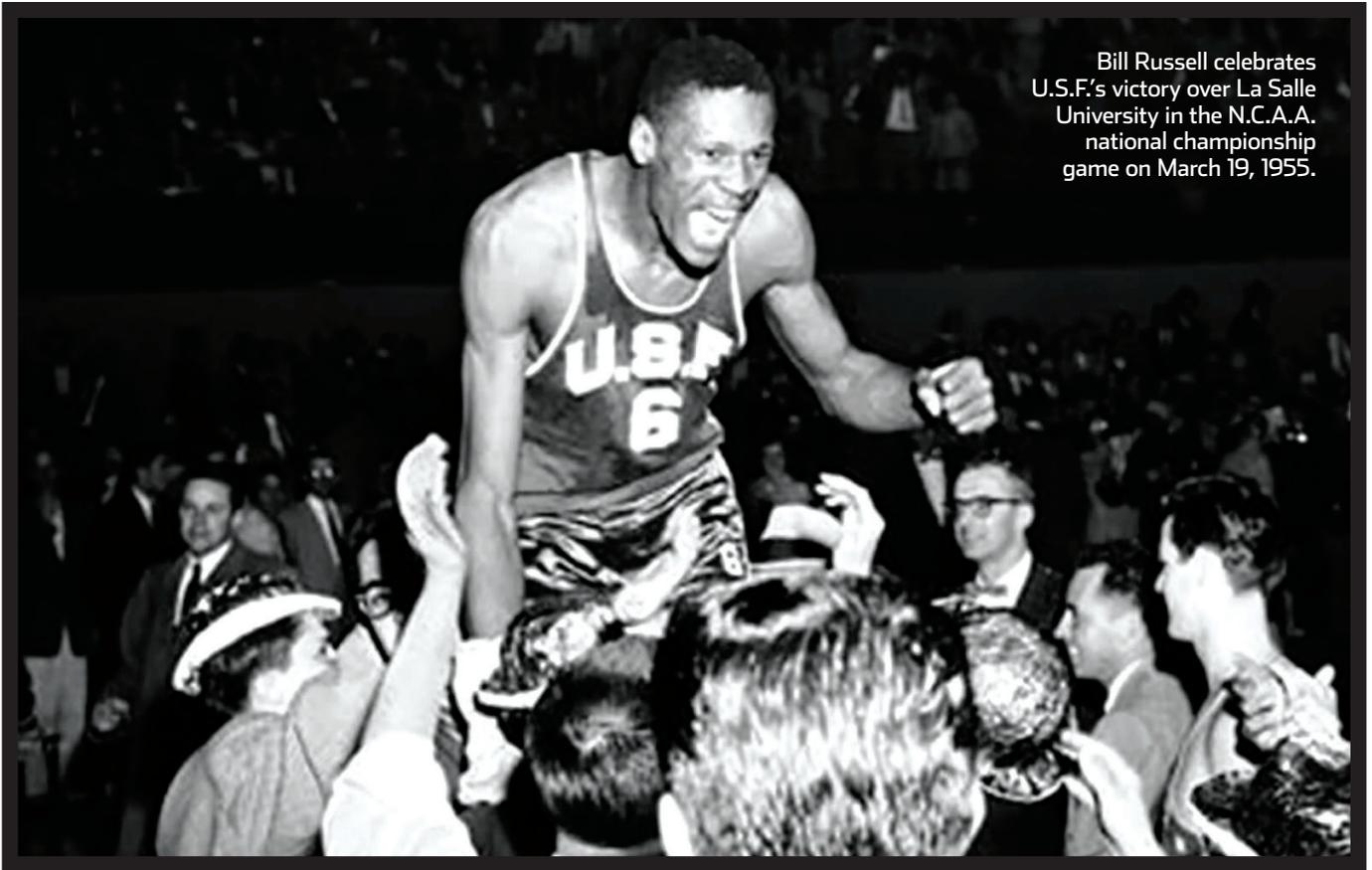
Mr. Russell died on July 31, 2022, at the age of 88. "Bill Russell helped put U.S.F. on the map in the 1950s," said U.S.F. President Paul J. Fitzgerald, S.J., at the time. "We are grateful not only for his many contributions to our community, the athletic department and Jesuit education, but also for his courage and commitment to advancing justice, on and beyond the basketball court."

Mr. Russell's obituary in *The New York Times* listed his many off-the-court passions:

He took part in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and was seated in the front row of the crowd to hear the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech. He went to Mississippi after the civil rights activist Medgar Evers was murdered and worked with Evers's brother, Charles, to open an integrated basketball camp in Jackson. He was among a group of prominent Black athletes who supported Muhammad Ali when Ali refused induction into the armed forces during the Vietnam War.

Impact on the Game

How did the Dons change the game? "This team has done more than any other to shine a light on race relations in this country," argued an editorial in the U.S.F. student newspaper, *The San Francisco Foghorn*, after their second championship in 1956. But in truth, the racial barriers the U.S.F. team faced—and challenged—did not disappear immediately. After U.S.F.'s back-to-back wins, the next three



Bill Russell celebrates U.S.F.'s victory over La Salle University in the N.C.A.A. national championship game on March 19, 1955.

N.C.A.A. champions were all-white teams. In some corners, the Dons' success led to a backlash against Black players. According to James W. Johnson in *The Dandy Dons*, the state of Louisiana banned interracial athletic events in 1956, shortly after U.S.F.'s historic game in New Orleans, joining other Southern states with similar bans.

But small changes soon became large ones. In 1963, during Loyola Chicago's championship run, an all-white Mississippi State team defied a state government order prohibiting them from playing racially integrated teams to face off against Loyola and its four Black starters in the N.C.A.A. tournament.

And as Mr. Goudsouzian notes in "The House That Russell Built," when *Look* magazine published its All-America team in 1951, not a single Black starter could be found. That same feature in 1958 showcased four Black players in the starting five—among them another West Coast star for a small Jesuit school, Seattle University's Elgin Baylor. Because of the dominance of players like Mr. Russell, Mr. Jones and Mr. Baylor in the N.C.A.A. and N.B.A. in the years that followed, the face of collegiate and pro basketball was increasingly Black.

Energized by the school's back-to-back titles and new national prominence in the mid-50s, U.S.F. alumni and benefactors provided the funds for an 8,000-seat are-

na, named the War Memorial Gymnasium, which broke ground in 1956 and opened its doors in 1958. It is still in use today, and in its rafters hang the jerseys of three players from those mid-50s squads: Bill Russell, K.C. Jones and Mike Farmer. The 1970s brought the team some glory days once again, but scandals in the 1980s involving U.S.F. players being paid by university boosters caused the school to drop men's basketball as a sport.

In 1985, the university reinstated the program, and Bill Russell returned to campus for the first time in a quarter-century to welcome the team's rebirth.

The 2023 preseason coach's poll for the West Coast Conference had the Dons ranked third, behind only St. Mary's and the perennial powerhouse Gonzaga. They have been averaging 20 wins a season since 2016. Men's collegiate basketball is a far bigger business today than it was 70 years ago and no longer rewards small-school Cinderella dreams quite as often. But who knows: Maybe somewhere in Oakland there's a gangly high school baller with a ferocious will to win, he comes to Inner Richmond, and then...

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



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.

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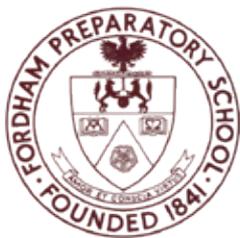
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(617) 474-5010 • bchigh.edu • enrollment@bchigh.edu

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

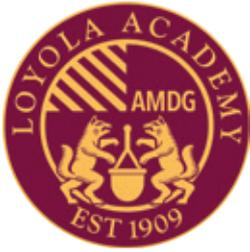
Fordham Preparatory School is a Catholic, all-male, Jesuit, college preparatory school. Our commitment to education is shaped by the spirituality and pedagogical tradition of the Society of Jesus. Our mission is to form leaders in to faith, scholarship, and service through a college preparatory education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



Loyola Academy

(847) 256-1100 • goramblers.org

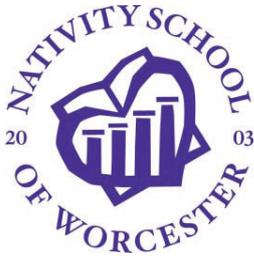
Located outside Chicago, Loyola is a vibrant community committed to responding to God's call to be women and men for others. Founded in 1909, Loyola has a rich tradition of excellence in academics, athletics, and co-curricular opportunities. Annually, we welcome approximately 500 students per grade from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



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Nativity School of Worcester

nativityworcester.org • advancement@nativityworcester.org

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Regis High School

(212) 288-1100 • regis.org admissions@regis.org

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

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(201) 547-6389 • www.spprep.org • admissions@spprep.org

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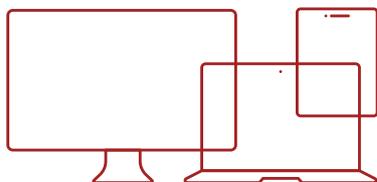
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(212) 924-7900 • xavierhs.org • admissions@xavierhs.org

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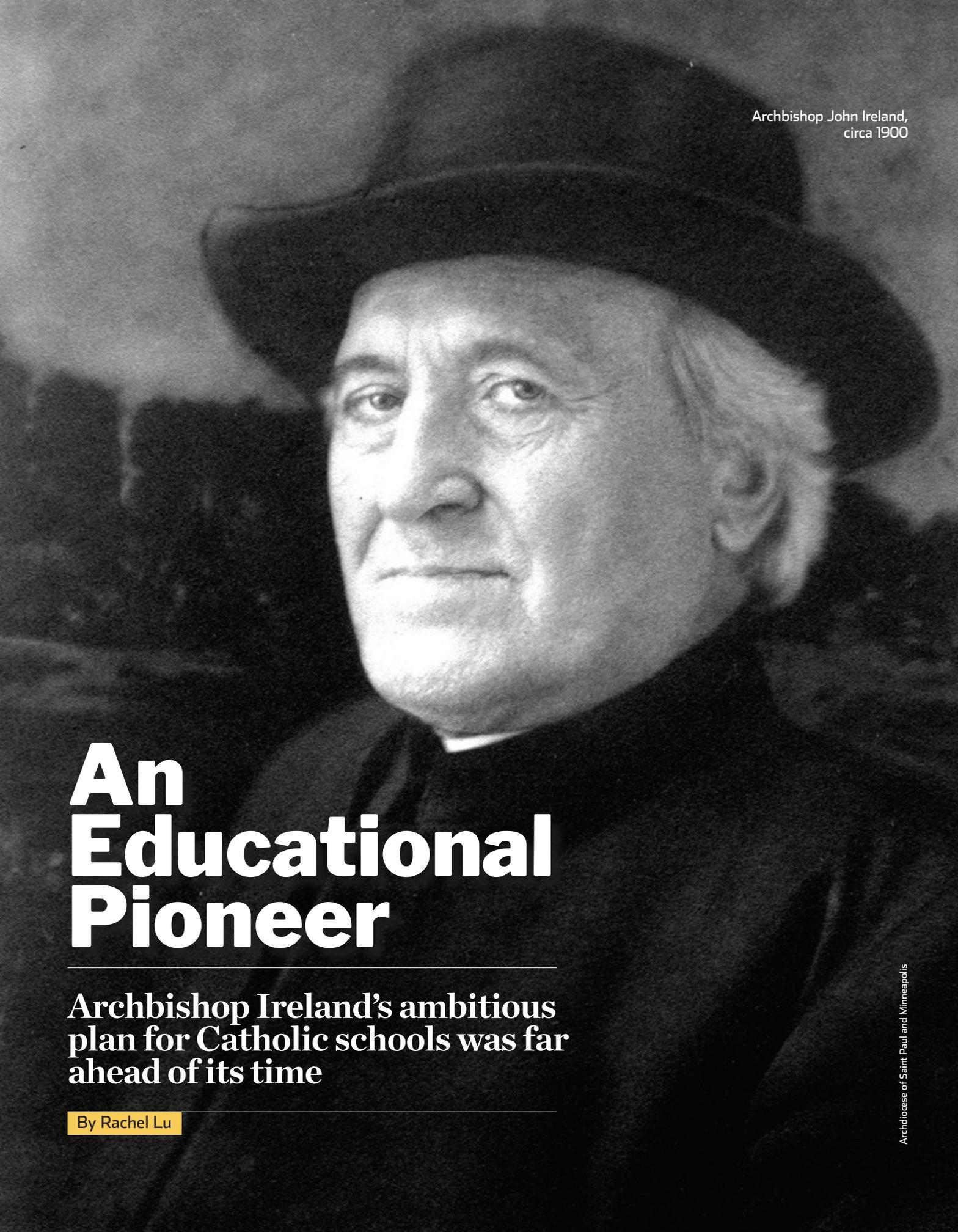
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Archbishop John Ireland,
circa 1900

An Educational Pioneer

Archbishop Ireland's ambitious
plan for Catholic schools was far
ahead of its time

By Rachel Lu

On the roof of a parking garage in the heart of St. Paul, Minn., there is a place where a visitor can take in a sweeping, panoramic view that symbolizes the relationship of church and state. To the right stands the Minnesota State Capitol, with its massive marble dome inspired by St. Peter's Basilica. To the left stands the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. Paul, open since 1915, the final jewel in the crown in the remarkable life of Archbishop John Ireland. Rising majestically from the bluff of St. Anthony's Hill, the cathedral claims the highest ground in the city as it looks down on both the Capitol and the financial district. This is not an accident. Archbishop Ireland wanted the world to know that Jesus Christ outranks both Mammon and Caesar.

Born in 1838 in County Kilkenny in Ireland, the future archbishop of St. Paul immigrated to the United States and settled in St. Paul with his parents in 1852. A year later, he was sent to Rome to study for the priesthood. Ordained in 1861 for what was then the Diocese of St. Paul, he became rector of the diocesan cathedral in 1867 and bishop of the diocese in 1884.

Even today, the Twin Cities have Archbishop Ireland to thank for many of their most significant Catholic institutions, including St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary and the University of St. Thomas. In 1888, Rome elevated St. Paul to a metropolitan see with Archbishop Ireland at its head. From a Catholic perspective, at least, it is fair to say that Archbishop Ireland put Minnesota on the map.

Archbishop Ireland's life was not an unbroken success story, however. He failed utterly in his most cherished project. In the 1890s, Ireland threw himself into an energetic effort to pilot a new model for Catholic education. He wanted to negotiate a political arrangement that would enable taxpayer money to be channeled into parochial schools. The project generated massive controversy and ultimately failed, to the detriment of Minnesota schoolchildren and the archbishop's reputation.

More than a century later, however, American Catholics again find themselves thinking about Catholic schools, educational choice and the possibilities of public funding. We are living through an era of expanding school choice, and recent examples like St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School in Oklahoma have reopened the possibility that Catholic schooling might become a recognized form of publicly financed education. It would be a vindication of John Ireland if it turned out that now, more than a century after his death, the hour had finally come for his most cherished plan.

Ireland's Tenure

Archbishop Ireland was a man of boundless energy and deep conviction. Very few have worked so assiduously to ensure that the Catholic Church was taken seriously, in St. Paul or throughout the United States. Ireland was also a fervent patriot, convinced that the United States was a great nation on its way to global prominence. In our own time, this view may seem unremarkable—indeed, many of Archbishop Ireland's speeches sound like something one might hear today at a Fourth of July fireworks show or from the stage of a national political convention. For a late-19th-century prelate, though, this attitude was quite distinctive.

