America

MAY 2025

TH H AND CULTURE

Springtime in the French Church

A visit to the new Notre-Dame de Paris

Jason M. Baxter

p46

LONGING FOR MORE: YOUNG ADULT HISPANIC CATHOLICS

LONGING FOR MORE

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Simple Steps to Pray, Ponder, and Practice God's Word
JACKIE ANGEL

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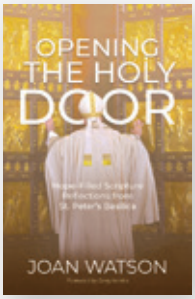

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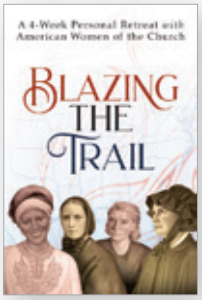

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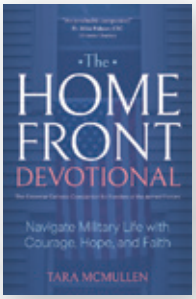

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Where Ignatius Stayed and Why

For the last week and a half, I have been traveling with a group of pilgrims to the Ignatian sites in Spain. Twice we have visited what are variously called "hospitals" or "hospices" where St. Ignatius stayed, living in poverty and begging for alms to meet his daily needs. One of these is in Manresa, where Ignatius spent time in prayer after his conversion. The other is in his hometown of Azpeitia, where he stayed for several months between departing from the University of Paris and meeting up with his companions in Venice.

During this visit home, rather than staying with his family, he elected to stay in a hospice in the town adjacent to the castle where he had been raised. This seems to have scandalized his elder brother, who headed the Loyola family. The closely related alternative names for where Ignatius stayed—hospital and hospice—are key to understanding why.

At the time, hospices were not places sought out for healing. Those with means would have a doctor attend to them at home. Instead, a hospice was where the sick poor wound up with nowhere else to go, along with others who had no other options left. We might think of them as a kind of cross between homeless shelters, guesthouses for travelers without many resources and last refuges for the sick.

This is not to say that no care was offered in a hospice; it was. But if someone had any other options, they would likely avoid a hospice. And if travelers could, they would bypass a hospice and count themselves lucky to do so. Ignatius, instead, sought these places out.

In addition to the hospices we visited and prayed in at Azpeitia and Manresa, Ignatius stayed in a hospice when he first arrived in Paris, until he realized he could not adequately attend to his studies while living there. He and the first companions lived in various hospices while in Venice and continued to visit and care for the poor in hospices in Rome. Only a few years after the first approval of the Society of Jesus, when the pope requested Ignatius to send three Jesuits to the Council of Trent, he gave them instructions to, among other things, make a point of visiting the poor in hospices while there.

I had visited many Ignatian sites in connection with World Youth Day in Madrid in 2011, such as the Chapel of Conversion at Loyola, the monastery and Black Madonna at Montserrat, and the cave at Manresa. But during that previous trip, I had not seen the hospices. Though I knew about them from Ignatius' autobiography and Jesuit history, I had not thought about what they were really like until I was standing in them myself, thinking about Ignatius living there.

In the lives of many of the saints—whose stories inspired Ignatius—these are places they seek out, both to care for the poor and to better embrace poverty in union with Christ, poor and suffering.

In other words, it is both noble and necessary for us who are whole and healthy to be in contact with those who are poor, sick and suffering. In those encounters, grace flows in both directions.

Over the past few months, the Trump administration's cost-cutting efforts, led by Elon Musk, have taken particular aim at humanitarian relief funds, especially those administered through the United States Agency for International Development, which is now all but defunct. In concrete terms, those cuts mean that people will go hungry, lack medical care and die in places where they were previously being cared for.

U.S.A.I.D. has been selected as in many ways an easy target. When foreign relations are involved, the president has much discretion and authority, making it easier to pretend that near-total cuts are exercises of prudence. It has also been targeted because some of its programs are accused of advancing a progressive ideological agenda, even though the cuts were not restricted to only those programs.

The idea that the cuts significantly help the federal budget, however, should be set aside: All foreign aid expenditures together amount to barely more than 1 percent of the total budget, with a bit less than half of that going to humanitarian relief and health programs.

But another reason, I fear, that humanitarian relief can be so easily targeted is because those in power do not value what it accomplishes. It is as if an equation is being solved with one side missing. U.S.A.I.D. funds count when they are cut and posted on a "wall of receipts," but the lives they save and the people they feed are invisible.

This is not to say that all humanitarian aid is beyond criticism, or that government funds are the only or best way to care for the poor and needy. That responsibility is incumbent on each of us personally according to our capacity—but it is also incumbent on all of us together, acting in common through both voluntary associations and public authority.

The further we get from the needs and the lives of the poor, the easier it is to forget that we have such duties at all. To the degree that the United States is stepping away from such contact—and celebrating its abandonment—we are all becoming poorer in ways that no amount of funding can redress.

Sam Sawyer, S.J.

THE ISSUE

GIVE AND TAKE

DISPATCHES

FEATURES

POETRY

OSV News photo/Sam Lucero

FAITH & REASON

FAITH IN FOCUS

IDEAS

BOOKS

THE WORD

LAST TAKE

Above: Chobe National Park, located in Kasane, Botswana, in 2024. Pope Francis released his encyclical "Laudato Si'" 10 years ago.

Cover: Notre-Dame Cathedral on Dec. 7, 2024
(Eliot Blondet/Abaca/Sipa USA via AP Images)

President Trump's 'bullying and transactionalism'

The morning after President Donald Trump's March 4 address to a joint session of Congress, and several days after his chaotic White House meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Sam Sawyer, S.J., editor in chief of **America**, expressed his dismay at Mr. Trump's combative, transactional approach to politics. "At its best, the United States defines itself not primarily by its borders, but by its values and principles," Father Sawyer wrote in an online essay that was also published in our April issue. While the United States has not always lived up to its professed values, he argued, "what we are seeing in Mr. Trump's bullying and transactionalism is something different. It is not hypocrisy but instead a meanness, a lack of generosity that distrusts the motive for generosity in others. Vice is no longer paying tribute to virtue, but instead holding it for ransom."

America's readers took to the comments section to respond.

Thank you, Father Sawyer, for this thoughtful piece. My own father, a Cuban who watched the Soviet Union destroy his country (part of the time from a forced labor camp) and who after migrating to the United States became a Republican, is horrified by what he is watching, as are many of his elderly friends. The spectacle of Elon Musk's brazen power on display in the Oval Office, and the bullying of Ukraine by repeating Russian talking points, has him and his friends in disbelief. Those who lived through the destruction of a country, as he did, know what this is, and last night's barrage of lies and insults in the longest speech of its kind since World War II reminded him of someone who was very similar: Fidel Castro.

Cecilia González-Andrieu (contributing writer for **America**)

Thank you for articulating what I have been feeling deep down but have not been able to put into words. I need a president that I can be proud of, who knows how to handle himself with diplomacy and respect for others as well as respecting our own national concerns. Respect commands respect. I cannot respect someone who blurts out what is on his mind without thinking it through before he opens his mouth. All the more so when this person is the president of the United States of America.

(Rev.) Leo LeBlanc

America deserves a moral leader, not a bully. When I think of how many of the Ten Commandments our current president has broken, I cringe and wonder how so many Americans could have voted for him. I can't imagine their dinner table conversations with their children justifying the actions of this administration, justifying the bullying and meanness. America deserves better. Our children and grandchildren deserve better. They are watching and waiting for our responses and actions.

Kathleen Zippilli

One thing I've been listening for in vain from Catholic authorities for many years is spiritual guidance on how to deal with Mr. Trump's lies. I've not seen an honest reckoning yet with how much damage is caused by his particular style of lying, and the big lies he has perpetrated. Seeing people believe the lies is all the more disheartening. Often giving Mr. Trump the benefit of the doubt feels like casting pearls before swine. He just lies all the more and then turns to destroy you when you finally object.

Matthew Kucera

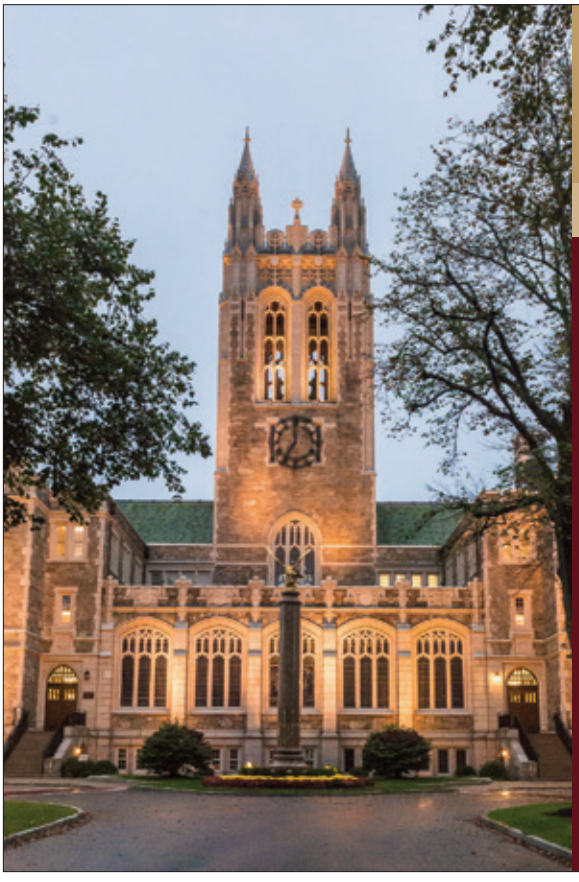
Catholics must remember that no matter the goodness of the intended end, immoral means are never justified; the ends do not justify immoral, un-Christian, means (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1753). In my mind there is an inherent immorality in the means of this administration—what Father Sawyer deems its "meanness"—regardless of its desired ends, that is distinctly un-Catholic.

David Geislinger

Thank you for this reasonable, calm, fair and on-target reflection. This may be a minor detail, but I think the following was particularly helpful: "...he would never abide bullies, which is how Mr. Trump and Mr. Vance were acting." I expected the sentence would say they *are* bullies. It said that is how they "were acting."

It is so important in opposing evil that we bring energy and clear action, but still maintain character—and Christian hope. People can change. It seems to me that change often requires strong, determined opposition, again without breaking character.

Mike McCue



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Trump's Attacks on Immigrants Damage Democracy

A few weeks ago, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement mistakenly deported Kilmar Abrego García to a violent prison in El Salvador. Agents arrested Mr. Abrego García in an Ikea parking lot on March 12 with his 5-year-old son in the car.