This was an era when the United States was still classified by Rome as mission territory, and the great Catholic minds of Europe were still vociferously debating the relative merits of monarchy and liberal democracy. The archbishop of St. Paul was not conflicted. When Ireland died at the ripe age of 80, John Courtney Murray, S.J., was still a child, and the Second Vatican Council was nearly half a century away. Nevertheless, Ireland confidently believed that the church should bless liberal democracy—while also working to draw out its greatest strengths and temper its defects. In particular, he hoped that the American church could lead the way, bringing transcendent truths to the New World and political ones back to the Old.

History has vindicated many of Ireland's views. The United States did indeed become a geopolitical power within a generation of Ireland's death. Much of the world accepted liberal principles as a foundation for peace and prosperity, and the church gave her blessing to democracy. In his time, Ireland was a controversialist; today he seems commonsensical.

Ireland was all the more unusual among Catholic prelates in that he was a flag-waving member of the Republican Party, having served as a chaplain in the Union Army during the Civil War. Today, his commitment to the abolition of slavery is clearly praiseworthy. Many of his signature projects have likewise stood the test of time. His cathedral still stands proudly, and the University of St. Thomas, founded by Ireland in 1885, is now the largest private college in the state of Minnesota. John Ireland remains, to this day, the most illustrious churchman who served in the North Star state.

Ireland's Educational Plan

Ireland was always known for his optimism and tenacity. But considering the level of anti-Catholic bigotry in late



Archbishop Ireland wanted to ensure that parochial schools were available to all Catholic children, even the poorest.

19th-century America, it is remarkable that he believed it possible to secure state money for Catholic schools. There has been a Catholic presence in the United States from colonial days, but in the 1800s Catholics were still an unloved minority in many parts of the country. In Archbishop Ireland's time, the country became infected with the mania of the Know-Nothing Party, which railed against alleged "Romanist" conspiracies to undermine the United States government. The Civil War broke the nativist fever, but afterward the temperature began to rise again as Catholics streamed in from Ireland, Italy, Germany and Eastern Europe.

In 1875, James Gillespie Blaine, then the leader of the Republican minority in the U.S. House, proposed an expansion to the First Amendment of the Constitution that forbade placing public funds "under the control of any religious sect." Everyone understood what this meant. Mr. Blaine was trying to ensure that public money could not be used to fund Catholic institutions, especially parochial schools. Religion as such was not the key issue in this case, because it was quite normal at the time for public schoolchildren to recite prayers and study the King James Bible. The call for a more rigid separation of church and state would rise in the later 20th century. In the 19th, Mr. Blaine spoke mainly for a Protestant majority that was anxious to limit Catholic influence, preserving their own control over state institutions and the culture at large.

Mr. Blaine's amendment narrowly failed in the U.S. Senate, but across subsequent decades, versions of it were adopted in 38 individual states. The public's attitude could hardly have been clearer. A less dogged campaigner than Archbishop Ireland would have quickly concluded that it would be quite impossible to secure state funds for Catholic schools. Archbishop Ireland had something of a taste for uphill battles.

Ireland firmly believed that it was necessary for Cath-



Archbishop Ireland would have been delighted by the idea that American Catholics might serve not just their own children, but also the nation at large, by building excellent schools. In photo: Students at Kellenberg Memorial High School in Uniondale, N.Y., on Sept. 14, 2023.

olic children to attend parochial schools. He had no wish to keep Catholics cloistered in insular parish communities; quite the contrary, he warmly encouraged Catholics in all states of life to integrate into American culture and be the salt of the earth. However, he was firmly opposed to secular schools. He explained his concerns in a speech delivered in 1890 to the National Educational Association of the United States, warning that the secular school...

treats of land and sea, but not of Heaven; it speaks of statesmen and warriors, but not of God and Christ; it tells how to attain success in this world, but says nothing about the world beyond the grave. The pupil sees and listens, and insensibly forms the conclusion that religion is of minor importance.

Addressing nonbelievers, Ireland promised: "I will not impose upon them my religion, which is Christianity. But let them not impose upon me and my fellow Christians their religion, which is secularism. Secularism is a religion of its kind, and usually a very loud-spoken and intolerant religion."

A Bold Experiment

Archbishop Ireland wanted to ensure that parochial schools were available to all Catholic children, even the poorest. But as new waves of immigrants arrived from Europe, there were *many* poor Catholic families. Keeping the lights



OSV News photo/Gregory A. Siermitz

on was a challenge, so Ireland looked for clever solutions. In August 1891, a parochial school in Faribault, Minn., informed the local school district that it was on the brink of closing. The school's financial situation had become unworkable. This was a problem for the school district as well, since it meant that the forthcoming school year would see a large influx of new students from the Catholic school for which the district was not prepared.

With coaching from Archbishop Ireland, the pastor, the Rev. James Conry, made a bold suggestion. He offered to place his school under the authority of the local district, with the understanding that the lease on the building (obtained for just a dollar a year) would only apply during school hours. It would function like a public school *most* of the time, following a curriculum similar to what was offered in secular schools. However, school hours would be tailored to enable morning Mass, religious instruction, and any other Catholic-specific experiences to take place outside the official school day.

The suggestion was modeled on an arrangement that had worked in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and it seemed to have been a success there. With its back against the wall, the Faribault school district agreed to try the same experiment. Shortly afterward, a cash-strapped pastor in nearby Stillwater, Minn., found himself in a similar situation, and at Archbishop Ireland's urging, successfully pitched a similar proposal to his own local school district. By odd coincidence, both schools sat atop hills and were referred

to as "the Hill School." In a literal sense, at least, Minnesota Catholics held the high ground.

In the short term, Ireland's plan seemed to be succeeding; he had his publicly funded Catholic schools. But there was considerable opposition from the start from both the wider Protestant culture and fellow Catholic clergymen, especially the Jesuits and some other bishops, following the lead of Archbishop Michael Corrigan of New York. They feared Ireland would simply deliver Catholic schools into the hands of unsympathetic Protestants, jeopardizing the American church's ongoing efforts to build up a thriving network of parochial schools.

Meanwhile, in the secular press, suspicious Protestants had no difficulty recognizing Archbishop Ireland's plan for what it was: an attempt to make taxpayers foot the bill for schools in which Catholic children studied under the direction of habit-wearing, rosary-bead-clicking nuns.

Ireland soon found himself embroiled in ecclesiastical controversy and was compelled to travel to Rome to discuss the matter personally with Pope Leo XIII, who was also a proponent of liberal democracy. The meeting went well; the pope was sympathetic. Leo was himself working to persuade French traditionalists to be more receptive to liberal democracy. The two men seemed to understand each other, and in 1892, the pope gave his assent to Ireland's plan. Five cardinals assigned to a special commission in Rome formally decreed that the Faribault and Stillwater schools "could be tolerated." Archbishop Ireland expressed



Archbishop Ireland confidently believed that the church should bless liberal democracy.

his appreciation by traveling to France to extol the benefits of republican governance. To all appearances, he had won the day.

The victory was fleeting. The Minnesota arrangement broke down almost immediately as the surrounding communities, then the nation, became aware of what was happening. Poughkeepsie's school had somehow managed to stay under the radar, but Archbishop Ireland's personal involvement with the Faribault-Stillwater plan effectively guaranteed that the Minnesota schools would attract public notice.

Stillwater's school was first pressed to remove all religious pictures, then to stop teaching catechism altogether. The presence of nuns in full habit was hotly debated. In Faribault, the Hill School lasted only two years before the district tried to transfer many of the teachers to other public schools in the region. They refused, and the entire arrangement was terminated.

Meanwhile, the American bishops fought bitterly among themselves as curial officials struggled to make sense of the controversy. Pope Leo XIII reiterated that he was amenable to Ireland's strategy, but he also felt considerable pressure to acknowledge that there were limits to how far the church could compromise with the secular state. The uproar over Catholic schooling was clearly in the background of the encyclical "Testem Benevolentiae," a carefully calibrated document that cautions against "the confounding of liberty with license" and against overconfidence in efforts to reconcile the "wisdom and authority of the church" with the mores of the secular state.

A Separate System

In retrospect, it seems obvious that the Faribault-Stillwater plan could not succeed. The hastily negotiated compromises were unworkable, requiring a tricky legal and cultural balancing act that could not be achieved when so many parties on all sides were rooting for it to fail. As

Marvin R. O'Connell, Ireland's biographer, makes clear, both Catholics and Protestants in the 19th century seemed largely to agree that Catholic children should not be in public schools. That being the case, it is hardly surprising that Catholics ended up pouring their energy into the construction of their own private, parochial school system.

Those efforts have yielded some excellent fruits, even though Catholics had to build that system in often very straitened circumstances. Since the time of the nation's founding, parochial schools have provided educational alternatives for a wide range of students who, for various reasons, were not welcomed or properly served by the public school system. This was made possible by the priests and religious who dedicated their lives to these schools, often working tirelessly and living frugally.

Today the laity have assumed many of the roles previously filled by priests and men and women religious, but Catholic schools and universities continue to build vibrant communities where the faith can flourish. Nevertheless, many are struggling.

As Archbishop Ireland recognized, it is difficult for Catholics to maintain their own independent educational system while paying taxes to support public schools. Many families who would prefer Catholic schools are forced by financial necessity to choose secular schools or to home-school instead. Beyond that, there are obvious drawbacks to a system that forces Catholics to divide their institution-building efforts. But the state has a proper interest in educating its citizens, and obviously Catholics should be properly concerned about the education of all children and not just their own.

Lessons Learned

The United States is presently in an era of major school reform. Nine states (Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, West Virginia and Utah) have now passed laws extending eligibility for school choice programs to all students. Many other states are experimenting with educational savings accounts, which allow parents considerable discretion in deciding how money on their children's education should be spent.

Also, Oklahoma recently approved a plan to open the nation's first explicitly Catholic charter school. A lawsuit has been filed challenging the school's constitutionality, but at present it is set to open in 2024.

This may be yet another instance in which Archbishop Ireland was ahead of his time. He believed that publicly funded Catholic education was consonant with the American project, and it may be that the American public is finally prepared to agree. This could open a new era, in which Catholic schooling is a possibility for all American families,

and Catholic educators have the opportunity to explore possibilities never before open to them in this country. This could also open opportunities for Catholics to serve their compatriots in a new way, by building schools rooted in their own tradition that non-Catholics may also wish to attend. Archbishop Ireland would have been delighted by the idea that American Catholics might serve not just their own children, but also the nation at large, by building excellent schools. Still, if we hope to succeed where such an indomitable institution-builder failed, it would be wise to learn from his mistakes.

First, it is important to build consensus and support when launching a school. Archbishop Ireland tried to skip this step by appealing to the immediate interests of decision-making parties. He saved local school boards money and promoted Pope Leo's political agenda, hoping that that would be enough. It wasn't. The schools became a cultural battleground, which is never good for students. Instead of looking for too-clever-by-half legal solutions to every problem, educational reformers need to build enthusiasm for their initiatives among teachers, parents and community members. Not every critic can be satisfied, but schools are much more likely to thrive when their community *wants* them to.

Second, Catholic schools should try to retain their autonomy as much as they reasonably can. Money always comes with strings attached, but a school will struggle to maintain its stability and mission if it is constantly subject to the whims of changing policy and public opinion. This was the problem that ultimately doomed Archbishop Ireland's initiative. It is worth fighting to preserve the school's own hiring and admissions standards as well as to retain a high measure of curricular control. The Faribault and Stillwater schools likely could not have won those concessions, but by asking upfront they could have at least clarified the extent of the challenge.

In our own time, this challenge will need to be negotiated on the ground, with school administrators, policymakers and parents continually stressing the benefits of local autonomy for schools. Recent battles in education have reminded us how fraught school environments can become when teachers, parents and policymakers are continually at war with one another. Cultivating a greater respect for schools' autonomy would surely be in the interest of students.

Finally, school reformers should focus on the practical issues. Archbishop Ireland's schools might have succeeded for at least a longer period if they had managed to keep a lower profile. Instead they became a flashpoint for raging culture wars, a problem that seems to recur in every age. If Ireland had worked harder to defuse those controversies



Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

John Ireland was the first archbishop of St. Paul, Minn., serving from 1888 through 1918.

and had focused energy instead on prudent management and community-building, the schools might have had a better chance. Those things are just as essential today.

Archbishop Ireland was an enthusiastic believer in the American Dream. He wanted Catholics to be patriotic Americans, and he believed that the church had an important role to play in building the United States into a great nation. But he also believed that Catholic schooling was essential. Without it, children's sensibilities would be shaped by secular mores, not the faith. These concerns seem just as reasonable today as they were in 1890.

Catholics are still a minority in America today, but the prejudices of Ireland's time have softened considerably. Is the time finally right for the realization of Ireland's vision? His cathedral still looks down from the bluff, as magnificent as ever. Perhaps the man is looking down from a still-higher place and smiling.

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IT IS NEARLY EVENING

Reflections on a Priestly Life

By John J. Strykowski

On Dec. 18, 1963, on a chilly and overcast morning in Rome, I was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Brooklyn. In the 60 years since, I have served in three parishes, two seminaries, the Roman Curia and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington.

There have been many defining moments. One of those was a visit to the ecumenical monastery of Taizé in France about 40 years ago. A friend and I spent the day there. It was crowded with young people, some of whom sat with the monks either individually or in groups, praying or conversing. The culmination of the day came in the evening with the prayer around the cross. Monks and young people sat on the ground in a semi-circular pattern with the cross in the center. There were chants, readings, moments of silence, all in an atmosphere of reverence and reflection.

I cannot guess at the religious affiliations of the young

people. I doubt that many of them were Sunday Mass regulars. But the cross held their attention. And that has been the way for so much of human history—the cross of Jesus Christ drawing people to itself. That moment in Taizé was a defining moment for me, which I remember to this day because there is a power to the cross that is universal, constant and irrepressible.

The Power of the Cross

What is the source of that power? I believe that the cross offers to people meaning, purpose and hope. Its meaning lies in the belief that God incarnate in Jesus Christ suffered as do all of us. Not even God incarnate is exempt from diminishment and death. Most believers do not get into debates about the impassibility of God. It is already and simply wondrous that Jesus Christ, truly God, suffered and died. If



this was the fate of Jesus Christ, then indeed we can bravely, even if fearfully, embrace the same fate. He walked with us to his death, and now we can walk with him to our own death. This is God's way.

The cross also gives purpose to its followers. Every life is burdensome. Jesus Christ took on our burdens. Nothing is accomplished without suffering. Though the Gospels proclaim directly or indirectly the joys that Jesus experienced, they also witness to the pains he experienced in announcing and actualizing the reign of God. There was opposition, threats, even betrayal. And so it is that those who know the cross of Jesus Christ are willing to take on the burdens of others or to embrace responsibilities that will bring both joy and pain or to embark on grueling journeys. Think of the mother with a child seeking safety and shelter in another country. To accept pain for the well-being of an-

other is God's way.

But this is not the end of the story. The power of the cross lies also in being a door to hope. The death of the incarnate God bursts the chains of death and reveals the whirling superabundance of divine life in the glorious body of the risen Jesus Christ. And the ongoing manifestation of this resurrection lies in a body of believers who, generation after generation, have continued to find meaning, purpose and hope in the cross, not finding them through some syllogism but through the story and image of the crucified and risen Son of God striking their hearts in their simplicity, starkness and glory.

Hope and the Eucharist

What is true about the cross is equally true of the Eucharist, the celebration of the paschal mystery, the death and



The cross and the Eucharist will endure through all the vicissitudes of human and ecclesial history.

resurrection of the Son of God. Throughout the centuries, the public visage of the church has been marked with controversies great and small. But beneath all the polemic there is the irrepressible life of the people of God seeking only one thing—the power of the body of Christ. It is most especially the poor who want that one thing. They need the meaning, the purpose and hope that the Eucharist gives. Jesus proclaims the Gospel to the poor and now they proclaim it to us. They remind us of the one thing that is necessary—beyond all the disputes of those who arrogantly take on mantles of authority.

The cross and the Eucharist will endure through all the vicissitudes of human and ecclesial history. There is no question that there are ideological and political forces for whom the Gospel is a threat. But the church has withstood onslaughts—not everywhere, not always. But even when cathedrals, churches and chapels are taken away, there is always the kitchen table. Priests and people keep finding ways to remember and find meaning, purpose and hope in the paschal mystery.

Because of the different ministries I have had over the years, I had to learn various languages. It has been a grace to celebrate the Eucharist in those languages, each of which offers a unique window into the paschal mystery because of nuances in words and even the cadences of sentences. For example, I find Italian to be lyrical and spirited, but Polish somber and weighty. English should be straightforward and direct, but the current translation is a cumbersome rendering of what reads well only in Latin. Nevertheless, each language, each culture brings a new perspective to our reception of the one paschal mystery, the mystery that binds the unity of the body of the church.

Quarrels in the Church

Sadly, the harmony that flows from that unity is somewhat diminished by the quarrels and dissensions of “prophets of doom.” That was what Pope John XXIII called the nay-sayers at the opening of the Second Vatican Council.

But he knew history and he knew that they would not prevail. Today’s prophets of doom will also fall into the ditches alongside the road of the church’s pilgrim journey, but not without doing damage by captivating some of God’s people with their strident voices. These voices are few, but they do represent an ideological divide within the larger church that needs healing.

I hope that the unfolding of synodality as the way of the church today will be an instrument of that healing. But synodality depends on the ability to listen, and I want to propose that an important means to fostering listening is a renewed appreciation of the philosophical and theological principle of analogy. This principle has a long history in the church, but I do not hear it much invoked in ecclesial discourse today.

Analogy and Faith

The word *analogy* itself (or in other forms, such as “analogous” or “analogously”) is used at times in secular discourse as a way of comparing two realities. For example, a diplomat might say that relations between the United States and Russia today are analogous to the relations between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, by which he means that they are somewhat similar but also somewhat dissimilar.

In philosophical and theological discourse, *analogy* has a deeper significance. Here I realize I can be accused of simplifying a principle that has been the cause of much debate over the centuries and also of not acknowledging the sources of my own understanding. But I can only write about what is helpful for me in addressing the current situation in the church. It is, after all, nearly evening.

I believe that in Christian thought, analogy is not only a way of talking about the similarities and dissimilarities between two realities but also a way of describing the participation of one reality in another. There is an unbreakable bond between the two realities. This bond may be the dependence of one reality on the other or the interdependence of two realities. On that basis, I suggest that we can talk about the analogy of being, the analogy of faith and the analogy of grace.

God is not one being among other beings. God is not a being at all; God is being itself, the source of all other beings. We do not participate in God’s being as such, but we do participate in the order of beings that God has created and continues to sustain in existence. As human beings, we have been created in the image of God, and thus we are in some ways similar to the triune God (having intellect and will) but also infinitely dissimilar because we are finite and contingent beings, utterly dependent on God.

As individual beings we do not participate in the being of other individuals, but since we are finite and contingent, we are dependent on one another for the fulfillment of our own being. The well-being of others fosters our own being, and the diminishment of others diminishes us also. Every individual human being is in real similarity to every other human being. The inevitable dissimilarities among human beings do not dissolve the similarity but should contribute to enlarging the humanness of each.

From the beginning, God sought to bring human beings into intimate communion with divine life. The unveiling of this plan reached its culmination in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The cross as the symbol of the entire paschal mystery draws us into the depths of divine love. The human response to God's invitation is faith driven by love. It is a faith that surrenders confidently into the mystery of the divine call.

But faith is analogous. There is the explicit faith of those who respond to God's call through visible participation in the community of faith, the church. But there is also faith beyond the borders of the church that perhaps cannot even be named. The liturgy testifies to this. In the Eucharistic prayers in Masses for Various Needs, we ask God to remember "all the dead whose faith you alone have known. Admit them to rejoice in the light of your face."

Throughout the years of my ministry, I have looked for signs of that faith in people whom I have encountered and in literature. I have found many such signs. In his last novel, *Stella Maris*, the late Cormac McCarthy, raised a Catholic but later distant from the church, wrote, "Any number of truths hitherto unknown to us have entered the human domain through the testimony of a single witness."

This strikes me as very Johannine. It is one of so many "signals of transcendence" (to use Peter Berger's term) that I have encountered in literature and in other arts as well. The recognition of divine mystery and the call to enter it cannot be eliminated from human experience, no matter how strong the surrounding secular milieu. The voice of God is one, but human responses are so varied. Faith is analogous.

Because the faith of human beings is analogous, so too is its expression. I hope that as the way of synodality becomes more common in the church there will be greater attentiveness to the diversity of ways in which faith is lived and articulated. God's plan is single and constant, but its reception is multiple. We belong together in God's plan, and we grow together through the mutuality of dialogue and collaboration in our varied responses to that plan.

'Grace Is Everywhere'

Since faith is analogous, so too is grace. God's self-gift is one and eternal, but the human acceptance of that grace is multiple. Humanity is caught in a circle of sin that shows itself in so many deeds of malice and injustice. What keeps that circle from becoming a downward spiral is its disruption—sometimes abruptly, sometimes gradually—by the eruption of unexpected acts of love, from heroic self-sacrifice to gentle words and gestures. Goodness surprises. Grace wins. As we hear in the Song of Songs, love is stronger than death. The final words of the country priest in Georges Bernanos's novel are "Grace is everywhere."

Grace is analogous. God's self-gift is one and constant, but its appropriation is multiple. All who are graced belong together and grow together by the recognition and celebration of grace at work in one another. Grace can even be at work in those who seem to be outliers.

One of the most significant paragraphs of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is No. 1735, regarding those who outwardly seem to be in sinful situations: "Imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments and other psychological or social factors." Those who struggle to be disciples in the midst of ambiguity are not deprived of grace and need the accompaniment of others who also are not free of struggle. No one is. But together the grace that is analogous points to the inexhaustibility of the one divine self-gift.

"It is nearly evening." These are the words of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, inviting Jesus to dine with them. I am glad and grateful for the journey of 60 years and for defining moments such as the prayer around the cross at Taizé. I am sorry for the ways in which I have failed the words I have written above. I am waiting for the invitation to join the supper. But not yet, perhaps?

Msgr. John J. Strykowski, a retired priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn, served in the Congregation for Bishops of the Roman Curia (now the Dicastery for Bishops) for six and a half years and at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for five years.



Forming Sisters for Service

How a small college in New Jersey educates women religious from around the world

By Joe Pagetta

All photos courtesy of Assumption College for Sisters

In 2021, Marietha Kimaro of the Holy Spirit Sisters in Tanzania was almost a dozen years into her mission in the United States. She had spent most of that time in Key West, Fla., and recently had been reassigned to Philadelphia.

“We do everything,” she told me by phone about the Holy Spirit Sisters. “We work in the hospitals. We are teachers. We are social workers. In Key West I was doing pastoral work—visiting the sick, teaching religion at the Catholic school and the parish and to the homebound.”

But by the time she got to Philadelphia, she was beginning to feel burnt out and in need of a change. She asked her mother superior back in Tanzania, Sister Dorothea Massawe, if she might be able to further her education. She had a high school degree but wanted more. Sister Dorothea was supportive. Sister Marietha recalls her mother superior asking her, “Do you have an idea of where you want to go? Or what you want to study?”

Sister Marietha had an idea. Years earlier, two other sisters from her order had attended Assumption College for Sisters in Mendham, N.J., the only accredited liberal arts college in the United States that is specifically for women religious. Initially an extension of Seton Hall College (now Seton Hall University), it was incorporated in 1961 as an

independent college.

It offers associate’s degrees in the arts and religious studies, and is often a springboard for obtaining bachelor’s degrees.

Sister Dorothea quickly contacted Sister Joseph Spring, then the president of the college, and Sister Marietha’s application was set in motion, though they soon learned the incoming class was already full. But when the visa application for another sister from Kenya was not approved, a spot opened up and Sister Marietha took a step toward her dream by entering the college for the fall semester of 2021.

“That was a miracle for me,” said Sister Marietha. “I thank God for that spot. And I am really grateful for the sisters.”

When it was founded in 1953, Assumption College for Sisters operated out of the Mallinckrodt Convent Motherhouse of the Sisters of Christian Charity, but in 2015, the motherhouse was renovated to accommodate more sisters, leaving no room for the college. Fortunately, it found a new home in an old place: a vacated convent of the Sisters of Christian Charity on the campus of Morris Catholic High School in Denville, N.J.

It was the superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Paterson who recommended the old convent. Though in disrepair, it had bedrooms, spaces for classrooms, a dining room and a chapel with a stained-glass window depicting the Sisters of Christian Charity's founder, Blessed Pauline von Mallinckrodt. "It was the perfect thing," says Sister Joseph. "It was readymade for us."

Louis Scarpa, director of institutional advancement for the school, who like thousands of others (myself included) was educated by the Sisters of Christian Charity in grammar school, said that the school's new location in a walkable, urban area helped to keep the sisters from feeling isolated. "The townspeople all know the sisters; they see them walk to daily Mass at the local parish," he said. "And the pastor there was so thrilled to have them just up the road."

Forming Servant Leaders

While a big transition, the college's move to Denville was not the first time in the school's history that it has had to pivot to stay true to its mission, which states that "through education and community," the school "forms servant leaders who transform lives."

For its first four decades, Assumption College for Sisters educated only its own members, Sisters of Christian Charity who were in the postulancy and novitiate stages of their formation. The opportunity for a college-level education for sisters joining the order directly out of high school was unique.

Retired educator Mary Murphy entered the college in 1964 as a postulant to the Sisters of Christian Charity. She earned her associate's degree and immediately went on to get her bachelor's degree and teaching certificate in education at Marillac College in St. Louis before she began her teaching mission. While Ms. Murphy eventually decided not to profess final vows in the congregation, she remains grateful for the opportunity Assumption provided and says the school offered an excellent foundation for her long career in education.

For many other women's religious communities at the time, the sisters' education ran concurrent with their teaching careers. Ms. Murphy said that many women religious who began teaching at 18 or 19 years of age had to pursue their degrees during weekend hours over the course of several years. "We didn't have to do that," she said. "We had this established thing."

Sister Joseph earned her associate degree at Assumption, as did Sister Marie Pauline Demek, the school's current president. By the time Sister Marie Pauline studied

at the school in the 1970s, the Sisters of Christian Charity and other orders took their lead from the Second Vatican Council's "Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life" ("Perfectae Caritatis"). It urged religious communities to return to their sources and understand their initial missions and charisms. In fulfillment of this mandate, many participated in two years of mission work between earning an associate's degree and a bachelor's degree. But the college's students had learned so much and accumulated so many student credits by the time they went to get their bachelor's degree, that the gap was negligible.

"We were very well educated back in the day," says Sister Marie Pauline, who before being appointed president of Assumption was the director of the Villa Pauline retreat center in Mendham. "We had over 100 credits [when we graduated]. We took so many courses when we were in the postulancy and the novitiate. [But] in those days, you didn't have to have, especially in Catholic education, a bachelor's degree."

By the time Sister Marie Pauline went to finish her education at Felician College (now Felician University) she was well prepared. She and her fellow sisters had earned more than enough credits at Assumption and were exempt from some classes. "[Administrators at Felician] were astounded that we knew what we knew," she recalls. "And having been out in education and teaching in the classroom, some of the courses were very easy for us. We sort of breezed through them because we had the experience."

By the late 1990s, with the declining interest in religious vocations, there were fewer Sisters of Christian Charity postulants and the faculty grew increasingly older. The school began to admit student sisters from other orders and, more noteworthy perhaps, other countries.

This shift started in 1996 with the welcoming of the Salesian Sisters of John Bosco in nearby Paterson. By 1999, sisters from Vietnam, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and Guatemala began to arrive. This was how Sister Marietha's predecessors in the Holy Spirit Sisters of Tanzania came to attend the college, and how Sister Elizabeth Pajoc Siney, from the congregation Mother of Orphans in Guatemala, found her way there.

International sisters are strongly encouraged to return to their home countries after completing their schooling, in order to help bring what they have learned back to their communities. Sister Elizabeth graduated from the school four years ago with an associate of arts degree and returned to Guatemala, where she is serving with her congregation and working toward her bachelor's degree in theology.

"My experience at Assumption College for Sisters



I went there to learn more about faith, culture, leadership and evangelization.

was wonderful,” Sister Elizabeth tells me by email from Guatemala. “It was a surprise for me, because before that experience, I never thought that someday I would come to America to study. But I saw that my congregation needed it, so I went there to learn more about faith, culture, leadership and evangelization.”

Like most international students at the school, Sister Elizabeth spent her first year in the three-year program learning the English language.

“At the beginning it was hard because I did not know the language, but after six months, I started to talk a little bit,” she adds. “Then after two years, I felt more comfortable with the language. Because of the wonderful experience at Assumption, I am studying now, little by little, to get my bachelor’s degree in order to help my community life and the people whom I serve every day in the parish where I am now.”

Last September, 17 students arrived at campus, three short of the usual and desired 20 after three students were unable to secure visas. All the students are perpetually professed sisters from sisters from religious communities based outside of the United States, including sisters from Vietnam, Tanzania, Zambia and Cameroon. None of them will have to pay for their education. Students at the school are fully sponsored—including tuition, room and board—thanks to the efforts of Mr. Scarpa and the school’s development team, and a passionate group of generous donors, who together raise the school’s \$600,000 annual budget. The school receives no federal, state or diocesan funding. A large portion of the school’s fundraising occurs during its annual springtime Caring Basket Gala, which includes a scholarship auction and awards ceremony honoring some of the school’s biggest supporters.

One of last year’s honorees, Sole Anselmi, treasurer and chair of the finance committee on the board of trustees



for Catholic Charities in Paterson, took the opportunity to honor the women they were there to support.

“To the Sisters of Assumption College,” she said, “who learn so they can teach others and transform lives: Your fidelity, grit, grace and beauty humble us all. These are the true honorees of tonight, for they have provided us with an example of how faith, compassion and selflessness can guide our everyday lives.”

Sister Joseph, who spoke at the gala just a month before her retirement and has had a dynamic tenure in her almost decade and a half at the school, remains optimistic about the school moving forward.

“First of all, I hope that there’s a permanency right now,” she says, following the uncertainty that led to the move back in 2015. “Mother Pauline’s vision was to serve God, no matter what. And that’s what I hope for the college.... We form servant leaders who transform lives. Our slogan is ‘Teach a Sister. Touch the World.’ And that really is quite ambitious.”