The Trump administration has since acknowledged Mr. Abrego García's deportation as an "administrative error." In 2019, he was detained and questioned about ties to the MS-13 gang, but an immigration judge eventually granted him protection from deportation back to El Salvador because local gangs were likely to persecute him. Yet the Trump administration, after incorrectly deporting him despite the protection order, argued that federal courts had no authority to order him returned since he is being held by the Salvadoran government. They have also renewed the allegation that he is part of MS-13.

Three months into President Trump's second term, the administration's focus on expelling immigrants has expanded to include not only undocumented immigrants and alleged gang members but also legal residents and visa holders whom the government describes as supporters of terrorism. The government has the power to remove foreigners whose presence threatens the United States or its foreign policy interests, but the Trump administration has stretched this rationale to include those engaging in protests against the war in Gaza, acts which are ordinarily protected by the First Amendment.

Marco Rubio, the secretary of state, said he has revoked more than 300 student visas, some in connection to campus protests over the war in Gaza, claiming that the students were "creating riots, basically, on campus." In late March, masked agents apprehended Rumeysa Öztürk, a Tufts University graduate student, without explanation. A spokesperson later said she "engaged in activities in support of Hamas," likely referring to an op-ed co-written with other students. Rasha Alawieh, a Brown University professor and kidney transplant specialist, was deported to Lebanon for allegedly supporting Hezbollah. And ICE arrested Badar Khan Suri, a postdoctoral student at Georgetown, for purportedly sharing pro-Hamas propaganda online.

Whether or not one believes that these students are in league with Hamas or Hezbollah, or agrees with their positions on the war in Gaza, campus protests and op-eds do not threaten U.S. foreign policy, unless dissent from the administration's position is a threat in itself. The president's executive actions and his administration's aggressive use of any minimally plausible authority against noncitizens betray a disdain for the right to object to the actions of those in power.

Against this backdrop, how should Americans who disagree with the administration's hostility toward immigrants proceed?

For decades, the church in the United States, including the editors of **America**, has stressed the importance of recognizing the human dignity of migrants. On March 24, Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso organized a rally in support of immigrants, describing the administration's policy toward immigrants as a hardening of hearts.

"I'm very concerned," he told OSV News. "You might even say I'm more concerned about 'us' than 'them,' than the immigrants among us, because we're losing something that is essential for us to be who we are, to have our own particular identity as a country of immigrants that welcomes people who are different than ourselves."

Bishop Seitz articulated what has become frighteningly apparent following the recent spate of disappearances: The United States, whose nationhood has in large measure been constituted by its embrace of immigrants, is turning its back on the stranger. This is not only a threat to the country's historic identity but is also, in the abuse of power to target those whom the Trump administration considers enemies, a betrayal of the rule of law and the values of a democratic society.

In the months preceding the 2020 presidential election, the editors of **America** wrote that Mr. Trump's first administration had "undermined the constitutional order to a degree unprecedented in modern American history," a concern we have reiterated many times since. Less than three months into his second term, the threat Mr. Trump poses to the constitutional order has only grown.

In 2025, the United States is a nation where a young woman can be snatched off the street by masked, plainclothes agents, shoved into a van and transported halfway across the country in violation of a court order, without the state producing any evidence of criminal activity—as happened to Ms. Öztürk. It is a nation where a father can be sent to a maximum-security foreign prison, shipped beyond the reach of American courts without due process—as happened to Mr. Abrego García.

These and other similar actions taken by the Trump administration represent a move away from a free, open society. The same president who pardoned roughly 1,500 convict-

ed Jan. 6 rioters on his first day in office now claims to be protecting Americans from an "invasion" of violent criminals by making end runs around the courts. The deportation of violent criminals is morally justifiable and the revocation of visas is legally possible, but the orchestration of such actions to insulate them from judicial review telegraphs that they aim more to demonstrate power than to implement policy.

Mr. Trump has demonstrated a willingness to use broad power to terrorize his opponents—even those who simply disagree with him. He has all but eliminated any debate within his own party. But healthy democracies allow disagreement without the threat of punishment.

This crisis is a call to solidarity. Americans should raise their voices, defying Mr. Trump's attempts to stifle criticism, in defense of our immigrant brothers and sisters. We should call and write to our congressional representatives, demanding accountability for this administration's denial of due process and defiance of the courts. We should call for an end to the appalling practice of consigning deportees to Salvadoran custody to avoid accountability before U.S. courts.

Yet given the gravity of the crisis, more frequent and more visible nonviolent protest may be necessary. Rallies such as the one Bishop Seitz led in El Paso may need to become so common as to be impossible to ignore. They can serve to confront Americans with what is being done by our government in our name and wake the consciences of our fellow citizens. The Trump administration's targets today are immigrants, but attacks on and disdain for due process, free expression and the separation of powers endanger the democratic freedoms of all Americans.

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The Catholic Church has a positive model for masculinity, and it really works

Among my most distinctive memories of growing up Catholic in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is accompanying my father to the meetings of our church men's group, the Holy Name Society. We met in the community space on the bottom floor of the church building, the same room in which we did school plays and gathered after Mass to share coffee and doughnuts. As a boy, I looked forward to the pancake breakfasts that accompanied each meeting.

Today, as masculinity and the role of men in society become increasingly contentious, the seriousness with which many of these men took the work of *being men* seems especially important. Catholic men's groups like the one I attended in my youth offer a powerful model for how men can be men *together*, while living out all that masculinity has to offer.

A lot of the men who gathered in that space were probably reliable Democratic voters, as were my father and grandfather, though that was before people associated the Democrats with effete coastal liberals. Among the people who gathered after church every few Sundays was a radio announcer who served as the voice of Iowa Hawkeyes basketball, assorted wrestling and football coaches, veterans of wars across the 20th century and, most notably to me, a lawyer who served as both our church groundskeeper and as an N.F.L. referee. When we did things together, a lot of it was stereotypical guy stuff: fishing, golf, cookouts, and trips to Iowa football and basketball games.

But the Holy Name Society didn't engage all that much with "manliness" as it is often defined today. Some of the men had actually seen war and had no interest in military cosplay. There were plenty of hunters, but they used shotguns or muzzleloaders rather than AR-15s. Their trucks were small, and more often they drove sedans. They did not display Punisher skull stickers, or whatever the '90s equivalent may have been.

Instead, for this group, the work of "manliness" was almost boring. They organized food drives, helped raise funds for the church and saw to the broader needs of our community, whatever those happened to be. The purpose of the Holy Name Society was to help all of us be good servants—to spouses, children, parents and communities.

Modelling Christlike Values

In the context of Catholicism, there is nothing particularly notable about this idea. To be a man in the church is to be a good servant leader, someone who models Christlike values of humility and sacrifice in the service of the greater good. In our community, it was no idle talk, either. I had more than a few male role models who did things like teach and coach while their wives made most of the money. Closer to home, my father and grandfather spent a lot of time volunteering on Habitat for Humanity projects or ferrying neighbors to and from doctor's appointments.

It's striking how different this kind of manliness is from the kind that has become so common in our culture. The masculinity of servant leadership is grounded in the Gospels and centuries of thinking about what it meant to take Christ's sacrifice as a guide for how one might act in the world. It emphasizes both strength and vulnerability, precisely because both of these qualities are brought together in the cross.

The manliness one sees extolled on social media and, increasingly, in our politics, may represent a comparatively small number of American men, but its growing influence, especially among American youth, makes it worth taking seriously. Most significantly for this discussion, this version of manliness is decidedly *post*-Christian: It rejects softness and vulnerability in favor of dominance and aggression. It teaches that there is no good but what a man can take for himself, no relationship that should not be exploited for personal gain. Manliness, in this view, is not a matter of character. Instead, masculinity is reduced to simulacrum—the relentless cultivation of a series of images, attitudes and tastes.

No wonder that some Christian churchgoers, according to Christianity Today editor Russell Moore, have complained to their pastors that core Gospel teachings are "liberal" or "weak." But this version of manliness is just another form of the idol worship condemned in the Old Testament. The Israelites worshiped a golden calf when Moses left his flock to go to the mountain. Now, many Americans idolize a man who famously owns a golden toilet.

Christianity as Cultural Force

This collapse has too many causes to delineate here. It is hard not to think, however, that at least part of the problem with men is the retreat of Christianity as a cultural force in American life, the repercussions of which the American left has not yet recognized. There are certainly plenty of examples of Christian men, including members of the clergy, engaging in shameful, even criminal conduct in spite of their professed devotion to the Gospels. But I also think the church exerted a salutary influence on men that is increasingly hard to find as we move further into the 21st century.

Servant leadership and the fellowship it fosters can create a positive and pro-social form of manliness, one that appeals to a desire for strength and dignity while also enabling men to engage with each other and others in meaningful works of care.

It is this latter piece that is so often missing from popular archetypes of masculinity. The basic thesis of the contemporary "manosphere"—a loose collection of writers and influencers that might include Joe Rogan, Jake Paul and Andrew Tate, but also political figures like Elon Musk and JD Vance—is that the world has fallen because the work of care has escaped the feminine space of the home and entered the realms of manly life.

Today's men are soft, weak, passive, this version of the story goes, and the only way we can get back on track is by reorganizing ourselves around a renewed version of traditional gender roles. Private care work for the women, and public, performative work for the men—and the more testosterone, the more spectacle, the better.

What I learned growing up in the church, though, is that this temptation to make one's manhood a spectacle is a grave form of error. There is nothing durable about building one's persona around a series of Instagram posts, no way to avoid the hard, daily work of being useful to oneself and others.

Today's cult of masculinity sometimes claims to hearken back to a classical age, suggesting, as the venture capitalist Marc Andreessen has written, that the world of combat sports and physical fitness is where men can be most fully themselves. But this not only gets the significance of works like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* deeply wrong, it also gives the dullest performances of manhood a depth and clarity of purpose they do not deserve.

The challenge of being a man in the present is not fashioning some kind of epic purpose out of the fragments of modern life. It is not rejecting the moral and physical duties that some regard as belonging to women. One does not need to abandon the concepts of gender difference or complementarity to acknowledge that masculinity as defined by the church encompasses far more than today's "manosphere" allows. The tradition of servant leadership, embodied in so many Catholic groups past and present, provides a framework in which men could be together in community in the fullness of their masculinity—one that encompasses not just traditionally masculine behaviors and activities but the fullness of human experience.

As we move into a future in which men and boys seem more lost than ever, servant leadership can also remind us of a basic but increasingly forgotten truth: that care might be the most manly activity of all.

Brady Smith *teaches middle school English at Rowland Hall, an independent private school in Salt Lake City.*

Beatrice Cruz of Arizona joins a demonstration outside the federal courthouse in Houston in June 2023 after a hearing on the DACA program.

OSV News photo/Adrees Latif, Reuters

As the Trump administration runs down its immigrant target list, are Dreamers next?

By J.D. Long García

In the first few weeks of his second term in office, President Donald Trump laid much of the groundwork necessary to fulfill his promise of "the largest domestic deportation operation in American history."

A post on Feb. 20 on X from the Department of Homeland Security details some of those steps. Mr. Trump declared a national emergency on the southern border, restarted construction of the border wall and signed the Laken Riley Act, which requires the detention of undocumented immigrants who have been convicted of criminal offenses.

The administration even began, briefly, using the U.S. military base at Guantánamo Bay to facilitate deportations and negotiated new deals with some Latin American countries that had previously refused to accept deportees. Its most controversial policy shift has proved to be a collaboration with President Nayib Bukele of El Salvador, who has accepted hundreds of alleged Venezuelan and Salvadoran gang members into his nation's notorious maximum-security Center for Terrorism Confinement after they were taken into custody by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and removed from the United States.

D.H.S. Secretary Kristi Noem reports a significant drop in the number of unauthorized border crossings since Mr. Trump came into office.

But so far, the administration has remained silent on the fate of undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children. They have long been known as Dreamers, a reference to the Dream Act (the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act), which was first introduced in 2001 as a way of creating a path to citizenship

for this group.

Many but far from all Dreamers are beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Instituted by an executive order from President Barack Obama in 2012, it protects an estimated 690,000 Dreamers from deportation. The program also gives DACA recipients authorization to work.

"I've always relied on DACA," said Alma, a DACA recipient and Jesuit university graduate who asked that her last name not be used. "It has helped me be able to have a [driver's] license...[to] live without fear" and to find work legally, she said.

But Alma worries about becoming a target if White House policy on Dreamers should change. She is already frustrated by the continuing uncertainty about her future in the United States and by the fact that every two years she has to spend more than $500 in renewal fees to remain enrolled in the program. She first received DACA status when she was 15 and describes herself as still in a kind of limbo.

"DACA recipients have always been waiting for a pathway to citizenship," Alma told **America**. "I think about all these other students who are in a similar situation, but can't live in the light. [DACA] has given me a way to not live in the shadows."

Over the years, Americans have expressed great compassion for Dreamers. In 2018, a CBS poll found that 87 percent of U.S. adults believed Dreamers should be allowed to stay in the United States. But as the Trump administration intensifies its focus on immigration policy, is public sentiment shifting? A NPR/Ipsos poll from February found that fewer than half of Americans supported giving legal status to Dreamers.

The possibly diminishing support, along with the Trump administration's intense focus on immigration, has left DACA recipients uncertain about their future.

"DACA was supposed to be like a Band-Aid," said Jorge Palacios, the migration coordinator for youth engagement at the Ignatian Solidarity Network. "I don't think anyone expected DACA to be a serious, long-term solution."

In fact, Mr. Palacios noted, Dreamers can no longer apply for DACA. D.H.S. is only processing renewals from current recipients. To receive DACA, applicants had to be in the United States before Jan. 1, 2007. That means most current college undergraduates who are Dreamers are not eligible for the protected status.

Mr. Palacios said he did not know a single current undergraduate student who has been able to enjoy DACA protection, even if their arrival into the United States replicated the experience of "official" Dreamers. "If someone's 18 and a freshman in college, they would have had to be [under] a year old when they came to the United States," he said, in order to have been included in the 2012 executive order.

A False Sense of Hope?

DACA created a false sense of hope, according to Camila, who also asked that her last name not be used as a precaution. She has been involved with the Ignatian Solidarity Network since her days as an undergraduate student at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

Today, without work authorization, recent graduates who are undocumented struggle to find work, she said. But new university-led efforts, like fellowships and stipends, have helped some undocumented graduates who do not have work permits.

"The first instinct [among DACA recipients] is fear or worry, and rightfully so, because...a lot of things that are being said [by the Trump administration] are threatening people's livelihoods," Camila told **America**. "But at the same time, we're also seeing people come together."

Camila has been a big part of making that happen at Loyola Marymount. She emigrated from Peru with her family as a child and was a senior at the university when she attended her first Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice, an annual event organized by the Ignatian Solidarity Network, in Washington. There she learned that many immigrant students did not have adequate support at their colleges.

Yet she found a great deal of support from helpful faculty and staff at L.M.U. She qualified for financial aid and connected with students who had a similar immigration status. Camila served in the leadership of a group at her university called Resilience, an immigrant rights student organization.

Her experience at L.M.U., as well as during the Covid-19 pandemic, inspired her to found the Undocu Network five years ago with the help of the Ignatian Solidarity Network. It is a national network for undocumented young adults that meets monthly "to talk about whatever their needs are, whatever barriers they're facing or even just victories they're having on their campuses or in life."

The network meets over Zoom. Participants come primarily from Latin American backgrounds, but the group is open to students from other countries, Camila said. Recently, the calls have included workshops on how to find internships, legal workshops to discuss strategies for formalizing their residency status, seminars on mental health resources, and help navigating complex emotions surrounding Latino and American identity.

Undocu Network also hosts annual summits, the most recent in January. Around 50 student leaders and Jesuit university alumni from across the country gathered for the

CNS photo/Chaz Muth

Brenda and Yarely—two Dreamers—celebrate their graduation from Trinity Washington University in 2018.

summit, which included U.S. residents who grew up undocumented, in mixed-status households or in immigrant communities.

"I can just listen to somebody share their experience and for some reason, I feel like I'm [the one] being heard," said Jonathon Mora of the Undocu Network, noting the converging stories of people who have been protected under DACA. "We're not going through this alone and we're not the only ones fighting for it," he told **America**. Last May, Mr. Mora became the first of his family to graduate from college.

Mr. Mora, who is pursuing a legal career, is a U.S. citizen who grew up in an immigrant neighborhood. He said sometimes all it takes to make a difference in another person's life is ask a question and listen to the answer.

"If we want to be advocates, we need to let the person whom we want to support speak and elevate their voice," he said.

Mr. Palacios, who grew up in a mixed-status household, said the student-initiated Undocu Network has connected those directly affected by changes to immigration policy and has helped ground the work of the broader Ignatian Solidarity Network.

With the Trump administration hardening its immigration policies, "the messaging on our end is fundamentally about what we can do to take care of each other," he said. "In the midst of all this fear, there is this clear sense of hope that is the driving force behind everything we do."

It is a hope, he said, that comes at an "overwhelmingly adverse" time for migrants.

J.D. Long García, *senior editor.*

Some facts about DACA and DACA recipients

538,000: The current tally of DACA recipients, down from a program total of **835,000**. Since the program began in 2012, thousands have dropped out after achieving legal residency or naturalization through other means, self-deporting, or leaving DACA because they could not afford its fees or were disheartened by their continuing legal uncertainty.

600,000: The number of current U.S. residents who were eligible for DACA but did not join the program.

100,000: Approximate number of Dreamers graduating from high school each year who would be eligible for DACA if the program had been extended.

7: The average age of DACA recipients when they arrived in the United States, More than **one-third** were under **5**.

2.7 million to 3.6 million: The estimated number of DACA recipients, DACA-eligible residents and Temporary Protected Status immigrants who could be put on a path to citizenship by a revised Dream Act.

20: Number of legislative attempts since 2001 to pass some version of the Dream Act. The latest, introduced before the House of Representatives in February 2025, is The American Dream and Promise Act.

25: The average number of years that DACA recipients have lived in the United States.

83: The percentage of DACA recipients in the U.S. labor force.

88: The percentage of DACA recipients living in "mixed" households with family who are U.S. citizens.

If DACA recipients through court order or executive action become targets for deportation:

1 million family members, including **300,000 children** of DACA recipients and **90,000 spouses**, would lose a loved one or household breadwinner. An estimated **120,000** U.S. citizen children would be pushed into poverty.

$71 billion: Civic investments in DACA recipients' education, job training and skill development that would be squandered.

$650 billion: Estimated future losses to the U.S. economy.

440,000: The number of workers who would be "lost" from the U.S. labor force.

Sources: Migration Policy Institute, National Immigration Forum, Center for American Progress, FWD.us, Coalition for the American Dream

After health crisis, Pope Francis begins a 'new,' changed papacy

Pope Francis said that he is experiencing "healing," specifically "in my soul and my body," as he reached the eighth day of a two-month period of rest and convalescence prescribed by his doctors on March 30. He shared this sense of healing in a brief written message for the Angelus that day, which was released by the Vatican.

This reassuring news came after the Vatican confirmed on March 28 that the 88-year-old pope was showing "improvements" in both his breathing and speech as a result of the therapy he is continuing to receive in Santa Marta, the Vatican guest house where he lives, after his discharge from Gemelli Hospital on March 23.

In his message, he invited people to "live this Lent as a time of healing, all the more as it is the Jubilee [Year]," revealing that, "I too am experiencing it this way, in my soul and in my body."

He added, "That is why I give heartfelt thanks to all those who, in the image of the Savior, are instruments of healing for their neighbor with their word and their knowledge, with kindness and with prayer."

Francis reminded people that "frailty and illness are experiences we all have in common; all the more, however, we are brothers in the salvation Christ has given us."

Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, the prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, had told journalists on March 21, "I think that now a new pope begins."

The cardinal said that Pope Francis "is a man of surprises and surely he will have learned many things" during his stay of more than a month in Gemelli Hospital, "and who knows what he will bring out of the hat!"

Cardinal Fernández said Pope Francis is "physically really well" but still "needs rehabilitation." Asked if he believed the pope would resign, the Argentine cardinal, who is very close to Francis, dismissed the idea: "I truly do not believe it. That, no!"

Addressing the question later, the cardinal said, "As far as I know, the hypothesis of resignation was never taken into consideration. Instead, I believe that this time of pain, tiredness and limits is the beginning of a new phase that will be fruitful and will be part of this pontificate."

The cardinal said that the pope wants to use the time he has left in service to the church, not to "heal himself." Moreover, when he returns to the Vatican, "it's not easy for him to follow the [doctors'] advice."

Cardinal Fernández made clear, however, that Pope Francis' situation after this hospitalization will not be the same as before. "His life will certainly have to change [when he returns to the Vatican], but I cannot give details," the cardinal said.

CNS photo/Pablo Esparza

Massimiliano Strappetti, Pope Francis' caregiver, adjusts a microphone as the pope greets a crowd at Rome's Gemelli Hospital on March 23.

He said, however, that "the general picture of his body is as before" the pope went into the hospital. "Now he needs rehabilitation because a long time [receiving] high-flow oxygenation dries you up and you almost have to learn to speak again," Cardinal Fernández said. The pope "has little strength in his voice, and so he needs therapy, time to recover the strength of his voice, also the muscles, because he has been too long without moving...and that's the stage that comes now."