What’s certain is that the sisters will continue to learn from one another, through both the curriculum and community life. Sister Joseph used to teach a Fundamentals of the Catholic Faith course that focused on the already mentioned Vatican Council document “*Perfectae Caritatis*.” She would include the history and charism of the Sisters of Christian Charity and then ask students at the end of the course to do a presentation on their own communities, charisms, histories and ministries.

“There are more similarities than anything,” says Sister Joseph. “It’s very interesting to see commonalities be-



At left: Lucia Luyen Pham, a sister of the Lovers of the Holy Cross and a graduate of Assumption College for Sisters, teaches children in Long Khanh, Vietnam, part of the Xuan Loc Diocese. Below: Marietha Kimaro, a member of the Holy Spirit Sisters in Tanzania. Bottom: Women religious in the classroom at Assumption College for Sisters.



tween all the different congregations.” Community life is hard enough, she adds, and is compounded by both personality and cultural differences. But somehow, with patience and grace, it all works.

“Assumption is my second home,” says Sister Marietha, the Tanzanian sister now in her third year. “The harmony of that place is everything to me. We are from everywhere, but we became one. Our difference is only that we are from different communities. But the way we are together and studying together, we share everything with love and a spiritual idea.”

“It has been four years since I left there, but I still miss everything,” echoes Sister Elizabeth (of Guatemala). “I really felt like I was at home and had everything I needed. I learned from every sister, from their culture, customs, talents and charisms. Each one of them helped me.”

And while there are sisters like Sister Elizabeth all over the world ministering in their communities with what they have learned at Assumption, the Sisters of Christian Charity benefit as well.

“We have been enriched by the presence of the international sisters,” says Sister Joseph. “It has opened our eyes to a whole new world.... We’re a microcosm of the world. I tell the sisters, ‘If the whole world would take your example, it would be a wonderful place to live.’”

Joe Pagetta is a museum communications professional, essayist and arts writer in Nashville, Tenn. He is currently working on a book for Vanderbilt University Press on James Aloysius Orengo, O.P., and early Catholic life in Middle Tennessee.

IMPOSSIBLE ANSWERS TO EASY QUESTIONS

What I say when people ask: How many children do you have?

By Laura Kelly Fanucci

We have five children. You can see them running wild around our yard, shouting through our home, stacking dishes in the sink after dinner. Seeing is a common way we count things, numbering them on our fingers. We have one whole hand, spread wide.

Five boys, I tell people upfront to get the gasps and gawks out of the way. Tell a stranger you have five children and they think you are crazy. Tell them you have five boys and they think you are insane.

Didn't you try for a girl?

Did you want all boys?

That must be terrible.

That must be a lot of work.

You must be the queen.

You must be a saint.

Why. How.

Having five kids makes you odd in this day and age. Five of one gender makes you a freak show. People count us whenever we are out in public together. Perfect strangers comment every time I take them to the store.

I spend so much energy defending my choices, delighting in my kids as proof and protest that big family life is indeed a worthy way to live. But behind my full-court press of defense lies a murkier truth.

Answering the question of *how many kids* feels impossible.

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We have seven children. Two are buried six miles from our home under a shared gravestone. Sometimes when I water the flowers there, I think about a line from "The Dash," a poem by Linda Ellis: *The dash between is what matters.* Each

of my girls has the same birth date and a different death date. But the dash between was never enough.

This lone gravestone will tell the story long after we are gone. The cruel math that any stranger can do to calculate how young the twins were, only a breath of one day or two. To imagine the parents who had to deal with death two days in a row.

But they are still mine, forever ours, carved in stone, etched into the cells of my body that carried them, birthed them, gave milk for them, mourned them.

Even if they get left out of the count by nearly everyone else.

Five boys! Everyone exclaims. *No girls? Didn't you want any? Didn't you ever try?*

I tried with everything I had.

Every time someone asks the same old questions, my heart sinks another inch deeper. Down into the soft earth where my daughters' soft bodies are buried.

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We have eight children. I birthed them all: the five I pushed forth under hospital lights, the two that were pulled from the slice of my stomach, and the one I labored to keep but lost on the long, bumpy drive to the emergency room.

The only time I tally them is in my prayers. And on every doctor's form.

How many pregnancies have you had? (Include abortions, miscarriages, stillbirths, live births.)

Every time I sigh in solidarity with everyone who has to scratch the hardest parts of their lives on thin paper that someone will shred later.



7 live births. 1 miscarriage.

Each August, on the eve of my oldest's birthday, the night before I became a mother who held a baby in my arms for the first time, I remember the lost life that changed mine. The one I carried for mere weeks, long enough to make plans but not long enough to keep them.

If I number every soul I was given to hold beneath my skin and learn to love unseen, they will always count eight, my favorite number from childhood. Now the one I tuck away, smoothed over and over like a stone in my pocket, hidden.

How many kids do you have? A nurse asks me over check-in. A stranger chats on a plane. The pause between their question and the answer—my held breath and hesitation—tells the whole story. I never know the right response.

I have—

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Life holds complicated questions, prickly thorns that jab our hands when a friend or relative or stranger thinks they're handing us a rose.

Are you seeing anyone? Didn't you want to get married? When are you two having kids? What do you do for a living? Why aren't you drinking? Where are you from?

For years I stumbled over the simplest question. *How many siblings do you have?*

Four, I said sometimes. Three, I answered others.

Did I want to drop a grief bomb? Would the other person understand? What was my life after my brother's death?

From the age of 10, I learned to read the room, to scan my capacity for truth-telling depending on the context.

New friends would awkwardly mumble “sorry,” and I would respond with a chipper “It's OK!” as only a young person could. Nothing could be further from the truth, but how could I convey any of that in casual conversation?

After all I have been through, now I always say *we are five*. We are always five. Love is present tense.

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I have five. I have seven. I have eight. I have none, because they came from God and belong to God and go back to God, and I never own them even in the beautiful, bittersweet between.

What painful irony that life's most precious parts are the ones we must hold loosely. The children we are given, the partners we choose, the family we love, the friends we adore. All of them will wound us and all of them will leave us eventually—or we will go first, trailing their grief in our wake.

And yet such superabundance, to love within the vulnerability that we might get hurt. What a life richly lived. What a holy use of our time here.

Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap (Lk 6:38).

Even laps disappear when we rise. Within the heart is all we hold.

Five, seven, eight, none. Infinity, infinity, infinity.

Laura Kelly Fanucci is a Catholic speaker and writer. She is the author of several books, including *Grieving Together: A Couple's Journey Through Miscarriage*. This article was reprinted with permission from the author's Substack, “The Holy Labor.”

GOOD NEWS 'WHAT THE CHURCH LOOKS LIKE'

A Jesuit high school pilots a program for students with disabilities

By Tom Tracy

This fall, De Smet Jesuit High School in St. Louis, Mo., admitted two students with intellectual disabilities. Their parents wanted a Catholic high school education for their children.

Jack McDonald volunteered to be a student mentor. “What interested me was how kids with a disability learn—and to look at things and high school through their eyes,” Mr. McDonald told OSV News.

Mr. McDonald, a junior, has been paired with Peter Marvin, a freshman, in a new program that will be closely watched for its overall impact on the student body and studied by the School of Education at nearby St. Louis University.

While students with disabilities take classes with the general student population, there is also one-on-one learning with the school’s faculty and staff. Students with disabilities pursue a modified diploma with their own graduation path, which may require an additional year of high school.

Mr. McDonald said he has already observed his mentee evolve from a shy student, hesitant to raise his hand and offer an answer in class, to a more outgoing student, giving presentations and fist-bumping with the other kids in the lunchroom.

“We take things at a different pace—an adjustment pace to high school,” Mr. McDonald said of his mentoring experience. “They want help in class and to get those answers. From eighth [grade] to high school is a jump.”

The trend in education of students with disabilities has dramatically changed over the last several decades from a separate educational platform to an integrated approach that places students in mainstream educational settings as much as possible.

While a number of St. Louis area parochial grade schools have been admitting students with disabilities, there was a void at the high school level in a city with no small number of Catholic schools, according to Sarah Patton, De Smet’s director of inclusive education, who works closely with the two pilot program students there.

“In the past 20 years, there has been a coming around to having teaching staff and learning consultants for spe-



Special needs student Peter Marvin, a freshman, completes an assignment with the assistance of Landon Lewis, a senior and one of his peer mentors, at DeSmet Jesuit High School in St. Louis on Sept. 6, 2023.

cial needs children and providing a pull-out method, where they come out of the [general] classroom and receive instruction in a study situation,” Ms. Patton told OSV News.

At De Smet, students with disabilities attend four classes with their peers, including physical education/health, theology, art and music, while they work privately with Ms. Patton on English, science and mathematics-related courses.

“They do also have a study hall with me, and that is where I work with them on executive functioning skills, on homework, and when they get older there might be more job skills-related training,” she said.

“We are hoping to start a community-based vocational instruction for skills program for being prepared to go to work, whereby in the afternoon they would go out in the community as volunteers and work at different sites, including grocery stores,” said Ms. Patton, whose background includes special education teaching for children in extended hospital stays.

De Smet is hoping to grow the program slowly, adding a few students each year and capping at around a 12-student population, with the addition of a few inclusive-education faculty members to help support those students.

The thrust is in keeping with the Jesuits’ newest universal apostolic preferences, which call for walking with the marginalized and youth, according to Ronald O’Dwyer, S.J., who was installed last year as president of De Smet. The Synod on Synodality’s recent session in Rome also demonstrated the inclusion of persons with disabilities as equal participants in the church’s life, from planning to ex-

ecuting the global gathering. The synod's synthesis report called upon the church to recognize the "apostolic capacities of persons with disabilities."

In addition to Peter Marvin, another freshman with disabilities, Aiden Hadican, is enrolled at De Smet. Both students have Down syndrome, but this program is for all students with intellectual disabilities who desire a Catholic education and an independent life after high school. The impact of the program will be assessed by St. Louis University and the locally based One Classroom foundation, dedicated to creating inclusive Catholic educational opportunities.

"We hope to grow this by one to two students a year and be a more active partner with families in the parish grade schools if they desire a faith-based education and need options," Father O'Dwyer said. "I would love to see one of our local girls' schools have an option for those students coming out of grade school."

Another interesting part of the project is the pool of 16 upperclassmen De Smet vetted to serve as peer mentors: Each passed a disciplinary and academic review and underwent a personal interview process to make sure they understood what they were signing up for and that they had the proper motivation and heart for being a mentor to

youth with disabilities.

"For some it was very personal; some have family members or relatives with disabilities and some others were wanting to challenge themselves to be more inclusive," said Kevin Poelker, the principal, himself a 1998 graduate of De Smet.

The mentors are enrolled in a related elective course touching on educational leadership and service, which may eventually be formally associated with the St. Louis University School of Education. Meanwhile, they engage in weekly reflections, writings and meetings with faculty members concerning interaction with their mentees.

"If you walked in [to our classroom] you might not notice anything different: The mentors are sitting nearby and sometimes they are helping Hadican and Marvin by repeating what we are doing or asking questions about what they learned," Mr. Poelker said. "Really what they are doing is modeling—so Aiden and Peter are taking clues from what their peers are doing."

The whole point, Father O'Dwyer added, is to have a community at De Smet "that does a better job of showing us what the church looks like."

Tom Tracy writes for OSV News from Florida.





A Grand Farewell

By John Dougherty

In Mami Sunada's 2013 documentary "The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness," the legendary filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki offered his official statement of retirement, which began: "I hope to work for 10 more years." Sure enough, retirement didn't stick: Three years later, he announced that he would make one final (final) feature. For an artist as prolific and driven as Miyazaki, stopping work was always going to be a challenge.

A decade later, Miyazaki's final film—titled "The Boy and the Heron" in English markets, but "How Do You Live?" in its original Japanese release—is in theaters around the world. "The Boy and the Heron" is a grand farewell: lushly animated, full of joy, regret and searing hope. This is what it looks like when one of the greatest filmmakers of all time says goodbye.

Miyazaki's influence is so massive that it's hard not to understate it. Directors as diverse as James Cameron, Bong Joon Ho, Guillermo del Toro and Céline Sciamma cite him as an inspiration. Walt Disney Animation Studios and Pixar see Miyazaki as a sort of godfather, crediting his work in the development of their animation and storytelling style. Studio Ghibli, the company he founded with his friend and producer Toshio Suzuki and the late director Isao Takahata, is widely considered the global high watermark for animation.

One would be hard-pressed to deny it. Miyazaki's films are gorgeously, painstakingly animated by hand, in a style that is at once traditional and groundbreaking. "The Boy and the Heron," despite being the definition of a late-career work, cuts no corners in this regard. Unique and expressive



Hayao Miyazaki at a screening of "Ponyo" in 2009. His final film, "The Boy and the Heron," is now in theaters around the world.

AP Photo/Chris Pizzello

characters stroll, run and fly through stunning painted environments: rich green forests, sprawling oceans plied by ghostly ships, an ancient vine-mottled tower looming over a pond. The action is fluid and effortless, belying the enormous effort that goes into bringing these two-dimensional worlds to life. Frequently the lines between humor and horror blur, as in a dream: Giant parakeets waddle with butcher knives hidden behind their backs, and the heron of the title transforms between bird and human states by, essentially, vomiting up the latter.

But it's not just technical excellence that defines Miyazaki's art. His films are sad, strange, breathlessly beautiful, rich in imagination and story. Miyazaki himself is a compelling and paradoxical figure: a chain-smoking pessimist and gruff workaholic who nevertheless has cre-

ated some of the most beloved children's films in history, including "My Neighbor Totoro" (1988) and the Academy Award-winning "Spirited Away" (2001).

A Political Filmmaker

He is an unapologetically political filmmaker, his work shot through with concerns about the human race's exploitation of the natural world and our seeming eagerness to annihilate ourselves. His works are prophetic in a way that Pope Francis or Dorothy Day might appreciate. In "Princess Mononoke" (1997) he tells an epic, tragic origin story about humanity's antagonistic relationship with nature; and his penultimate film, "The Wind Rises" (2013)—a fictionalized biography of Jiro Horikoshi, designer of the fighter planes used by Japan in World War II—would make great companion-viewing with this year's "Oppenheimer." Those concerns inform even more innocent works like "Castle in the Sky" (1986) and "Ponyo" (2008).

This is not to say that his films are ponderous and preachy—far from it. But an essential element of Miyazaki's genius is his trust that children can engage with emotional complexity and serious themes. Most often seen as through the eyes of a child, these films approach hardship with a spirit of innocence and hope, a belief in change that has not yet been ground down by the world—which makes it capable of working miracles.

"The Boy and the Heron" is both a soaring adventure and a bittersweet meditation on letting go. The film opens in Tokyo during World War II as—in an eerily relevant note—a bomb strikes a hospital. Teenage Mahito's mother dies in the blaze. A year later, his father has married his late wife's younger sister, Natsuko, and the three of them flee Tokyo to live on her country estate. Mahito is troubled by this change in his family dynamic and haunted by dreams of fire. He freezes out Natsuko and injures himself with a rock to avoid going to school, leaving a scar on the side of his head. And this is all before a talking heron with unnerving rows of human teeth appears at his window, croaking out that his "presence is requested" at an eerie, abandoned tower on the edge of the property.

Mahito rebuffs the heron (Masaki Suda) until Natsuko wanders into the woods and disappears. Intent on rescuing her, Mahito enters the tower and finds himself transported into a magical alternate world, with the heron as his reluctant guide. Along the way he discovers wonders, horrors and surprising friends, like the tough Kiriko (Kô Shibasaki) and Himi (the singer-songwriter Aimyon), a young girl who can conjure mystical fire. At the center of the world waits his mysterious great-uncle (Shôhei Hino) and a choice that will determine the fates of them all.