Asked how Francis is emotionally after a month in the hospital, the cardinal said, "I can say that it has certainly been a very hard time for him, this month, for him who loves to give himself entirely, to be there in the hospital bed without being able to help others, to give a word of comfort to other people."

He said the pope "has a great ability to learn from life, from whatever comes, to grasp beauty even in dark moments. For this reason, I am sure that something very beautiful will come out of this experience—we do not know what it will be, it will be the surprises of Pope Francis."

Gerard O'Connell, *Vatican correspondent.*

OSV News photo/Quetzalli Nicte-Ha, Reuters

Mexico's Sheinbaum proves a deft handler of the mercurial Trump

With U.S. tariff threats looming on March 9, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum convened a rally in the Zócalo, the massive public square in the center of Mexico City, where she called for national unity. She only twice mentioned the person whose threats she was responding to: U.S. President Donald Trump.

"The unity of the country is very important. It's the only way to confront one of the world's greatest powers," Ms. Sheinbaum told a sea of supporters.

The Mexican bishops' conference heeded the president's call, releasing a video on social media after the rally. Various bishops read from a statement congratulating Ms. Sheinbaum, who took office last Oct. 1.

"We Mexicans are called to work together in the face of adversity...to overcome division and social confrontation, to continue with the dialogues in the construction of peace, to promote greater investments for economic development with better working conditions," the statement said. "We cannot help but consider that the policy of the new president of the United States of America towards Mexico in particular, and towards the world in general, is worrying," they said.

The repeated taunts and threats from the U.S. president had been notable in his early weeks in office, yet at this rally Ms. Sheinbaum spoke often of "respect," using the word 11 times in her address to the crowd.

Citing a "respectful" phone conversation with Mr. Trump just four days before the Zócalo rally, Ms. Sheinbaum said, "In the relationship with the United States, with its government, dialogue and respect prevailed.... We are neighbors. We have the responsibility to collaborate and coordinate, [but] we cannot cede our sovereignty nor can our people be affected by decisions made by foreign governments or hegemons."

Mr. Trump had offered temporary reprieves on previous tariff threats after conversations with his Mexican counterpart, but on March 26, Mr. Trump announced his intention to proceed with a 25 percent tariff on cars manufactured outside the United States. (Mexico and Canada were exempt from the "reciprocal" round of global tariffs announced on April 2.) In keeping with her previous approach, Ms. Sheinbaum did not immediately respond to this latest trade provocation.

So far, in fact, Ms. Sheinbaum has deftly handled Mr. Trump, even developing an unlikely relationship with the U.S. president, who has expressed admiration for her and has spared Mexico many of the discourtesies expressed during his first run for office in 2016.

Her handling of the mercurial U.S. president has sent her approval rating soaring, reaching 85 percent in the latest survey from the newspaper El Financiero. Her daily media presentations have drawn rave reviews from partisans, exasperation from critics—whom she routinely trolls and attacks—and worldwide attention because of her skill in pushing back without somehow raising Mr. Trump's ire.

"Mexico is a free, sovereign and independent country," she often reminds him. At the same time, Ms. Sheinbaum has responded robustly to Mr. Trump's demands on both

Rallying for unity at the Zócalo in Mexico City on March 9

security and migration.

She staved off his first threats of tariffs in February by sending 10,000 national guard members to the northern border, ostensibly to stop fentanyl from crossing into the United States. Ms. Sheinbaum also appears to be reversing her predecessor's security strategy of "hugs, not bullets"—an approach blasted by critics and the church as essentially a policy of state passivity toward criminals.

Her administration has been stepping up cartel arrests and "decommissioning" drug labs. Mexico has handed over 29 cartel capos to the United States.

Mexico has also beefed up immigration enforcement. That tougher enforcement, along with the Trump administration's canceling of the CBP One cellphone application, has led to just 8,326 migrant encounters along the Mexican border in February—the lowest-ever monthly total, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Though Mr. Trump's most recent moves on tariffs mean all bets are off, before April 2 financial markets had been speculating that Ms. Sheinbaum could continue to placate the U.S. president. Ms. Sheinbaum has found a way to keep a dialogue with Mr. Trump going—even to talk back without antagonizing him. She has often met his demands without losing face.

She often speaks of keeping a "cool head" in dealing with Mr. Trump. So far, it is a strategy that appears to be working.

David Agren *contributes from Buenos Aires.*

'Solemniser' Neasa Ní Argadain prepares to officiate at a wedding.

Photo courtesy of Neasa Ní Argadáin

Catholic sacramental marriages suffer sharp decline in Ireland

The share of marriages in Ireland that were Catholic fell precipitously between 1994 and 2023, according to a report authored by the Irish Times columnist Breda O'Brien for the Iona Institute, a socially conservative think tank.

According to the report, one third of weddings performed in Ireland in 2023 were conducted in a Catholic church, while one quarter of the total wedding ceremonies fell under a category of "New Age and other religions." In 1994, 91.4 percent of Irish marriages took place in the church, while "other religious" accounted for only 0.3 percent.

In Ireland, individuals licensed by the state to perform marriages are known as solemnisers. Neasa Ní Argadáin is a solemniser for the interfaith religious organization OneSpirit Ireland. She believes the increased demand for marriages outside the church is the result of a widespread dissatisfaction with the Catholic liturgy—a problem not limited to weddings.

The church has not been "meeting people where they were at," she told **America**, and not allowing a "broader understanding or expression of the divine in-dwelling that I was witnessing in the people I met, who felt they believed in something they couldn't always articulate well."

In an email to **America,** Ms. O'Brien said: "People are being fed a kind of therapeutic spirituality that emphasises individual choice over the demands of authentic community. But people still long for something profound when they marry. 'Spiritual but not religious' ceremonies meet a need but leave the couple at the not-altar. There is no ongoing support, much less challenge."

Ms. O'Brien said that the church must "accept that only a thin veneer of Catholic culture is left for most people"; it must reconcile itself to "the need for evangelization of Ireland as a new mission territory" and vigorously promote Catholic marriage among young people in order to reverse the decline.

Connor Hartigan *is an O'Hare fellow at America Media.*

HOLDING HOPE

Milwaukee's Franciscan Peacemakers help women survivors realize a future free of sexual exploitation

By Colleen Jurkiewicz

Amber, a member of the Franciscan Peacemakers' Clare Community, pours candles in the program's workshop.

David Bernacchi

The storefront of Franciscan Peacemakers on Lisbon Avenue in Milwaukee looks—and smells—a little like a spa.

It is a warm, feminine space, in both feeling and décor, with natural wood tones set against white shiplap that would make the HGTV interior designer Joanna Gaines proud. The artfully stocked shelves are lined with soaps, candles, bath bombs and lotions; inhale, and scents like honey oatmeal and lemon verbena fill your lungs. Above the checkout counter, the words "Peace and All Good" are mounted in gleaming metallic signage.

In the workspace behind the retail area, Amber busies herself making candles, filling Cyber Monday orders and greeting visitors who come into the store. There are three weeks until Christmas, and the temperature outside is hovering in the teens. Every opening of the door brings with it a rush of bitterly cold air.

Polite and soft-spoken, Amber (who has requested to be identified only by her first name) explains that this is her first traditional job.

It "saved my life," she said.

Franciscan Peacemakers is a nonprofit organization ministering to women who have experienced or are experiencing sexual exploitation and the many comorbidities of that trauma—addiction, abuse and poverty, to name just a few. This storefront is the home base for the Peacemakers' social enterprise, which provides women survivors of sexual trafficking with work experience and

If this work has taught him anything, it is the power of a woman who has decided to change her life.

a means to support themselves financially.

Amber has been in Franciscan Peacemakers' Clare Community program for 18 months. She is now 27 years old, but her struggles with addiction began when she was a teenager.

"I have an allergy of the body and an obsession of the mind," she said. For years, Amber's life was a cycle of drug use, criminal activity to enable that drug use and unhealthy relationships. The cycle was occasionally interrupted with attempts to recover, to start over, to build something better for herself.

But she was never able to create a sustainable life without drugs and prostitution—at least not until 2023, when Deacon Steve Przedpelski came to visit her in the Walworth County Jail.

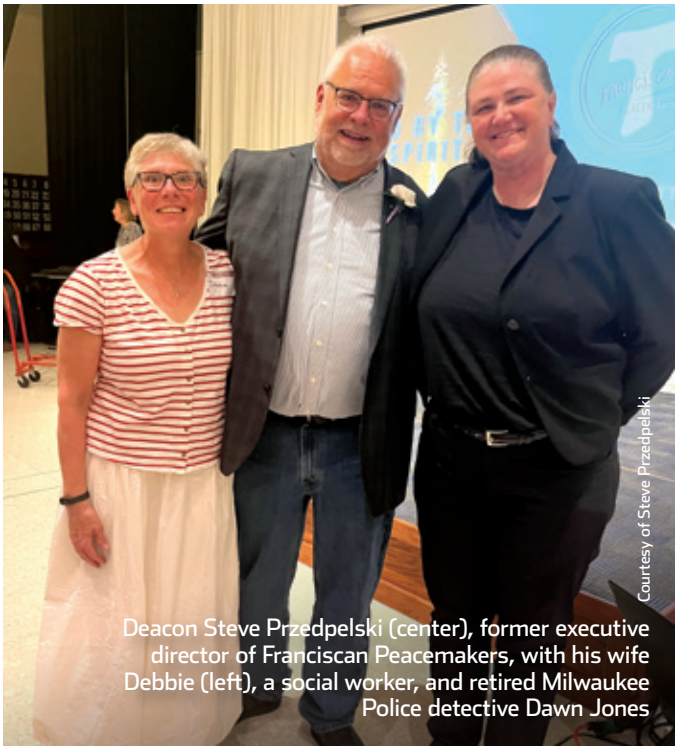
Asking Better Questions

Franciscan Peacemakers was founded in 1995 by two Capuchin priests who started handing out bag lunches to women who worked as prostitutes on Milwaukee's North Side. Soon after, they began partnering with suburban parishes to distribute the lunches.

That is where Deacon Przedpelski came in. Newly ordained as a permanent deacon, he was leading groups of young people from West Bend, Wis., about 30 miles northwest of Milwaukee, on service opportunities that immersed them in Catholic social teaching. They heard about Franciscan Peacemakers through a news article.

"I was very intrigued," Deacon Przedpelski recalled. He and his wife, Debbie, a social worker, began taking groups of children from a social-justice-based youth group at his parish to help distribute the lunches. At the time, Franciscan Peacemakers was trying to get started as an official nonprofit. Deacon Przedpelski offered to help out for six weeks.

That was almost 30 years ago. Just last year, he retired as the organization's executive director. In that time, the structure and the ministry of the Peacemakers evolved, along with the world's understanding of the women they serve.



Courtesy of Steve Przedpelski

Deacon Steve Przedpelski (center), former executive director of Franciscan Peacemakers, with his wife Debbie (left), a social worker, and retired Milwaukee Police detective Dawn Jones

Deacon Przedpelski learned quickly that in order to actually help the women, he needed to know them. And to know them, he needed to ask better questions.

"I had always initially taken the approach of 'How can I help you?'" he said. Instead, he began asking: "What is your story? What brought you to this point?"

Almost universally, the answer was some form of early childhood trauma, often sexual abuse.

"And the women, right up to the last day [of my career], continued to teach me what was happening in their lives and how they wound up in whatever situation they were in," he said.

When a partner agency called him in 2023 to refer Amber's case, he brought Cynthia with him to the jail. Cynthia (who has also requested to be identified only by her first name) spent close to a decade on the streets, addicted to drugs and experiencing sexual exploitation, before coming to the Peacemakers.

Deacon Przedpelski could see that within five minutes of meeting, Cynthia and Amber had established a connection. He excused himself to let them talk. If 30 years of this work has taught him anything, after all, it is the power of a woman who has decided to change her life.

Ultimately, the court allowed Amber to join the Clare Community Program, a two-year, residency-based, trauma care program operated by Franciscan Peacemakers that includes housing, support and resources for addiction recovery. When she first moved into the St. Bakhita Catholic Worker House, where the women of Clare Community live,

David Bernacchi

Cynthia is a mother, a grandmother, a former member of the National Guard and a member of the Clare Community. Her love for her family (shown with Cynthia in the photo at left) helped motivate her to change her life.

Amber did not think she was going to stay.

"I didn't know how to have friends. I didn't want to talk to anybody," she said. "But after a couple weeks I did some outpatient treatment, started meeting with a therapist, got my meds regulated." She was offered a spot in the Franciscan Peacemakers' social enterprise, and she found she was good at the work. More than that, she liked it. She liked the structure, the accountability, the fellowship. She liked meeting and exceeding the expectations that others had for her.

And for the first time, she was able to stay sober.

"I was never used to having people watch over me," she said.

Many of the other women who enter the program have similar stories, said Anne Haines, founder and executive director of the St. Bakhita Catholic Worker House, which is a separate entity from the Peacemakers (though the two work collaboratively to support the women in Clare Community).

"Several of the women survivors have said to me: 'It's hard for me to understand when you give us things and you don't expect something in return,'" she said. "Because they're so used to the exact opposite."

Originally from a small town in Pennsylvania, Cynthia is a mother, a grandmother and a former member of the National Guard. She came to Wisconsin in 2004 with her now ex-husband; after they broke up, she ended up on the streets, addicted to drugs.

"I was kind of hopeless," she said.

Looking back, Cynthia said she can now see how adverse childhood experiences and social determinants of health "actually paved the way for me to become addicted to substances and being in unhealthy relationships." But she didn't have the luxury of that perspective when she was in the midst of addiction and sexual exploitation.

Cynthia got to know Deacon Przedpelski and his team well during those years. Through their street ministry, Franciscan Peacemakers offered food, basic necessities and fellowship to women in her situation, driving their vans through neighborhoods known for prostitution activity.

For a long time, Cynthia was not ready to accept their offers to aid in her recovery. "I didn't want to believe I was being exploited," she said. But in 2018, when a spot became available in the Clare Community program, she took it. "I was ready for an opportunity to save my life," she said.

She hasn't looked back. Today, Cynthia holds an associate's degree and a bachelor's degree and works as the Peacemakers' outreach and recovery assistance specialist, helping women like Amber imagine a future on their own terms.

Behind the Peacemakers' storefront and workspace is the Hospitality Center, open five days a week. In the Hospitality Center, women can come in off the street to warm up, drink coffee, use the restroom and talk with Franciscan Peacemakers staff. There, they will likely meet Cynthia, who still remembers the transformative power of being cared for with no judgment and no expectations.

"I know how horrible it is on that side of the coin," she

‘I’m in awe of the women and the strength they show.’

said. “I know it takes a lot of somebody loving on you before you start to want to love yourself.”

“There’s just such tremendous power in one woman working with another woman, sharing her experience, strength and hope, and not saying, ‘Here are the steps you have to take in order to recover,’ but just saying, ‘Here’s what worked for me. You don’t have to do this alone,’” said Megan O’Halloran, who succeeded Deacon Przedpelski as executive director of Franciscan Peacemakers in 2024.

Four generations of O’Halloran’s family have experienced addiction, so she is well-versed in the toll the disease can take on individuals and families—as well as the stigma they endure. It is a stigma shared by so many of the women who come to the building on Lisbon Avenue.

“Every woman that we serve is a person, first and foremost, worthy of love and dignity and care,” she said. “Every woman coming to the door is somebody’s daughter, is somebody’s mother, sister, friend.”

Megan O’Halloran became executive director of Franciscan Peacemakers in 2024.

David Bernacchi

‘The Brokenness Isn’t Just on the Border’

The Hospitality Center is quieter than usual today; Ms. O’Halloran thinks it could be that police have done “sweeps” of the area and made arrests. This neighborhood, located on Milwaukee’s Near West Side, was founded by wealthy Germans in the 19th century. But as with other neighborhoods in Milwaukee, deindustrialization has taken its toll. Today, this area experiences poverty at more than double the rate of the rest of Wisconsin and has gained a reputation for being an area where sex trafficking occurs.

According to a 2019 study by the Wisconsin Department of Justice, local law enforcement has both “a desire and need for training on how to differentiate between prostitution and sex trafficking for both operational and data collection purposes.” That study noted that 24 agencies in 16 counties reported arrests of juveniles for prostitution between 2014 and 2018 but reported zero human trafficking incidents for that same period.

The problem is that law enforcement, and the public in general, do not always know how to recognize sex trafficking when they see it. Because of this, the scope of the issue is hard to illustrate to the public.

“What people don’t fully understand is the element of that fraud, coercion and force [that women are put in when they are being trafficked],” said Ms. O’Halloran. Victims, she said, “may not even recognize that it’s a trafficking situation themselves. They may think it’s a choice.”

“It took me a long time to come to terms with it,” said Cynthia. “People don’t realize it. They don’t see it for what it is, because we rationalize and we justify and we make it make sense to us so we can live with it.”

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, human trafficking is a crime involving the exploitation of a person for labor, services or commercial sex. Sex trafficking is legally defined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” in which the act is “induced by force, fraud, or coercion.”

But when headlines refer to “human trafficking,” many people aren’t thinking of women who are being arrested and charged with prostitution, and the actions and circumstances that constitute “force, fraud and coercion” are not always well-understood or even universally agreed upon.

“It is just really hard to get people to understand that this is a problem,” said Debra Schneider, a board member of Franciscan Peacemakers and a coordinator of Faith Coalition Against Sex Trafficking. “People don’t believe that trafficking is a real thing. And in our state, there are many who don’t believe that a child who is 15, 16, 17 years old who is being prostituted is not just trying to make a buck.”

A member of St. James Catholic Church in Menomonee Falls, Wis., Ms. Schneider was serving on the parish’s hu-

David Bernacchi

Julie Rowley is a staff member at Franciscan Peacemakers.

man concerns committee when a staff member suggested they research the issue of human trafficking. She and a colleague spent a year talking to organizations working in the field and listening to survivors' stories.

"What we discovered was that sex trafficking was a real issue in our own community," said Ms. Schneider. She helped to found the coalition in 2019. The group hosts educational events at churches throughout southeastern Wisconsin, hoping to raise awareness of what sexual exploitation is, the risk factors for it and the obligation of faith communities to care for victims.

That kind of faith-community-based education and activism is encouraged by "Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking," released in 2019 by the Vatican. Intended for use within Catholic dioceses, parishes and organizations throughout the world, the document follows years of papal denunciation of human trafficking—Pope John Paul II called it "a modern plague" in 2002—and emphasizes the need for a response from all followers of Christ to what Pope Francis has termed "an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ."

But too often, Catholics are unaware of the full spectrum of crimes that constitute human trafficking, said Felicitas Brugo Onetti, a social worker and anti-trafficking education and outreach coordinator for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"This issue is not well-understood," she said. One reason is that, due to its portrayal in the media, "human trafficking" is often conflated with "human smuggling."

"This misunderstanding is often due to the loose use of the term *trafficking*, which some use to describe the movement of people rather than the exploitation involved," she said. "This feeds the misconception that addressing immigration issues or securing borders will eliminate human trafficking."

Trafficking can involve movement, but it is a crime against the person, Ms. Brugo Onetti explained. It's about "recruiting, harboring, providing or obtaining individuals for exploitation." Borders don't have to be involved, she said; this is happening to Americans, in American cities.

Semantics causes other issues with public perception. Deacon Przedpelski cautioned that overusing the term *sexual exploitation*, as opposed to *forced prostitution* or another more matter-of-fact term can prevent mainstream understanding of the level of violence inherent in the sexual trafficking business model. He said he uses both terms in his preaching and writing. "Some were uncomfortable hearing the term [*forced prostitution*]; others appreciated not whitewashing the problem," he said. "Sex trafficking and violence go hand in hand. There is no polite or easy way to say it."

In addition to the retail store and online sales, Franciscan Peacemakers' social enterprise sells most of its products through farmers' markets and in-person sales events, many of which take place at Catholic parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. These sales events are valuable opportunities to remind churchgoing Catholics of what human trafficking is and what it looks like. Ms. O'Halloran recalled that, at a recent event, she told an attendee that human trafficking happens in each of Wisconsin's 72 counties. The man was shocked, she said.

Deacon Przedpelski said he has witnessed similar reactions time and time again. He has spent the past 30 years visiting different Catholic parishes throughout the metropolitan Milwaukee area, preaching about the church's obligation to victims of sexual exploitation. He has often been approached after Mass by people who saw themselves in his homily—women who had been trafficked, sometimes decades ago, and didn't realize it, as well as men who were becoming addicted to pornography and desensitized to the violence and objectification to which it introduced them.

"Trafficking happens at the border, no doubt about it. But the brokenness isn't just on the border and isn't just on the streets in the city of Milwaukee. The brokenness is among those we worship with," said Deacon Przedpelski.

"This isn't a problem 'over there.' And it is not a problem that happens to 'those types of women,'" said Ms. O'Halloran. "It is a problem that affects everyone throughout this country."

The accountability ‘saved my life.’