"The Boy and the Heron" is both a soaring adventure and a bittersweet meditation on letting go

Shuuto Ghibli/CKIDS via AP



A Critical Self-Portrait

The great-uncle (never named) is easy enough to see as a stand-in for Miyazaki, an aged sorcerer who crafted his own fantasy world and sustains it through his careful attention. But it is a critical self-portrait, channeling Miyazaki's ambivalence about his art and legacy. The source of his power—which he wants to transfer to Mahito—is a menacing Lovecraftian space rock. The door to his tower is marked with the words *fecemi la divina potestate* ("I was wrought by divine power")—which sounds impressive until you realize it's referring to the inscription Dante describes above the Gates of Hell.

As he reaches the end of his career, Miyazaki is too clear-eyed to take a simple victory lap. The film trembles with his worries about the systems he has participated in to make his art, and how his influence may have imprisoned others, preventing them from finding their own way (not to mention his complicated relationship with his son, the filmmaker Goro Miyazaki). In a moment that echoes "The Wind Rises," Mahito's father, a munitions factory owner, pauses to appreciate the beauty of a set of glass fighter jet canopies. Lying in the sun, devoid of context, they do look beautiful: like giant, crystalline teardrops held together by a fine web of metal. But they are also part of an instrument of death. Miyazaki wants us not to forget that: There is no such thing as a pure act of artistry untouched by the world around us. To isolate oneself in creation, to focus only on

the work of making art and not the ends it is put to, is to deny one of our core responsibilities as human beings.

Miyazaki is a man who has for a long time been defined by his work. This film feels like his attempt to make peace with the knowledge that, like all of us, he will leave this world with work unfinished. It is tempting to want to pass that unfinished work onto the next generation, to ensure that it—and, in a sense, *we*—continue after death. But ultimately, Miyazaki suggests, the only worthwhile legacy to pass on is one that will help the people who come after us to face this broken world with courage and compassion. Miyazaki uses his final film to offer a story of hope and encouragement. More specifically, when the film was announced, Toshio Suzuki said Miyazaki was making it for his grandson: "It's his way of saying, 'Grandpa is moving on to the next world, but he's leaving behind this film.'"

It's a masterful goodbye, although I'll admit that doesn't make parting any easier. Miyazaki is in my pantheon of favorite directors, and his films have enriched my thought, writing and faith; that's why I chose "Kiki's Delivery Service" (1985), my favorite Miyazaki film, as one of the first selections for my Catholic Movie Club column. I'm grateful for all that these films have given me, and that I have been able to share them with my children. They love them as much as I do: laughing and cheering and, I hope, learning something about being kind, brave and willing to do the hard work needed to bring about the sort of world



A scene from "Spirited Away" (2001)

Alamy

you want to see.

So I am grateful that he sat down at the drafting table one last time to make this last film. Sooner than I like to think, my children will be introduced to the adult world, with all of its horrors and hardships. They are inheriting a planet that lies cracked and bleeding, a world plagued by violence and selfishness, where faith and hope can seem at best naïve. They will lose people they love, and in the face of all of this they will ask, as we all have: How do you go on? How do you live?

This film, and Miyazaki's entire career, is his answer. You live by finding true, if sometimes unlikely, friends. You live by choosing to treat the world and everything in it with tenderness and care, doing your best to save what you can. You hold onto hope, even in the face of overwhelming opposition. And you try, in whatever way you can, to create something beautiful, something that enriches the lives of others, something worth leaving behind.

John Dougherty is the director of mission and ministry at St. Joseph's Prep in Philadelphia and the author of the Catholic Movie Club column at americamagazine.org.

JOIN THE CATHOLIC MOVIE CLUB

The Catholic Movie Club is a short weekly essay pulling out spiritual themes in our favorite films. "Movies help me to make sense of the world around me and my place in it, to process my hopes and fears," writes the columnist and moderator John Dougherty. "They inspire me to meditate on the meaning of life, which is another way of saying that they've brought me into deeper conversation with God."

To join the conversation, visit americamagazine.org/catholic-movie-club or join our Facebook group at facebook.com/groups/americanatholicmovieclub.

Some of the discussions thus far include:

THE BELLS OF ST. MARY'S What's most extraordinary about Sister Benedict—and depiction of religious life in "The Bells of St. Mary's"—is that she lives her vocation joyfully, filled with the light of someone who knows they are exactly where God means them to be.

JAWS The shark serves as a potent metaphor for many American ills. I have seen it referenced, for example, in regard to our national response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the continued scourge of gun violence. But as a Catholic, "Jaws" makes me think most of the clerical sexual abuse crisis.

ROCKY This is a resurrection story, and what is resurrection if not the impossible becoming possible? Impossible things have happened before. And, if we believe, they can happen again.

POLTERGEIST "Poltergeist" was made as a critique of Reagan's America, but you can easily draw connections to today. Many of us would rather plead ignorance than face the suffering of the world directly. But as Jesus reminds us in Matthew 25, turning a blind eye doesn't absolve us.

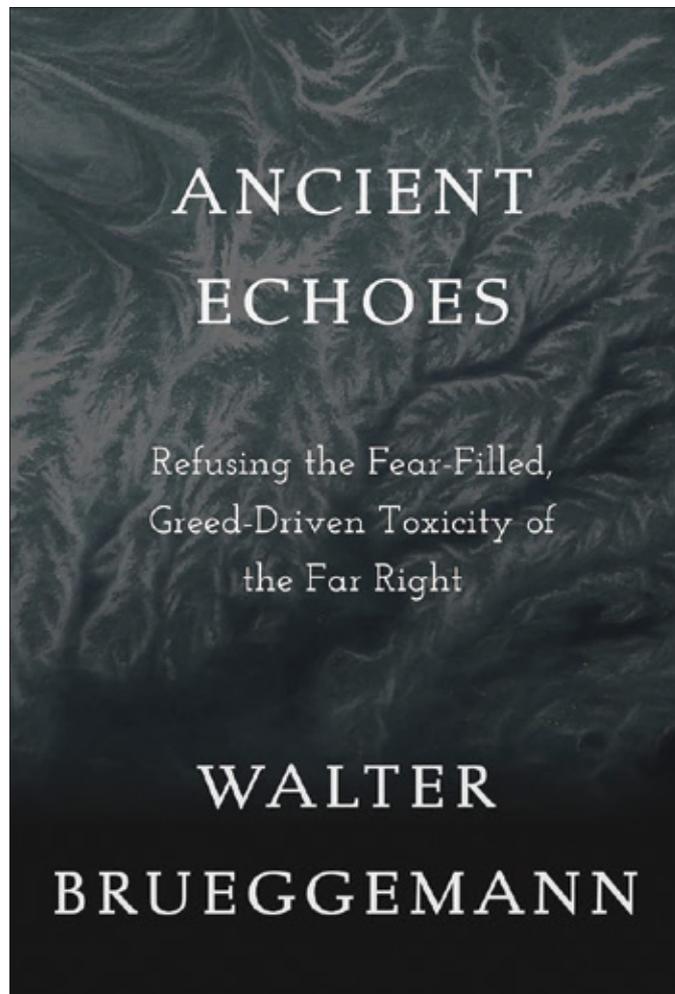
MEAN GIRLS Maybe we never fully grow out of our fascination with, and anxiety about, fitting in. But "Mean Girls" suggests that our shared anxiety should be an opportunity for connection and empathy instead of division.

THE SIXTH SENSE Faith is scary because it requires us to embrace what we don't understand. But faith also reveals the deeper purpose of our lives. In "The Sixth Sense," Cole discovers a vocation, a gift for helping people who appear to be beyond help.

FRANCES HA "Frances Ha" allows us to see Frances the way God might see her. We see her flaws, but we also see how hard she's trying, her moments of brilliance and kindness, her loneliness and desire.

SHORT TERM 12 "Hurt people hurt people," the saying goes. But hurt people can also help people. "How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?" "Short Term 12" provides one answer.

BIBLICAL MANDATES



Fortress Press / 132p \$17

Contemporary American religion and politics are linked in diverse ways, many of them problematic. Particularly prominent is the way in which evangelical Protestants and not a few Catholics support right-wing political positions—and do so on religious grounds. The highly respected Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary, offers a critical assessment of that linkage in *Ancient Echoes: Refusing the Fear-Filled, Greed-Driven Toxicity of the Far Right*, a provocative set of essays that provides a useful treasury of biblical texts potentially relevant to contemporary political discussion.

Basing his argument on an analysis of right-wing politics put forth by Kurt Andersen in *Evil Geniuses: The Unmaking of America: A Modern History*, Brueggemann identifies eight propositions associated with that side of the political divide: (1) government is bad; (2) yesteryear

was perfect, ideal; (3) establishment experts are wrong, science is suspect; (4) people are entitled to their own facts; (5) short-term profits are everything; (6) liberty equals selfishness; (7) inequality is not so bad; (8) universal health care is tyranny. Brueggemann offers eight responses, each of which is richly illustrated by biblical passages.

On defending the possibility of good governance, he notes that Ezekial 34:2-24 both criticizes Israel's bad shepherds and promises proper care of the people by a truly good shepherd (34: 12-16). That vision is reinforced in Psalms 72:12-14 and in the actions of Jesus for those in need in Luke 7:22.

Appeals to an idealized past, often resembling MAGA mottos, can be found in Scripture in the admonition not to forget Jerusalem (Ps 137:5-6). However, these are outweighed by prophetic critiques of a present situation steeped in luxury, pride and exploitation (Am 6:4-6; Is 3:16-17; Jer 5:26-28) and are countered by portraits of a future that removes present suffering and inequality (Is 65:17-25).

In defense of medical science, frequently criticized during the Covid-19 pandemic, Brueggemann moves beyond the Hebrew Bible and appeals to Sirach 38:1-15, part of the Apocrypha (or “Deutero-canonical” texts). This passage, cited in full for those whose Bibles do not include it, appropriately calls its readers to honor physicians and pharmacists, whose skill explores the world that God has made.

Defense of learned doctors is straightforward, but Brueggemann's challenge to the world of “alternative facts,” is more complicated. Here he deploys the story of Absalom's coup against David (2 Sm 14-18), focusing on the counsel given Absalom by two advisors, Ahitophel and Hushai. The first offers a sensible but focused plan; the second a more extravagant plan, designed to fail, which is not surprising since Hushai was a clandestine supporter of David. The biblical story illustrates sets of “competing facts,” although the moral point that Brueggemann wants to score is not obvious. He recognizes that by citing a case of a failed prophet, Hananiah, an opponent of Jeremiah (Jer 28:11-14), whose optimistic vision of Israel's future in the face of Babylonian imperialism proved incorrect.

Countering the profit motive, Brueggemann appeals again to a prophetic critique of scoundrels (Jer 5:26-29), but also to the Torah (Dt 16:19-20) and to the words of Jesus about the impossibility of serving both God and wealth (Mt 6:24).



He reminds us that the biblical tradition is critical of much about the right-wing agenda.

Claims to self-sufficiency are found in Scripture on the lips of Pharaoh (Ez 29:3) and the king of Assyria (Is 37:24-25g) but countered by the words of Yahweh (Is 37:26-29; Ez 29:4-16). The warning of Jesus against greed and self-centeredness operates on a more personal scale (Lk 12:13-21).

Prophetic denunciations of inequality (Am 6:4-6) are juxtaposed with the situation of Israel in the desert, when all have what they need but no more (Ex 16). The egalitarian ideal did not last, but Moses warned against assumptions of self-sufficiency (Dt 8:12-17), as did Paul (2 Cor 8:15).

The defense of universal health care appeals to the example of Elisha's healing of Naaman (2 Kgs 5) and Jesus' care for all who needed healing (Mt 4:24; 9:35; 15:30-31), an example followed in the early church (Acts 5:16; 8:6-8; 28:8-9).

Brueggemann's review of biblical texts relevant to contemporary political issues will no doubt delight left-leaning preachers and ordinary faithful, who will welcome the reminder that Scripture strongly defends the poor, the weak and the marginalized while condemning wealthy oppressors. Whether Bible-reading supporters of right-wing politicians will be totally convinced by the argument is doubtful.

Some may respond that their right-wing politics is not primarily about economics, or if it is, it is about responsible use of government resources. They may also argue that they are concerned not about money but about the defense of unborn human life, or the preservation of the security of their neighbors against an unregulated influx of migrants, or the effort to keep America's judiciary true to the original intent of our founding documents. One may disagree with their arguments, but to ignore them will not help to overcome our current sharp political divisions.

The popularity among many Christians of right-wing politics, especially Trumpian MAGA-ism, is a distressing contemporary phenomenon. The process of analyzing and engaging it critically might well start with a reading of important biblical texts, but engagement needs to go further and address contentious issues.

If one does have a consistent ethic of life, whatever that means in detail, what public laws should govern individual decisions in a pluralistic society, and what emphasis should be given to that ethic within a larger political and social scene? If one is concerned about migration, how should one balance a concern for public safety with the moral responsibility to care for asylum seekers? If one

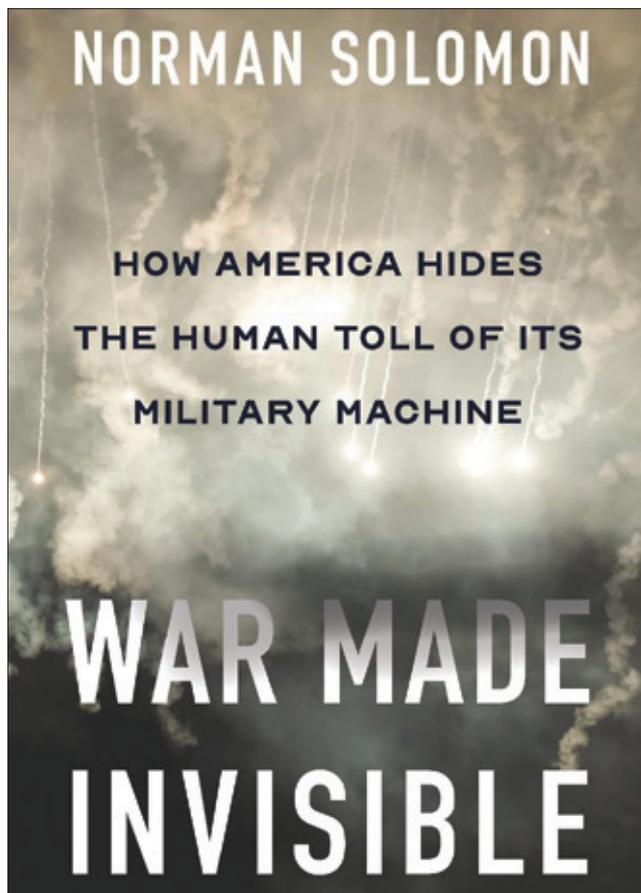
worries about fiscal responsibility and imposing financial burdens on coming generations, what are appropriate limits of debt, and how should it be paid?

On each of these issues and many more as well, biblical passages may be relevant, but probably not decisive in determining political stands or formulating public policy.

Walter Brueggemann has provided a useful tool reminding us all that the biblical tradition is severely critical of much that characterizes the right-wing agenda. It might well provide some inspiration for homilies on the issues involved. But engaging our Christian friends, and often our relatives, in dialogue about their political positions will require a broader sense of what those positions are and a thoughtful analysis of the issues that they raise.