‘You Don’t Have a Choice’

The victims of human trafficking come from every culture, every ethnic group and every tax bracket. But too often, they represent communities on the margins. Too often, their vulnerabilities are miscast as weaknesses and the results of poor decisions.

“A lot of people act like we’re broken, and I don’t look at it that way,” said Amber. “People look at [having worked as a prostitute] as a choice that we made. But while in active addiction, you don’t have a choice.”

Amber was only 16 or 17, she said, when she was first introduced to drugs in her small hometown of Twin Lakes, near the Wisconsin-Illinois border.

Before long, she was hooked on heroin and looking for a way to feed the addiction. A friend of a friend offered her a way to make money in exchange for sex. “At first I was forced to do it, but I was high all the time. So I didn’t even really realize what was going on until I sobered up,” she recalled. “And then finally I learned how to do it on my own because I was just trying to survive. I knew that I had a quick and easy way to make money and to feed my addiction.”

Because of persistent misunderstandings surrounding sexual exploitation, especially surrounding the circumstances that lead to it, recovery options currently available are not always effective. Deacon Przedpelski and his team began realizing this in the mid-2000s. The women they were helping, those who wanted to get off the street, needed something more than the short-term, 60-day or 90-day programs being offered.

“Women would participate in groups and they’d be working successfully on recovery, but still turning to prostitution for money because, at the time, it was harder for them to get employed,” he said.

In 2012 the Peacemakers heard about Thistle Farms, a group in Tennessee working with sex trafficking victims. Thistle Farms had launched a program to help lift the women out of the cycle of poverty and addiction while providing them with long-term housing and recovery support. With Thistle Farms’s help, Franciscan Peacemakers created their own version of the program in 2013. In 2014, they opened Clare Community, which offered supportive housing to women on their journey away from exploitation.

Currently, four women are in both the Clare Community Program and in Franciscan Peacemakers’ social enterprise. Joining the social enterprise is not a required part of Clare Community, merely one of its offerings, and a woman must have a length of documented sobriety before she comes to work on Lisbon Avenue.

“What we do is [create] community—a family,” said Ms. Haines, who lives full-time at the St. Bakhita Catholic Worker House. A former friary on the grounds of St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church in Milwaukee’s Harambee neighborhood, the house is just a few miles from the Peacemakers’ storefront.

“Our community has Christmas meals together. When I host Easter for my own family, the women are there too,” said Ms. Haines. “We decorate the Christmas tree together. We all eat together on Monday nights.”

Ms. Haines’s brother, Jeffrey, an auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Milwaukee, visits the home to say Mass every Tuesday evening. No expectation is placed on the women to attend Mass, but they are welcome to.

“They take my breath away with their resilience,” said Ms. Haines of the women survivors. “I can’t believe sometimes after what they’ve been through that they’re open to trusting and loving again—open to relationship, open to community. I’m in awe of them and the strength they show.”

Staff members and Clare Community members work to create products like candles, soaps, lotions and salt scrubs (inset), which are sold to support their ministry.

Janell is a member of Clare Community.

A Call to Consistency

Franciscan Peacemakers is not a spa, but perhaps the comparison is forgivable. A spa, after all, is a place where bodies come to find rest, rejuvenation, respect. And the women who come to this building are in dire need of all three—not just in body, but in spirit.

Deacon Przedpelski's morning meditation all these years has been the Gospel of John, Chapter 13, where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and commands them to do likewise. That's how he sees the Peacemakers: washers of feet.

"It's a call to consistency to all the broken," he said of the story in John 13. "Regardless of their circumstances, regardless of their sexual orientation, regardless of the color of their skin. To do this means to be this servant to the marginalized, and to do it with love."

The day before she spoke with **America**, Amber applied to a technical college. She has a savings account now, another stipulation for the women in the Clare Community Program.

"My plan is to go to college and get a management position somewhere," she said. "I have a lot of hopes and dreams, and I guess we'll see what happens. I can't get too far ahead of myself, because all we have is today. Tomorrow's not promised and yesterday's gone."

Cynthia is considering returning to school to earn her graduate degree. She has a lot of big plans for the Peacemakers, but she is starting with implementing "Warming Wednesdays" at the Hospitality Center, offering hot oatmeal, cocoa and a jacket to the ladies who stop in.

She wants every woman to leave the building on Lisbon Avenue with a little more warmth than she had coming in, a little more strength, a little more dignity.

And if a woman comes in and doesn't have hope, Cynthia said, it's OK. She has enough for them both.

"We're holding that hope for them. We're trying to speak that," she said. "[We are trying to say,] 'You deserve it. You're worth it. You have value.'"

Colleen Jurkiewicz *is a staff writer with The Milwaukee Catholic Herald. She writes every week at LPi's (Practicing) Catholic blog.*

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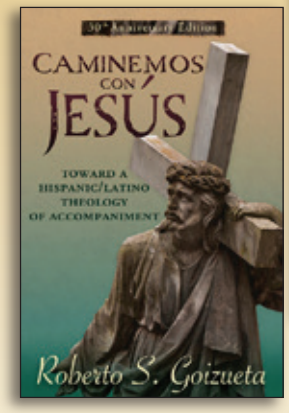

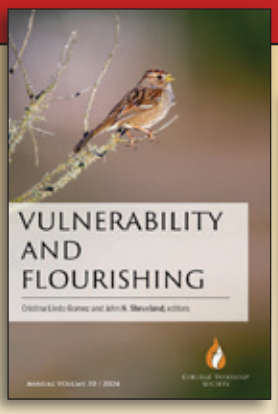

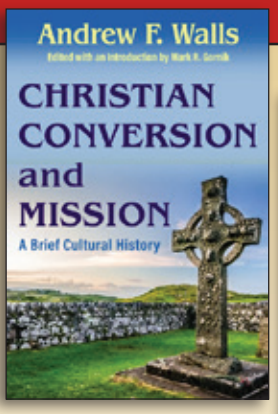

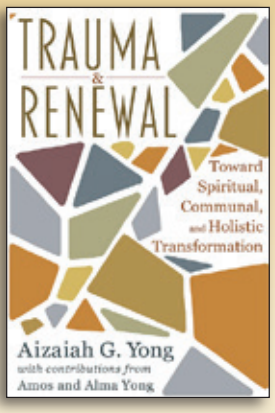

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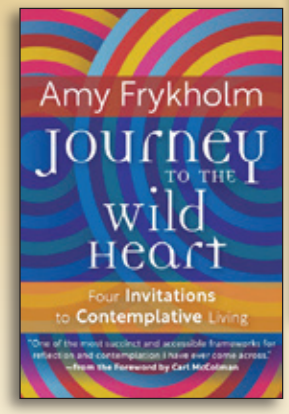

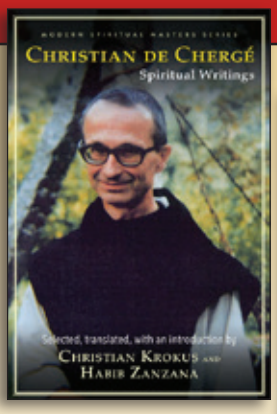

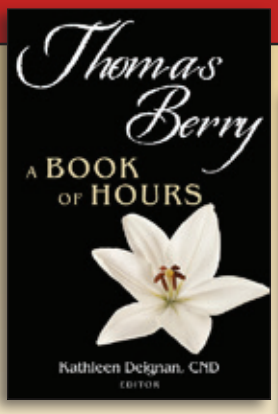

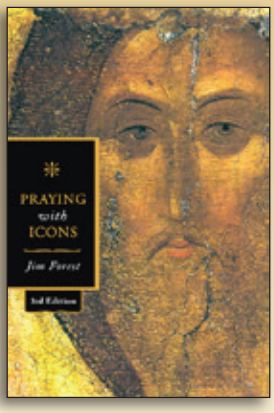

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The Antidote to Christian Nationalism

We need a healthier public square in which people of all backgrounds can work together.

By Rachel Lu

Last fall, an itinerant preacher named Mario Murillo held a rally in Eau Claire, Wis., one stop in a series of appearances he dubbed the Courage Tour. Among the 2,000 or so attendees was a writer for The Atlantic, Stephanie McCrummen, whose published description of the event detailed faith healings, charismatic singing and chanting, and extensive warnings about the Democratic Party and the existential threat it represented to American life and society. Above all, Ms. McCrummen reported, Mr. Murillo was conditioning his listeners to think of themselves as "warriors." The Courage Tour was saturated in martial metaphors, with audience members encouraged at each turn to dedicate themselves to the cause. Ms. McCrummen's piece, "The Christian Radicals Are Coming," rapidly went viral.

Ms. McCrummen has been writing about politicized Christianity for several years now, and she is not the only one worried. Concerns about Christian nationalism have given rise to a slew of books and exposés, typically offering lurid glimpses into radicalized Christian subcultures, paired with warnings that their influence is far deeper and wider than most Americans realize. In another piece, Ms. McCrummen declared that about 40 percent of American Christians, "including Catholics," are under the influence of the New Apostolic Reformation, a charismatic Christian movement that teaches followers they are divinely called to dominate American media, education, business and government. Some would put the numbers even higher. In *Taking America Back for God,* the sociologists Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead argue that over half of all Americans are rightly classified as Christian nationalists.

How concerned should Americans be about this? It is hard to get perspective in such a tumultuous political moment. If the country is indeed being bent to the will of militant theocrats, that is deeply concerning. Still, the sensationalism of some of the reports inspires a certain skepticism in many people. Clearly, a contingent of radicalized Christians exists and has rallied around President Donald Trump, viewing him as a kind of prophetic figure. But how representative are these people of American Christianity more broadly?

Christian influence has waned in American public life, especially among the highly educated. The Pew Research Center suggests that 28 percent of Americans are now religiously unaffiliated, and a Gallup poll indicates that only three in 10 Americans attend religious services regularly. It is hard to tell whether the scholars and journalists decrying Christian nationalism have a sufficiently nuanced understanding of faith and the complex ways in which it can shape believers' lives. They are right to recognize that there is something amiss in the blending of Christian faith and right-wing politics, but it's reasonable to ask whether they have a balanced understanding of the situation. Dramatic events like last year's Courage Tour, which encouraged politically conservative Christians to serve as election workers and poll watchers, are more

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eye-catching than people quietly going to church or reading their Bibles at home. But they may not really be representative of what Jesus means to most American Christians.

Defining Christian Nationalism

In fairness, it really is hard to know what metrics to use to quantify the politicization of faith. Christian nationalism has been a major topic of discussion in the past few years, but it is surprisingly difficult to formulate a clear definition. Dr. Whitehead and Dr. Perry describe it thus: "Simply put, Christian nationalism is a cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civil life." Everyone seems to agree that politics and Christian faith are being linked in problematic ways, but it is not terribly easy to describe that connection with precision. It is "a form of political idolatry," warns the theologian Drew Strait. Paul Miller, a contributing editor at Christianity Today, says that it is "a bad political theory, illiberal in theory and practice, and at odds with key features of the American experiment."

All of these authors seem to agree that Christian nationalism represents a real threat to American democracy, but none can furnish a single, clear marker that would divide nationalist Christians from the more benign variety. Christian nationalists, it would seem, believe that the United States is properly Christian, and that Christians make the best Americans. That is an ugly sentiment. But it also throws open a host of difficult questions.

Faith and Politics

What are "the key features of the American experiment?" How does one distinguish "political idolatry" from healthy civic participation? If Christian nationalism improperly combines politics and faith, the most constructive critique will be rooted in a clear, reasonable view of the right way to relate those two things. Do critics of Christian nationalism have that? Does anyone? This is a problem, not just for Christians, but for people of faith generally. The question of how God and Caesar fit together has always been very hard, no matter which god one has in mind, or which Caesar.

History shows us that the relationship between religious faith and political movements is fluid and endlessly shifting. Religious language may be used by statesmen for honorable ends, or by tyrants on their quest for power. Adolf Hitler, Francisco Franco and Franklin Delano Roosevelt did not draw on religious themes to the same extent or in the same ways, but each clearly tapped into religious feeling and used it for a political end. Hitler and Franco used religious language in cynical and evil ways to establish themselves as dictators, but Roosevelt moved his countrymen deeply with his references to "almighty God" in his famous fireside chats.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a Baptist minister who freely used Christian language in his public (and political) speeches. Abraham Lincoln wrestled with agonizing questions about the workings of divine Providence, clearly understanding his responsibilities as president within that theistic framework. Abolitionists, suffragettes and anti-war protestors are among the many

OSV News photo/screen grab CPAC

An artist paints an image of Donald Trump alongside an image of the face of Christ, onstage at the Conservative Political Action Conference on Feb. 23, 2024.

groups in American history who have publicly used Christian themes to advance social and political causes.

When we see Christian language and imagery are being used opportunistically by corrupt politicians (here in the United States, but also in other countries such as Hungary and Russia), it is only prudent to worry about where that road might lead. Already it has gone to troubling places. No one can forget the Trump Bible, a flag-festooned volume of the Word of God hawked by the American president and the country singer Lee Greenwood, or the rash of "Christian" books and memes declaring Mr. Trump to be God's chosen instrument on earth. We should keep in mind, though, that faith and politics can never be neatly separated. American history, in general, has been a story not of rigid secularism, but rather of a nation in which people of many backgrounds and convictions have mingled freely in the public square, working out their differences through the democratic process. Americans have generally preferred to keep religious radicalism in check not by aggressive weeding, but rather by allowing a thousand flowers to bloom.

The rise of Christian nationalism reflects Christianity's increasingly fraught relationship with mainstream politics and culture, increasingly noticeable over the past 15 years. Writers like Ms. McCrummen are resonating, not only with progressives and secularists, but also with many Christians who have personally watched people they love get swept up in conspiracy theories and extreme views. Christian nationalism is particularly alarming insofar as it channels anger and cultural resentment, which irresponsible grifters (and especially President Trump) have molded into a reactionary radicalism. But when Christians are drawn to illiberal fantasies of repressive theocratic regimes, that is a manifestation of their cultural weakness, not their dominating cultural strength. Christian nationalism is not harmless, but neither is America hurtling toward theocracy. There are, certainly, good reasons to be concerned about threats to our Constitutional order, and a theologically tinged authoritarianism might contribute to that problem. But even or especially if that is true, the goal at this juncture should be a civic peace, negotiated among Americans of all convictions.

The Antidote

The best antidote to Christian nationalism will not be a high and impenetrable "wall of separation" between religion and public life, but rather a healthier and better-integrated public square in which people of all faiths and backgrounds can work together for common goals.

Of course, Christian nationalists are directly opposed to such a healthy integration. Unfortunately, far too many of Christian nationalism's critics are also unable to articulate this kind of robust engagement of religion in public life as a goal. This becomes immediately evident when one digs into the methodology that leads sociologists to declare that huge swaths of American society are infected by Christian nationalism. Drs. Whitehead and Perry, in their influential study, used a six-question survey to gauge respondents' levels of sympathy with Christian nationalism.

CNS photo/Mike Theiler, Reuters

Supporters of President Donald Trump join in prayer outside the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021.

> It is hard to get perspective in such a tumultuous political moment.

Respondents might be tipped into the Christian nationalist category for doubting that "the federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state," or agreeing that "the display of religious symbols" should sometimes be permitted in public spaces. Believing that "the success of the United States is part of God's plan" is another sign of Christian nationalism for the two researchers, though respondents seemingly were not asked whether God also wants *other* nations to succeed or has a plan for them. Thinking the federal government should allow (not require) prayer in public schools was also taken as evidence of Christian nationalist sympathies.

It is fair to assume that the attendees of Mr. Murillo's rallies would overwhelmingly be classified as Christian nationalists. But the category might capture a wide range of other people, too. Some may find it ironic that a subject in Dr. Perry and Dr. Whitehead's study might be classified as a Christian nationalist for believing that Muslim students should be permitted to pray during the school day or that Amish citizens should be given religious exemptions from a military draft. They might be Christian nationalists for being comfortable with Jews displaying a Star of David on a booth at a public festival or simply for thinking that the United States, like all nations, is held in God's Providence, such that any success the nation enjoys is part of a divine plan.

Dr. Perry and Dr. Whitehead's work contributed to a moment of panic in many circles. That concern gave rise to a whole range of conversations, with some comparatively sober and others more histrionic. Georgetown University and the Berkeley School of Theology held conferences on how Christian nationalism threatens democracy. The Center for American Progress declared that Christian nationalism represents the "single biggest threat to American religious freedom," while Americans United for Separation of Church and State warned that these "extreme Christian fundamentalists" are backed by a "billion-dollar shadow network" that "will stop at nothing to secure their power and privilege" by forming a theocratic state. It all sounds deeply alarming, and indeed, if roughly half of Americans wanted to jettison democracy and freedom of religion for an Iranian-style theocracy, that truly would be alarming. But in fact, none of the views the sociologists identify as "Christian Nationalist" obviously entail, or even clearly imply, a desire to repress or marginalize non-Christians. There may well be some groups that harbor such intolerant desires, but the research that has been conducted does not allow the authors, or anyone else, to make informed conclusions about their size, reach or support from ordinary American Christians. If anything, the research may simply show that ordinary American citizens have a more tolerant and nuanced understanding of religious faith than do academic sociologists.

Is Religious Neutrality Possible or Desirable?

In many ways, the Christian nationalism debate illustrates that there is much work to be done in multiple camps. Through most of American history, Christians of various stripes contributed to different political parties and movements in a wide range of ways. Our Constitution prohibits the imposition of "religious tests" as a requirement for voting or holding public office, but until quite recently almost no one supposed that this made religion a taboo subject in political contexts. Of course religion will shape believers' sensibilities and views, contributing to public discourse and motivating many social reformers. America's founders

OSV News photo/Jason Reed, Reuters

Stone tablets depicting the Ten Commandments are shown outside the Supreme Court in Washington on June 27, 2005, placed there during a vigil by a religious group.

wanted to protect freedom of religion in part because they saw it as a crucial ingredient of a healthy polity and culture, which needed to be protected from co-option by the state.

In the later part of the 20th century, a desire for "religious neutrality" became more commonplace, especially in elite legal and scholarly circles. The Supreme Court's 1962 ruling in Engel v. Vitale, which forbade prayer in public schools, was foundational to this new understanding of neutrality. Many of the core ideas of religious neutrality were developed further by legal theorists of this era, such as Justices William F. Brennan and Warren E. Burger. These men showed a strong interest in protecting the private consciences of individuals by building a public square that would be accessible to Americans of all faiths and persuasions.

Concerned that state support for religious institutions would be exclusionary and divisive, they argued that government initiatives should always have clear secular goals and be presented in secular language. Their apparent concern was to avoid state *entanglement* with religion, but they failed to ensure that religious Americans were not marginalized in their public activities and expression. This led to a widespread perception among late-20th-century jurists that the Constitution itself demanded a high and secure "wall of separation" between church and state. That is, public schools, public festivals and other initiatives involving the government should be scrupulously secular.

Even outside legal circles, this probably seemed like a reasonable approach in a time when Christianity, although ebbing, was still overwhelmingly the dominant American faith. When Christianity was perceived as the default belief system, avoiding open or public expressions of Christian faith may have looked like an act of generosity and tolerance, meant to ensure that non-Christians were not marginalized or deterred from civic participation. When committed and churchgoing Christians started to move into a minority status, those same rules and mores took on a different cast. They began to feel oppressive to many Americans, and in a very real sense perhaps they are.

Consider Dr. Perry and Dr. Whitehead's assumption that "religious symbols" should not be permitted in public spaces. This view immediately invites many clarificatory questions: What counts as a religious symbol, or a public space? Should everyone be prohibited from displaying religious symbols, or only people plausibly viewed as representatives of the state? No matter how one interprets the claim, it is obvious that a wide range of nonreligious symbols are permitted in public spaces, including many that are socially divisive: pride flags, a MAGA hat, the raised fist of Black Lives Matter, a Blue Lives Matter flag, or the logos of politically controversial organizations such as Greenpeace, the National Rifle Association, or the American Civil Liberties Union, for instance.

Indeed, there are particular symbols (such as a swastika) that most Americans agree are too offensive to be tolerated in public, but it is understood that free societies should allow people wide latitude to express their views and allegiances through symbols. If religious symbols are treated as an exception case, that starts to look rather repressive. Why are religious people's desires to give visual expression uniquely suspicious?

We might apply a similar line of reasoning to the sub-

ject of education, which inevitably forces us to encounter hard questions about socialization, civic norms, and which ideas or practices are most important or worthy of consideration. When a strong majority of Americans were Christian, excluding religion from public schools might have seemed like a reasonable way of making education more inclusive. Today though, religious perspectives jostle publicly with a range of social and political ideologies, which are clearly competing for social influence whether or not they are classified as religious. If public school students read Karl Marx or the author Ibram X. Kendi, but never encounter thinkers like Pope Leo XIII or Pope John Paul II, religious believers might begin to feel justified in their belief that the public square has been engineered in such a way as to marginalize them. It is not entirely surprising that some then conclude that it is necessary to be more aggressively political.