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MILITANT EMPIRE



The New Press / 240p \$28

“If we take an examination of what is understood by happiness...it is a perpetual possession of being well deceived.”

—Jonathan Swift

Norman Solomon is a distinguished media critic and the author or co-author of more than a dozen books. In his latest work, *War Made Invisible*, he examines the variety of ways we are so often uninformed or misinformed by our mass media’s coverage (and non-coverage) of wars and their legacy of destruction. Since 9/11, the problem has only worsened.

Solomon takes as his starting point a line from Joan Didion written in 2003, two months before the United States invaded Iraq: “We had seen, most importantly, the insistent use of September 11 to justify the reconception of America’s correct role in the world as one of initiating and waging virtually perpetual war.” He comments that in this one sentence, she captured “a calcified set of assumptions that few mainstream journalists were willing to question.”

Perennial complaints about our mainstream media fall short of what Solomon identifies as their repeated

support of U.S. militarism and war, “yet news reporting guides public outlooks.” Defense spending, he writes, falsely “equates military operations with defense.” The United States spends more on its military than the next 10 ranking countries combined and has 750 military bases around the world, “compared to no more than three dozen for Russia and five for China,” and these inconvenient facts point to something more than defense: “The militarism that propels nonstop U.S. warfare is systemic, but the topic of systemic militarism gets little public attention.” Consequently, aggressive American intervention in various countries is rarely questioned.

When reporting on U.S. wars, the mass media tends to underreport or omit details. “What we don’t see and hear,” Solomon writes, “might be the most pernicious messages of all.” Peacemaking becomes difficult when “U.S. troops and their commanding officers loom large, while the people they kill and wound have no stature.” The carnage of the Gulf War in 1991, for example, became “mass entertainment back home, with unpleasant aspects tastefully omitted.”

It might seem naïve to expect the media not to focus on U.S. military success or to pay more attention to opposition casualties, but as Solomon shows, the fawning over successes that involve mass slaughter of civilians reveals a lopsided sense of reality. He notes that Katie Couric of the “Today” show praised Operation Desert Storm in 1991 as “virtually flawless” just days after an American missile struck a civilian shelter, killing over 400 people, most of whom were burned alive. Most often, the media complacently accepts such horrors, echoing the Pentagon euphemism “collateral damage.” Media consumers are trained not to expect coverage of U.S.-inflicted damage and casualties, even if occasional images make it through, like the horrifying 1972 photo of Kim Phuc Phan Thi, a 9-year-old Vietnamese girl who had survived being burned by American napalm.

Occasionally a reporter raises questions that disrupt the media’s near-unanimous war support. On Feb. 3, 2022, a Washington Post report of a successful “counterterrorism strike” in Syria added that it killed 13 people, including six children and four women. But “by midmorning, the focus had changed dramatically,” Solomon writes, reporting instead that “This horrible terrorist leader [the head of the Islamic State] is no more.”

Further downplaying the earlier report, “throughout the day, administration officials only talked about two children” and blamed their deaths on terrorists. Solomon cites the pointed observation of Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies that the “so-called ‘global war on terror’



Occasionally a reporter raises questions that disrupt the media's near-unanimous war support.

has, from its origins, been characterized by attacks by U.S. Special Forces, by airstrikes, by armed drones and more that routinely kill far more civilians than the targets identified on the 'kill lists' prepared by presidents and top White House officials."

War coverage makes it "easy to forget that people are really burning." This forgetting is assisted by news organizations that "often resemble a fourth branch of government." A departure from the standard war coverage may occasionally appear, yet "the impacts of propaganda are not undermined by exceptional departures from the usual boundaries," Solomon writes.

Solomon traveled to Baghdad at one point with the foreign correspondent Reese Erlich, who subsequently wrote, "I didn't meet a single foreign reporter in Iraq who disagreed with the notion that the U.S. and Britain have the right to overthrow the Iraqi government by force." When he raised the "issue of sovereignty...they look as if I've arrived from Mars." Erlich commented further, "The U.S. is supposed to have the best and freest media in the world, but in my experience, from having reported in dozens of countries, the higher up you go in the journalistic feeding chain, the less free the reporting."

Americans are likely to find little in mass media about conditions in Vietnam, Iraq or Afghanistan after U.S. troops leave, even though war's "enduring effects are just getting started." For example, Solomon notes, when asked "if he felt 'any moral obligation to help rebuild [Vietnam],'" President Carter dismissed the idea: "Well, the destruction was mutual." In Afghanistan, the United States showed the same disinclination "to resuscitate or rebuild it." Sanctions remained in place even as starvation set in. When the government finally donated \$308 million "in humanitarian aid," it meant, as Solomon points out, "eight dollars per person in a country already beset by widespread starvation...way too little and too late."

When 48 Democratic representatives urged President Biden to do more in the face of the famine in Afghanistan, he unfroze \$7 billion in Afghan assets but diverted half of it for "relatives of 9/11 victims," even though, as a commentator wryly observed, there was not a single Afghan on any of the 9/11 planes. While U.S. media outlets generally took the government's response to the famine in stride, one online news and investigative source, *The Intercept*, headlined its coverage as "Biden's Decision on Frozen Afghanistan Money Is Tantamount to Mass Murder." Solomon makes judicious use of such alternative information sites.

After 20 years of the "war on terror," "for those paying attention, the U.S. government's credibility had badly

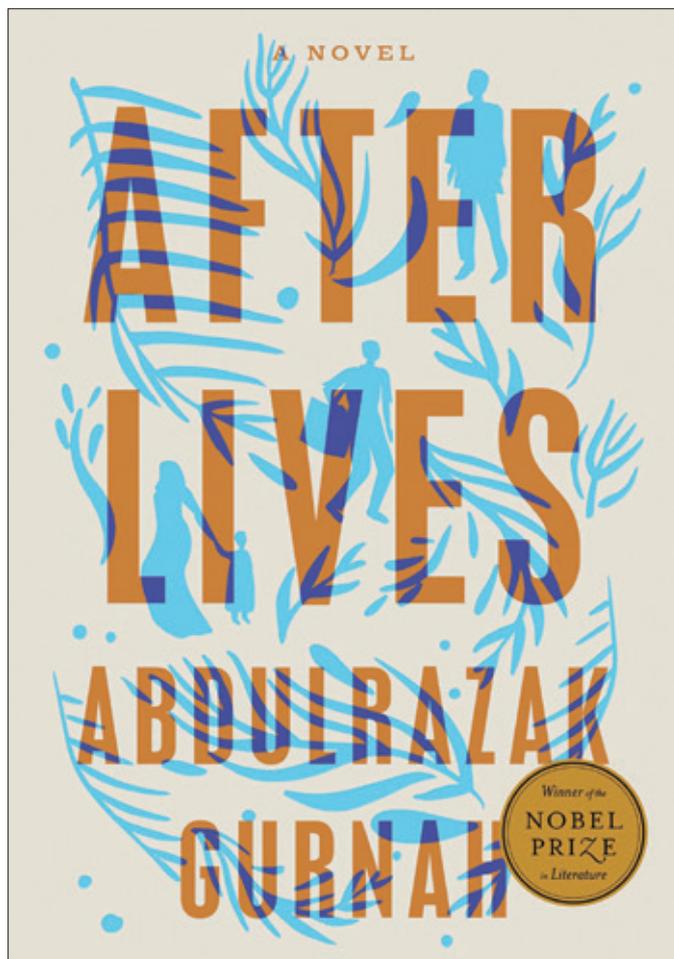
eroded," he writes. It will not do "for journalists to toe the war line for years and then finally report, in effect, *Now it can be told—years too late.*" Even when mainstream news organizations eventually called the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 "a gross foreign policy blunder," it had little effect, because "such framing evades the structural mendacity that remains built into the military-industrial complex, with its corporate media and political wings."

The American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq consisted of more than faulty judgment calls; they were "premeditated and hugely profitable aggression," Solomon writes, adding that "there is little evidence that the underlying repetition compulsion disorder has been exorcized from America's foreign policy leadership or mass media, let alone its political economy."

In the book's closing pages, Solomon recounts a conversation with Daniel Ellsberg, the protagonist of the story of the "Pentagon Papers," in 2021. Sitting outside his house on a balmy autumn day, Ellsberg wondered if things would suddenly change if Americans were better informed. He said he "was not optimistic" and pointed to something beyond the problem of mass media and war. What Americans don't realize, he said, "is that they are citizens of an empire, they are in the core of an empire that feels itself as having the right to determine who governs other countries, and if we don't approve of them because of their effect on corporate interests, or their refusal to give us bases...we feel absolutely right and capable of removing them, of regime change."

Solomon seems somewhat more optimistic. Still, he ends with a blunt quotation from James Baldwin: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

Jerome Donnelly is a retired English professor from the University of Central Florida.



Riverhead Books / 320p \$28

Recognition by the international literary community can breathe new life into an oeuvre that has been hard for Americans to access. Such was the case with the work of Abdulrazak Gurnah after he won the 2021 Nobel Prize in Literature. When he was announced as the winner, many of his 10 books were out of print, and *Afterlives* hadn't even been published in the United States. The first U.S. edition of the book came out in 2022, though it was originally published two years earlier in the United Kingdom.

In this sprawling novel, two African men experience different fates serving in the German colonial forces before and during World War I. Gurnah reveals how the direction of our lives is shaped by chance encounters as much as it is by careful planning. We cannot separate ourselves from the institutional and social forces swirling around us, but rather we are marked indelibly by them whether we are conscious of it or not.

This is a book of survival, in which Hamza, one of the main characters, returning to town after serving in war, thinks that “keeping his head clear and his body safe re-

quired all the wit he possessed.” Before he established a new rhythm after the war, Hamza led a “fugitive and itinerant life.” Although it is not an effusive novel, there is much kindness and accompaniment to be found in these pages. Hamza receives plenty of this accompaniment from Khalifa, an African Gujarati bookkeeper whose path he happens to cross: “Khalifa liked to talk, and Hamza was a dutiful and tireless listener.” Khalifa takes Hamza into his household and eventually Hamza falls in love with the young woman who lives there, Afiya.

Afiya is the sister of Khalifa's good friend Ilyas, who was kidnapped by a German at a young age, but he has a fondness for the language, culture and even the mission of the colonizers. His life path shows that colonialism is not simply of the body, but also of the mind. For much of the book, Afiya pines for Ilyas's return and wonders what's become of him after he volunteers to serve in the German forces. Afiya shares a special bond with Ilyas after he rescued her from a situation in which she was being abused. However, not long afterward, Ilyas volunteers to serve and leaves her with Khalifa. Ilyas is never seen again. We learn only at the book's conclusion that he has ended up living in Germany, where he promotes the Nazi cause and “appeared on their marches carrying the Schutztruppe flag and on platforms singing Nazi songs.”

“The Germans are gifted and clever people.... They think of everything,” Ilyas shares before he leaves for the war. He even states, “They had to be harsh in retaliation because that's the only way savage people can be made to understand order and obedience. The Germans are honorable and civilized people and have done much good since they have been here.” In this declaration, we see that Ilyas has taken on the posturing of the Germans, distancing himself from other Africans whom he dismisses as savages, unable to understand that he, too, is considered savage.

The novel explores communities that are alternatives to traditional families. While Ilyas perversely seeks belonging and community with those who have decimated his homeland, Hamza looks to public places of worship for comfort before he forms a family with Afiya:

There was always a profusion of mosques in this town, he remembered that from years ago. He thought he would go look for one, to have a wash and for the company. In so many places he had traveled there were no mosques, and he missed them, not for the prayers, for the sense of being one of many he often felt in a mosque.

One could argue that this sense of being one of many is, in

fact, a form of living prayer, of realizing one's place in the universe as one among many children of God.

Although there is hope in the pledge that Afiya and Hamza make to never to leave one another, and in Hamza the once-stranger becoming a key member of a household, the book brims with melancholy from the devastation that war brings, even when it is at a distance, but especially when it has been experienced firsthand. We see how the weight of the war bears down, forever shifting one's perspective on humanity's potential and purpose.

"The worst mistakes he made in his earlier life in this town had been the result of his fear of humiliation, through which he lost a friend who was like a brother and the woman he was learning to love," Hamza reflects. "The war crushed those niceties out of him and showed him staggering visions of brutality that taught him humility. Those thoughts filled him with sorrow, which he thought was the inescapable fate of man."

The story conveys the sense both that life's connections are tenuous and that one's character can draw others into their life. When he stumbles upon the warehouse where he first meets Khalifa, Hamza has low expectations. Yet when Khalifa offers him a place to sleep,

it made Hamza take another look at Khalifa, this generous offer, the coin earlier in the day, all that kindness alongside his irritable manner and sour looks. I like the look of you, he had said. Nassor Bishara had said that to him too. It had happened to Hamza before, that his appearance had won kindnesses for him in unexpected ways. The German officer had said that too, more than once.

We understand that it is not his physical appearance they like, but rather how he moves through the world, unassuming and honest.

Even amid the miseries of colonialism, there is space to share what one has with another. Hamza is tutored by a German officer in the army, yet this relationship brings scorn upon him. In a sign of how much the officer cares for Hamza, he confides that Hamza reminds him of his younger brother. In some of the relationships that develop within the novel, we can see that eventually, accompanied and accompanier blur as both give and receive from the other, perhaps even to the point of no longer "othering" one another. In this we see the incredible possibility that we are all invited to strive toward: stepping beyond our historical circumstances and the societal differences that separate us to be servants to each other, and by doing this, becoming true leaders. While we can never truly cast

aside the forces of history, we can be cognizant of how we acknowledge and respond to them.

Cynthia-Marie Marmo O'Brien is a writer and editor in New York.

TURNING SEVENTY-FIVE

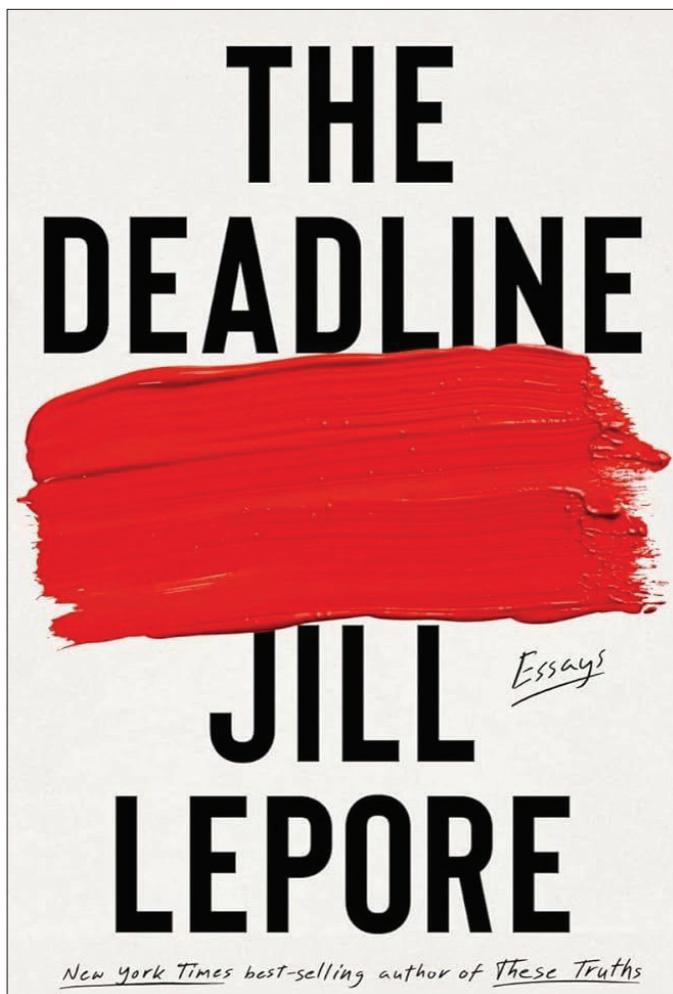
By Jerome Miller

The disjoint connecting hip to thigh,
the loss of footing on the stairs,
an instant sharp pain somewhere near the heart
and sudden ringing in the ear when no bell tolls,
portend the last declension:
the loss of kilter skiing down a chute,
hurtling into Nothing.

I'd cling fast to the tanager in April,
the August double off a Pirate bat,
my grandchild's face on Halloween,
were there not somewhere near the heart
or coming from it
the inkling of a descending winter truth:

Nothing may be a well of grace
to fall in looking up
to see how far down
Love has to reach
to raise us from it.

Jerome Miller is a retired professor of philosophy. His work has also appeared in *Commonweal* and *Theological Studies*, among other journals.



Liveright, W. W. Norton & Company / 640p \$45

“Panic is not evidence of danger,” Jill Lepore calmly notes in her newest work, *The Deadline*, “it’s evidence of panic.” But Jill Lepore has reason to panic.

Lepore, a staff writer at the *New Yorker* and a professor at Harvard, has penned the 46 essays that comprise *The Deadline* during an unprecedented decade. Every day, Americans are lost in the relentless onslaught of headlines spurring out of the ever-changing political opinions of our country’s leaders. There is seemingly no reprieve. It appears that now is as good a time as any to panic.

To say that Lepore’s work provides a reprieve would be inaccurate; but neither does she sow the seeds of panic. Instead, she uses her deep historical knowledge to ground the reader in truthful analysis, synthesizing complex ideas into their most digestible form. She allows readers to build their understanding of how our country has worked and will continue to work, reminding us that “history isn’t a pledge, it’s an argument.”

That argument takes form in Lepore’s exploration of America’s obsession with its own history, evolving cultural mores and the forces that have fostered and subsequently undermined the United States’s elusive greatness. At 640 pages, it is a slimmer anthology than Lepore’s previous work and perhaps her magnum opus, *These Truths: A History of The United States*, which was a hefty 960 pages.

The Deadline, which includes two previously unpublished essays, traverses the worlds of historical narrative, political theory, literary analysis and cultural exposé. Within its 10 chapters, each containing three or four essays first published in *The New Yorker*, Lepore demonstrates her intellectual chops. She constructs and reconstructs historical narratives, from the lives of the legendary—Fredrick Douglass, Ruth Bader Ginsburg—to the stories of the unsung: Lisa Franklin, Ben Franklin’s little sister; and Robert Ettinger, the father of cryogenics, who thought that “death is for chumps.”

While she is a scholar of the past, Lepore’s deft analysis is rooted in the present. Lepore splits and merges the storied narrative of American police brutality with the history of the Second Amendment in “The Long Blue Line.” She conducts a close exegesis of the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights in “The Rule of History.” Her explanatory journalism and cultural commentary on the too-narrow scope of the #MeToo movement in “The Return of the Pervert” is shrewd and poignant. She is accidentally a prognosticator in her delightful yet troubling 2018 essay “Valley of the Dolls” that foretold the social commentary of the 2023 movie “Barbie”—which, by the way, Lepore hated. What she lamented in “Valley of the Dolls” still grips the sorrowful present: “Empowerment feminism is a cynical sham.”

Her writing is crisp, the kind of no-nonsense commentary that recalls the facts as they are (Robert L. Ripley of “Ripley’s Believe It or Not” fame grew up “fabulously wealthy”), and then personalizes the analysis (Mr. Ripley “had a girlfriend called Okie and a dog called Dokie” and “looked remarkably like a vampire” and “only dealt in oddities”). She layers the facts in a poetic narrative, a lyrical style with a pragmatic agenda.

In “No, We Cannot,” Lepore responds to President Obama’s 2008 promise that *Yes, we can!*, using utopias and dystopias as her framework. She paints a holistic picture of the American political scene despite working from a dirtied canvas. She looks to the future of politics through the lens of a sordid past, saying “A story about ruin can be beautiful.... But a politics of ruin is doomed.”



Jill Lepore reminds us that history isn't a pledge, it's an argument.

And yet, Lepore finds room in *The Deadline* to diverge from her well-trodden path. In the titular essay, Lepore offers an elegy for her departed friend, Jane, who died on the day Lepore's first son was born. The news rendered Lepore paralyzed by grief as she lay in her hospital room preparing for labor. She describes her cesarean section in dissociative terms, stating, "The doctors had to unzip my baby from me." From notes on motherhood to the challenges of "never showing your colleagues your soft belly" as a woman in academia, Lepore's personal essay—penned by the quintessential academic essayist—reveals her psyche.

It must be an exhausting, panic-inducing task to peruse the annals of history with an eye trained on the present. The primordial roots of American history have nestled themselves deep within the mind of Jill Lepore. And despite her robust understanding of the American past and the significant challenges posed by the present political, cultural and ecological climates, she does not panic. At least, not yet.

Christine Lenahan is a Joseph A. O'Hare fellow at *America*.

THE DEATH OF CICERO

By James Matthew Wilson

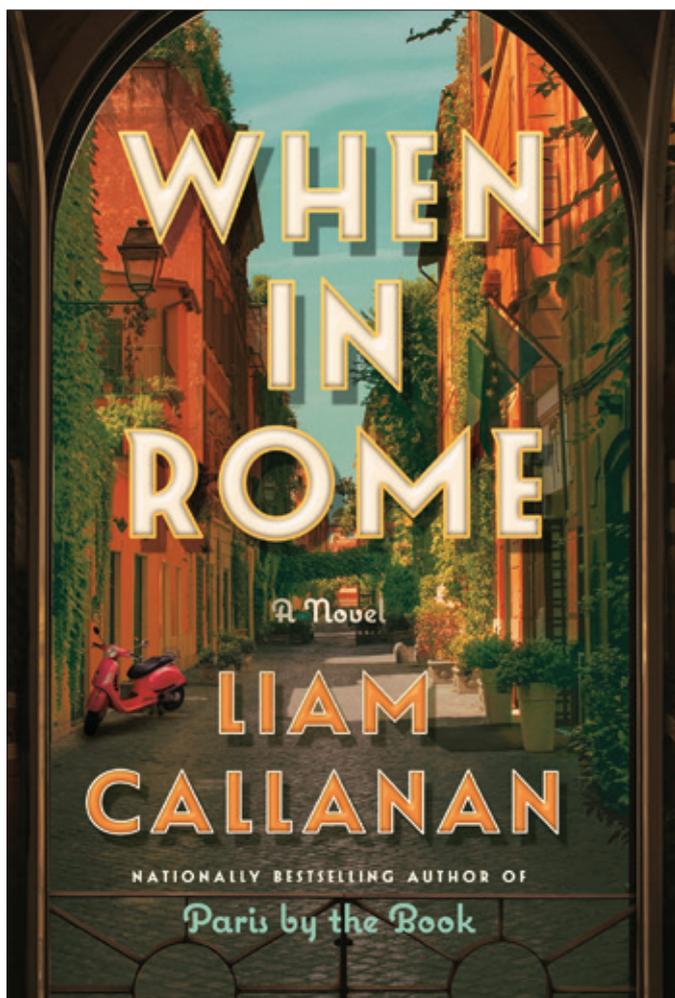
A fluttering of wings and sudden pain
Entered the guarded portals of his head
Beneath its sheet, and woke him once again
To find a ring of crows about his bed.
The sunlight shimmered on the distant sea.
The birds cawed, restless, as though one divine
Had sent their feathered darkness as a sign
That death approached and he must rise and flee.

His servants pulled him through the postern gate
To ride in shadows to a waiting ship,
As if provision could slip free of fate.
The litter jostled, sweat pearled on his lip,
And dust plumes, rising at the hastening feet,
Settled upon his robe and graying beard.
His valet's eyes were wild with what they feared
And found the blazing sails of Antony's fleet.

The carriage veered, then rattled to a halt.
Its drape swung open to reveal two men;
They stood with swords drawn, ready for assault.
He offered none, stretched forth his neck, and when
The blade was raised, told them, do what they would.
His head dropped with his two hands, in the dust;
Then, brought to Rome to answer Antony's lust,
All three were nailed, where Cicero once had stood.

But this, historians note, was not the end.
Antony's wife would bow before that head
And, with her hairpin, pierce its tongue to send
One final message to the noble dead:
Though they may speak with justice all their lives
And bear death bravely, chatting of the soul,
Power shall rule the world from pole to pole,
And nothing that defies its will survives.

James Matthew Wilson's most recent book of poems is *The Strangeness of the Good* (*Angelico*, 2020).



Dutton / 336p \$28

Upon receiving the George W. Hunt Prize from America Media and the Thomas More Chapel & Center at Yale University in 2017, the author Liam Callanan discussed how the Catholic faith touches on his work. In his remarks, Callanan suggested that while his more recent work no longer features priests as protagonists, his novels and short stories have been becoming progressively more Catholic over time.

Anyone who reads his latest release, *When in Rome*, and who is familiar with his earlier work would be almost certain to agree. A professor of English and creative writing at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, Callanan is now the author of four well-received novels and a collection of short stories.

When in Rome, published in March 2023, focuses primarily on the activities of a middle-aged former nun, Claire Murphy, who by a quirk of fate leaves her native Milwaukee to take up residence with a teaching order of nuns in Rome. As a commercial realtor dealing with higher-profile church

properties, Claire travels to the Eternal City to better negotiate the sale of the nuns' crumbling convent. She is readily taken in by the sisters of the Order of Saint Gertrude, who carry on in their mission with joy and enthusiasm despite concerns about declining vocations and the possible closure of their entire community.

The experience rekindles Claire's interest in professing vows once again and living out her remaining years as a member of a caring religious community.

The central theme of *When in Rome* is discernment, whether in a religious sense or in the quest for the right path in life. There is also the subtle suggestion that discernment is not an instantaneous thing but can evolve over long periods of time.

This uncertainty about making the right choice is embodied in Claire, who before entering a religious community in Milwaukee had enjoyed a romantic fling with a fellow undergraduate at Yale University.

In the decades between finishing up at Yale and traveling to Rome, Claire not only entered and left a religious community; she also went through a marriage and a divorce, and became mother to a now-28-year-old daughter.

Readers will certainly empathize with Claire as she labors over the decision to return to religious life or pick up where she left off with Marcus, her college love from 30-plus years ago at Yale.

"Something inside her, raw, medieval, specious, wanted to punish her for falling in love with Marcus when she'd been preparing to promise herself to God all along," Callanan writes. "And something else, just as insidious, suggested that the reason she'd not left the convent path earlier—like five days into freshman year—was because she'd been scared to. Not scared of what God would think—God didn't 'think'—but because it was scary to stand outside the door of the life you thought you would lead."

Callanan is a writer with an intense interest in religious vocation, and while researching this new book, he spoke to several priests and nuns to ascertain how they made their final decisions. This novel also reveals Callanan's clear affection and respect for religious commitment, especially for sisters. Referring to the religious sisters' communities in general, Callanan writes: "Claire knew well that there was no more capable class of people worldwide than religious sisters. They ran hospitals and schools and nonprofits. They prayed; they marched; they labored; they served."

"They braved poverty, misogyny, and a church that could and often did go out of its way to make their lives hard. And their lives were already hard."

When in Rome is remarkable for Callanan's use of the female voice to propel the narrative. It's a technique Calla-

A MEDITATION ON FAITH

nan had employed to great effect in previous novels, *Paris by the Book* (2018) and *All Saints* (2007).

Callanan flirts with cliché in the choice of a title for his new book. But the author makes it work in this case by creating a strong sense of time and place that takes the reader along for the ride. Consider, for example, this lush depiction of the Eternal City's artistic, culinary and Catholic Church-centered charms: "Claire did not realize that life in Rome would involve such constant reference to theology, history, art history, philosophy, the lives of the saints," Callanan writes. "It's strange she didn't anticipate this, of course, because these things are such constant companions here."

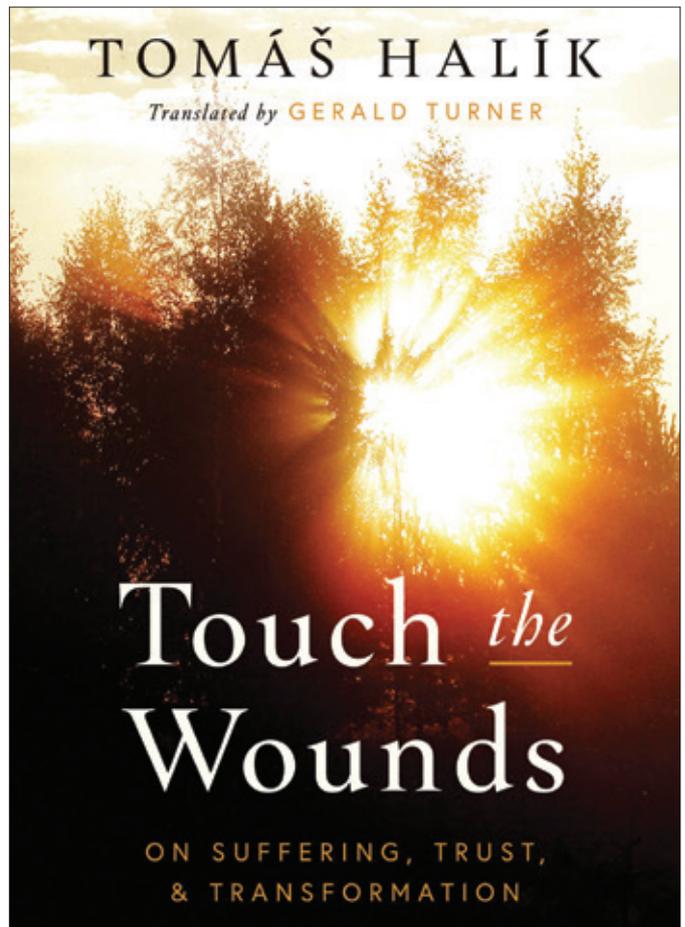
Many of Callanan's ideas about fiction and its powers appear in his essay for *America* published when he received the Hunt Prize award in 2017. There Callanan describes how fiction engages the reader and often presents truths not readily apparent at the outset. "Fiction teaches us empathy—with characters whose lives lie far beyond our own, or are so eerily similar that they seem identical."

The author appears to have lived up to his literary prescriptions with *When in Rome*. Not only will readers experience Claire's interior turmoil; they might well pick up insights into how reviewing one's life choices and underlying motivations can be, in a very real sense, liberating. Through Claire, readers come to understand that thoughtful people are always discerning even years after having made significant decisions in the past.

Much of Callanan's fiction hints at the action of divine grace in people's lives and how the protagonists come to understand and appreciate its beneficence. While in Rome, Claire casts off uncertainty and regret. She also comes to terms with a Catholic faith that, for many people, creates confusion as to how best to serve God. She realizes the value of contemplation and occasional solitude. Callanan describes Claire's new attitude with such alliterative, colorful terms as "alone time without loneliness...community with claustrophobia...belief without boundaries."

The author makes plain Claire's sense of freedom and relief in the novel's satisfying denouement: "She doesn't believe in magic anymore, in divine deals governed by spite, in loneliness as purifying pain.... What surprises her is that [her ultimate choice] has meant receiving so much," including "companionship, contentment, grace, a faith no longer formed by fear. Peace. She knows peace, is peace, gives peace."

Michael Mastromatteo is a Toronto-based columnist and book reviewer for *Catholic News Service*.



University of Notre Dame Press / 170p \$25

Pope Francis called the church a field hospital in his 2013 interview with Anthony Spadaro, S.J. (published in English in *America*). Francis meant that Christians should not always lead with controversial moral issues when people most need a healing encounter with Christ. Francis' famous metaphor may have been inspired by Tomáš Halík's 2008 book, where he calls on the church to provide "dressing stations" for the wounded. Halík's book is now available for the first time in an English translation by Gerald Turner as *Touch the Wounds: On Suffering, Trust, and Transformation*.

Halík, a Czech priest and professor, has written a profound yet accessible meditation on faith in our secular age. Although he would agree with Francis' point, Halík offers not simply a corrective on how to approach seekers, but also a rich spiritual reflection intended to help us lead with our wounds.

Inspired by the well-known story of Halík's namesake, "doubting Thomas" from the Gospel of John, Halík turns the typical understanding of this story on its head. For Halík, we are mistaken if we read Thomas as a secular materialist who can't believe in the resurrection without touch-

ing Jesus' wounds; rather, Thomas wants to know that the suffering of Jesus on the cross was not wiped away by the resurrection, that Christ's suffering was real, in some way permanent, and it mattered. In other words, it is precisely in woundedness—our own and others—where we find God.

Halík writes, "I am incapable of uttering the words 'My God' unless I see the wounds." Jesus' resurrected body is still wounded, even though the wounds could have been healed without a trace, because it is through touching his wounds that we come to know God. And because Jesus identified himself with the poor and suffering (Mt 25), the vulnerabilities, physical and metaphorical, of all those suffering in our world are Christ's wounds too. Christians are called to know Christ by touching and helping heal the brokenness of others.

For Halík, true faith is a wounded faith: A faith that fails to encounter darkness and doubt is no faith at all. According to Halík, Jesus is our model, whose cry on the cross was "Why have you forsaken me?" Jesus experienced the total absence of the Father so that he might fully enter our humanity, where we must believe without seeing God. Halík says that Jesus' faith never faltered because, even at the moment of his death, Jesus responds to God's absence by asking an "agonized question."

For Halík, Christian faith is separated from faith in general because Christian faith is "wounded, pierced, yet constantly questioning and seeking," a faith "that is crucified and resurrected." Halík insists that only a faith that has experienced suffering and doubt can emerge strong yet humble. To those who have lost faith because of suffering or evil in the world, Halík says it has had the opposite effect on him: "...almost nothing has aroused in me such a thirst for meaning as the absurdities of the world, and such a thirst for God as the open wounds of life's sorrows."

Halík also challenges Christians by contrasting this crucified and resurrected faith with a faith that sees God as an object or something that can be understood—what Halík calls a "fundamentalist theism." Halík says that any God that can be established by metaphysics, a supreme being, is not God enough for Christians, and may even interfere with the church's attempt to witness a vulnerable faith.

The invulnerable certainty that Christians often show to the world turns people away from Christianity because it is so self-assured, so all-knowing. Instead, Christians must witness a wounded faith. If people do not find God in church, liturgy or even Scripture, Halík says they can still encounter Christ in their wounds and those of others.

As the pastor of the academic parish at Charles University in Prague, Halík is adept at talking to seekers about

God. For example, Halík says that when people talk about searching for meaning in their lives, they are searching for God by another name. Not only is talk about meaning actually talk about God, but part of what it means to be wounded is to lose a sense of the meaning of one's life. When we suffer, we naturally ask: "Why me?" Part of the healing process is to help the wounded answer that question as they reconstruct a life of meaning. Because truth and faith, as Halík says, are not properties you can own, but are instead commitments that are lived out in our lives, the healing process can begin with finding meaning again.

In this brief but wide-ranging book, Halík models faith in our secular age—from how to properly practice intercessory prayer to how we should think about resurrection. Written during a five-week solitary retreat, the book weaves together a lifetime of contemplation of Scripture, mysticism, contemporary theology and the philosophy of religion. The work is very personal, not because he shares his private life (he doesn't), but because he shares with us the fruit of his contemplation.

At times, those of us who have not yet shared his vast reading may find themselves wishing for more background or explanation. For example, like Kierkegaard, Halík appreciates the paradoxes of faith. Sometimes, however, I was left unsure of Halík's practical meaning. In his discussion about finding Easter joy by participating in the dance of the Holy Trinity, Halík explains that it was necessary that the resurrected Jesus ascend to heaven because to stay physically with us would leave no role for faith or freedom.

Halík argues that "We must do without God as external support" so that we can embrace our freedom and our responsibility. Halík warns us that preachers often offer us an "external Christ" when they should invite us to know him in Spirit and inwardness. But I wondered: If Christ left us and sent the Spirit, how would it be possible for preachers to offer us an external Christ? And how will I know when they are offering me phony reassurance instead of real faith?

Despite these occasional difficulties, Halík's book is a provocation in the best sense of the term, one that pushes his reader to leave behind a pristine faith that prefers to rest in certainty in exchange for one that asks the "agonized question" and, like St. Thomas, does not shy from the wounded world.

Joseph P. Creamer is a lecturer at the University at Albany, State University of New York.



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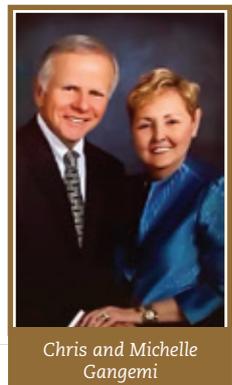


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What Is This ‘Rising From the Dead’ All About?

We were just settling in to the readings for Cycle B of the liturgical year with the Fifth and Sixth Sundays in Ordinary Time, when the second half of February brings the beginning of Lent. Overall, the season of Lent is about renewal and preparation for the sacraments of initiation; but in the Lectionary readings for this year (Cycle B), it begins with readings about suffering (Jb 7:1-7), about being labeled as unclean (Mk 1:40-45) and about the near-sacrificial offering of Isaac (Gen 22). Where is the sense of renewal in this?

On the second Sunday of Lent, the Gospel passage relates the disciples’ dazed state after witnessing Jesus’ transfiguration. “So they kept the matter to themselves,” the evangelist concludes, “questioning what ‘rising from the dead’ meant” (Mk 9:10). What Jesus was trying to teach, and what they did not understand, was that the path of faith leads to life, not death. When Job ques-

tioned, “Is not man’s life on earth a drudgery?” or when Abraham readied himself to slay his only son, Isaac, the cost of faith became clear. These existential realities of pain and potential loss were tempered, however, by a faith that reaffirms life even in the face of death.

Passages from the previous Sunday affirm this life-giving confidence. In store for Abraham is the promise of abundance in a distant future that he will never witness nor fully understand. Jesus’ disciples, as they wrestle with the idea of “rising from the dead,” start to understand that the resurrection will involve them as much as it does Jesus. For today’s disciples, faith in life over death is more than just an involvement in a religious doctrine. It is an act of continuous renewal as trust in God drives away all that can lead us astray.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), FEB. 4, 2024

Job’s Depression and Jesus’ Prayer of Solitude

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), FEB. 11, 2024

Illness as an Offense Against Our Will to Live

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT (B), FEB. 18, 2024

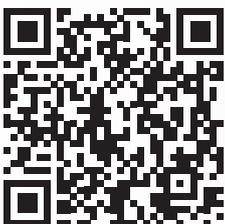
Declarations of Clean and Unclean

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT (B), FEB. 25, 2024

Rising From the Dead as Transfiguration



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



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Returning to the Source

Enriching Lent by entering into the Gospel

By Joyce Rupp



Some memories remain amazingly fresh through the years. One of mine takes me back to the age of 7 or 8, when a young, enthusiastic teacher taught our class that Jesus is our friend, someone we could talk to at any time, any place. I chose the chicken coop after school because that was where my farm chores took me, doling out the oats and corn from a tin bucket as I fed the clucky hens. I felt such joy and peace knowing I had an invisible presence listening to my thoughts and feelings. I didn't need a response; just knowing I was being heard was enough.

Although my perception of the divine has expanded since then, the core value of those early school days remains with me: Stay in relationship with this teacher, healer and counselor to find inner peace and wise direction for how to live. Each Lent I welcome the opportunity to refresh and re-energize this bond. Meditating on the Gospel passages for the liturgical season and relating them to my daily life provides ample potential for this revitalization.

When I entered my religious community, I learned how to meditate. But it was through Jesuit-led annual retreats that I gleaned another vital step for this relationship—incorporating the Ignatian method of entering intimately into the Gospel scenes, noticing the details, placing myself there among the people, absorbed in the spiritual energy of the one who healed and counseled them.

I marveled at how alive those scenes became when I used both my external and internal senses.

Doing so drew me closer to this loving source, inspired me to want to live more intently what I saw in my mind's eye and felt in the depths of my heart. Learning how to pray in this way has been a valued spiritual practice, especially for my Lenten journey, enabling me to gain insight and courage for the inner growing I have yet to tend.

When considering a relationship with Jesus through the Gospels, coming to relate to him in a personal manner is essential for truly embracing Christian faith, more than simply reading or hearing a Gospel passage. Otherwise religious faith remains just a list of rules, regulations and creeds. Like any thriving relationship, this faith requires a continual return to the source in order to effectively embrace what he taught about spiritual transformation.

Wherever he was, Jesus spent a significant amount of his guidance giving advice on our attitudes regarding one another: Consider others as precious as yourself; cease comparing; be humble and forget about pushing into first place; remember what genuine love is about; move toward rather than away from those who treat you as an enemy; be willing to pay the price for what you believe and value; stand with and support marginalized persons; don't think twice about letting go of what holds you back from being truly kindhearted. These are just a few of the guidelines that inspire and urge me, especially during Lent, to keep maturing spiritually, to continue to embrace the heart of the Gospels' directives.

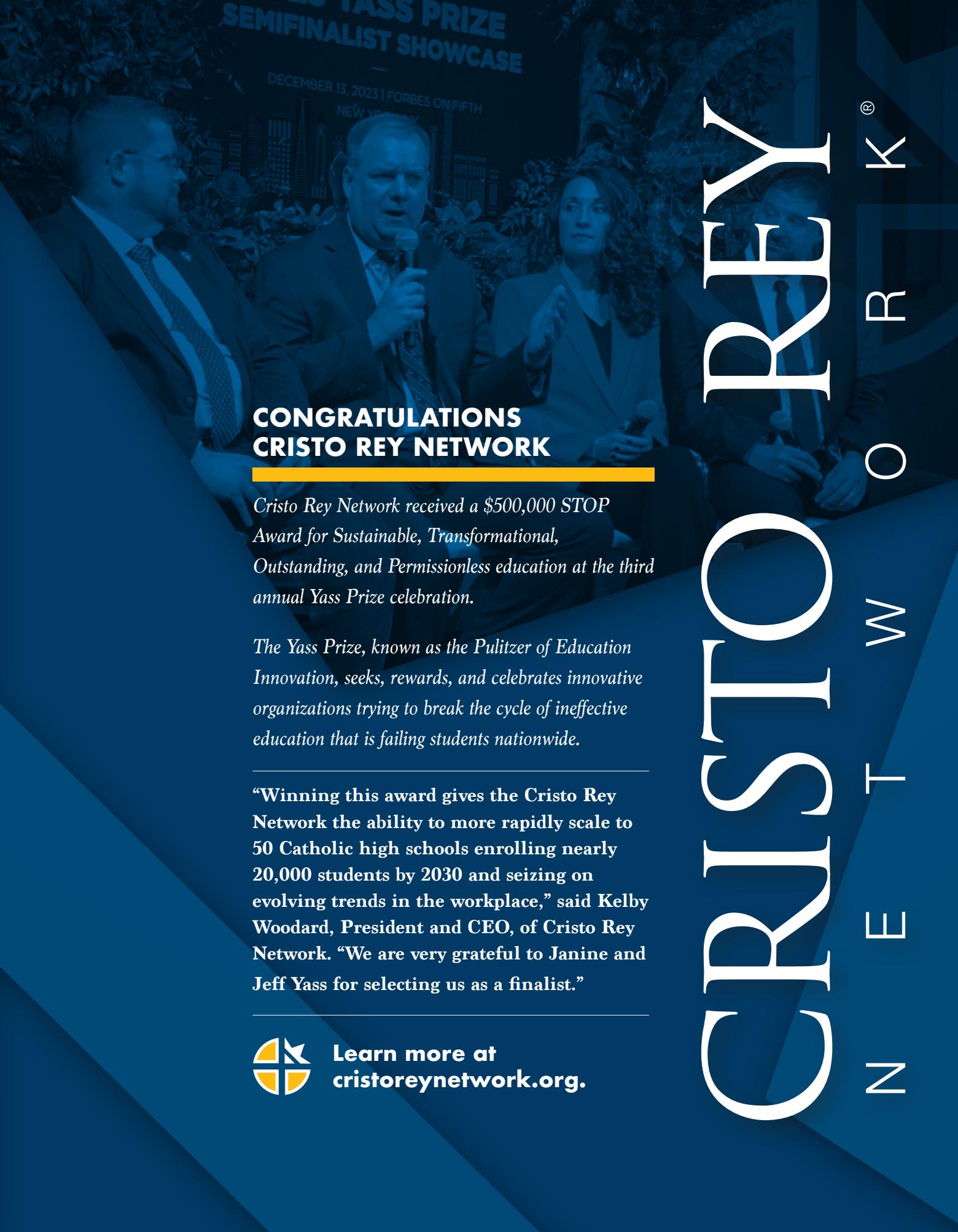
When I pause to consider what

guides the flow of my life, these teachings of Jesus are center-stage. Their transformative messages continue to provide counsel and direction. I cannot imagine my spiritual journey without its being based on these foundational principles. Many times I've neglected their directives. At other times I have given them ample attention and activation. When I see that some of what I think, say and do has to be restored to its true and solid footing, I gladly welcome a fresh slant or perception that re-grounds my spiritual growth. This sighting enlivens my motivation for ongoing transformation.

With few exceptions, the most difficult task of a Christian involves that of being a living exemplar and conduit of the virtues so obviously present in Jesus. What a gift Lent can be for us in continuing to grow and deepen this process of personal transformation.

And so it is that the teachings, healings and counseling of Jesus lead and direct us on this transforming route that brings us ever further into the fullness of who we truly are—persons capable of great love. This relationship continually widens and deepens as the guidance of the way becomes intertwined with our everyday comings and goings.

Joyce Rupp, O.S.M., is a Catholic author and speaker. This essay is adapted from her trilogy of Lenten books, including, most recently, Jesus, Guide of My Life.



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“Winning this award gives the Cristo Rey Network the ability to more rapidly scale to 50 Catholic high schools enrolling nearly 20,000 students by 2030 and seizing on evolving trends in the workplace,” said Kelby Woodard, President and CEO, of Cristo Rey Network. “We are very grateful to Janine and Jeff Yass for selecting us as a finalist.”



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