It is worth considering these points as some Republican-led states, like Oklahoma and Texas, debate whether biblical lessons should be permitted, or even required, in public schools. There are some obvious problems with forcing public school teachers to include the Bible in their curriculum, regardless of their own religious views. But it may also be a mistake to suppose that a default exclusion of religious material achieves a truly neutral approach in such a diverse and divided society.

Respect and Confidence

Radicalized Christians almost certainly are not numerous enough to establish a repressive theocracy, but it does not follow that Christian nationalism is not dangerous. A very small number of zealots in key political roles can be dangerous under the direction of a malevolent leader. And their number may not be so very small. Even if American democracy is not at serious risk, radicalization can carry other costs. It can seriously damage the credibility of Christians, making evangelization more difficult. It can feed into vicious cycles of polarization that are already poisoning our culture and political sphere. It can certainly do real harm to individual souls and lives.

A lasting solution may require Christians to become more comfortable with holding a minority status, at least in certain spheres of American life. Extremists need to be reasoned with and, in most cases, condemned. Catholics may have a role to play here in helping our Protestant compatriots get a perspective on the situation: We have more experience building healthy subcultures within a larger American polity that has sometimes regarded Catholics with suspicion.

At the same time, a lasting solution will also require other Americans to work harder to carve out a space for Christian traditionalists within our civic life. If devout religious believers cannot see a path to healthy civic participation, in accord with their own consciences and convictions, it is inevitable that some will continue to radicalize.

> **There is something amiss in the blending of Christian faith and right-wing politics.**

Unquestionably, building a mutually respectful public square is a challenging task, requiring considerable patience and prudence. Hard questions will need to be broached, over gender ideology, public health, immigration and more. There will be times when particular radicalized subgroups are deemed too offensive or hateful to be tolerated in the mainstream. We must find ways to live together, despite deep disagreement, and this is never easy. Ironically, though, we might actually find a source of hope in the astonishing incivility of the public square in recent years, simply because it points to the possibility that greater cooperation and harmony might really be possible if more people embraced this as a goal.

The drafters of the U.S. Constitution had great respect for religious faith. They chose the path of disestablishment, not creating a state-sponsored church, because they wanted people of diverse views and convictions to be free to live and pursue happiness in keeping with their own consciences. They worried about the effects of zealotry and factionalism, both religious and political, but believed that these could be best contained by respect for the law and the constitutional process. It clearly was never their intention to see religion relegated to the cloisters. Today, it may be the founders' vision that truly feels utopian. Can we really live together peacefully, despite deep disagreement? Is our Constitution up to the task?

It is certainly worth a try. And even in a frenzied hour, we should take up the task with a certain confidence. Americans have a long track record of working out differences in peaceful ways. We know how to do this. It is time to revive our tradition of respectful tolerance.

Rachel Lu *is a freelance writer, an associate editor at Law & Liberty and a regular contributor to National Review. She lives in St. Paul, Minn.*

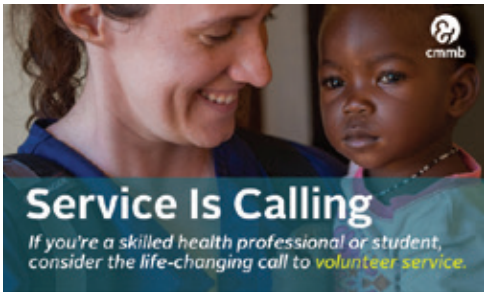
AMERICA'S VOCATION/VOLUNTEER DIRECTORY

Finding time for a retreat can feel daunting, and choosing the right location can be even more challenging. Our list of retreat houses is here to help guide your search. But before diving in, let's start with the basics.

What is a retreat, and why should I consider one? Simply put, a retreat is an extended time dedicated to prayer, often incorporating moments of silence or opportunities for sharing your faith. At a retreat house, spiritual directors or speakers are available to help you connect with God.

How do I know which retreat is right for me? There are various types of retreats, so you can select one that aligns with your spiritual needs. A directed retreat involves meeting daily with a spiritual director to reflect on your prayer life. A guided retreat may focus on a specific theme (like women's spirituality) and offer talks along with opportunities to meet with a director. Preached retreats typically include listening to spiritual talks and praying independently or in faith-sharing groups.

How do I find a retreat that suits me? The retreat houses featured in this guide are excellent starting points. They provide the opportunity to connect with trained professionals who can help you choose a retreat style and location that resonates with you, or even pair you with a regular spiritual director.



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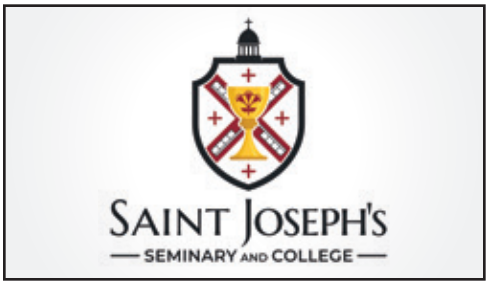

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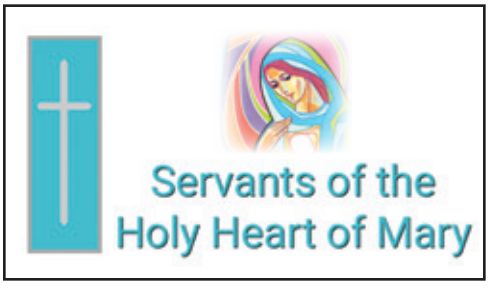

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CNS photo/Carol Glatz

Nicaea and All That

Why a council from 1,700 years ago still matters

By James T. Keane

The church universal this year celebrates the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council intended to address all the churches of Christianity. Though his ongoing recovery from pneumonia may prevent it, Pope Francis had planned to travel to the Turkish city of Iznik (site of the ancient city of Nicaea) in May for a meeting with Bartholomew I, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople. The proposed meeting is to commemorate the anniversary and to recognize a period of Christianity when a greater unity persisted despite significant strife and disagreements—both political and theological.

What happened at Nicaea in A.D. 325? And why is that still so important today? The following might not pass muster in a theology or church history classroom, but it might explain the importance of the anniversary.

Calling the Council

America has been around long enough that an article in the magazine's back pages actually commemorates the *last* centennial anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Writing in 1925, the author claimed a rationale for his piece that seems apt enough to claim it for ourselves as we commemorate 17 centuries since that famous council:

> Sixteen hundred years is a considerable length of time, even in the history of mankind, and it may seem like a very reactionary and ultra-conservative state of mind to refer to an event so distant as being anything which concerns our present-day life and affairs. Still more will this appeal to the modern-minded as being the case, if we announce to them that a decision, made in the year 325 of our era, is to be accepted at full face value in this year of grace 1925. Yet that is exactly what we do and that is the issue which at this moment comes before us.

The above—well, except for the ultra-conservative state of mind—still holds true a century later because Nicaea remains as important as ever for our understanding of God and the core statements of Christian belief.

A wall fresco depicting the First Council of Nicaea can be seen in this photo taken in the Sistine Hall of the Vatican Library on July 19, 2023. The council was held in 325, and its 1,700th anniversary will coincide with the Holy Year 2025.

The First Council of Nicaea (there was a second, 462 years later) was convened by Emperor Constantine in A.D. 325. The bishop of Rome at the time, Sylvester, did not attend the council, but sent delegates in his stead. While it would be wildly anachronistic to consider Sylvester a pope in the manner of the modern papacy, in the fourth century the bishop of Rome was already recognized by most local Christian communities as a "first among equals" (*primus inter pares*); though he lacked jurisdictional authority over other Christian sees or local churches, appeal was often made to the bishop of Rome when disputes arose between churches.

The location of Nicaea itself—in Asia Minor, only 40 miles from Byzantium, which would become Constantinople and usurp Rome as the capital of the Roman Empire under Constantine five years later—is an indicator of where much of the political and ecclesial authority of Christianity rested at the time. In other words, it was not in Rome. In fact, before the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the presence of large Christian communities throughout the Middle East meant Christianity's geographical center was significantly farther to the east than most of us realize.

The Nuts and Bolts

Over 300 bishops participated in the council, almost all from the East. Emperor Constantine (also in attendance) footed the bill for the proceedings, which took place from May through July. The precipitating theological conflict was an ongoing dispute in some Eastern Christian communities among differing views on the nature of Christ.

The chief antagonist (history being written by the victors) was Arius, a presbyter from Alexandria who resisted the notion that Jesus was co-equal with God and that Jesus had existed for all eternity, arguing instead that Jesus was a created being and subordinate to God the Father. Opposing him was Archbishop Alexander of Alexandria (and, eventually, Athanasius, his successor), who held that the Logos, or Son, had existed for all eternity, generated from God the Father but not subordinate to or created by God the Father. The working out of that issue and a number of ancillary theological propositions is what Nicaea is primarily known for today.

The practical results of the council included the following: the promulgation of a common statement of belief (our Nicene Creed); the rejection of certain heresies regarding the nature of Jesus, particularly Arianism (and the subsequent exile of Arius himself); the establishment of some early precepts of canon law; agreement on a common date for the celebration of Easter; practical determinations for handling repentant sinners and recalcitrant bishops; and (no small thing) the establishment of a precedent for handling ecumenical gatherings in the future.

The historian Peter Brown has argued that most of the theological issues settled at the council had already been more or less decided ahead of time, making some of the drama we associate with Nicaea more of a rubber-stamp affair. Nevertheless, the use of an ecumenical council to promulgate such decisions was a momentous development for the church, and it is one of the reasons why the Council of Nicaea has pride of place in church history, along with the Council of Chalcedon, in the estimation of most Christian historians and theologians.

Arianism, Modalism and the Nicene Creed

We are reminded of Nicaea almost every Sunday at Mass when we recite the Nicene Creed (in many places the Apostle's Creed is used during Lent and the Easter season), affirming the core beliefs of every major Christian denomination. For the council fathers at Nicaea, the first and most important question was: Does Jesus the Son descend from God the Father, in the sense that he is a created being that is somehow subordinate, as Arius and his followers argued?

No, said the gathered bishops after much debate; Jesus is, to use the language of the Creed, "begotten, not made, one in being [*homoousios*] with the Father." Ditto for the Holy Spirit, who is co-equal with the other two persons of the Trinity and thus fully God—though, truth be told, the Holy Spirit wasn't a primary focus of Nicaea.

Much of the church—especially in Western parts of the empire overrun by invaders who became Christian—remained influenced by Arianism for decades and even centuries, but the heresy eventually succumbed to history.

A second question addressed what has been variously called monarchianism, modalism or Sabellianism. This heresy was, in the eyes of the church of the third through fifth centuries, an attempt to collapse the three persons of the Trinity into one—God the Father, who acted in different modes or performed different functions or showed different manifestations of divinity. Followers of Arius—stressing the difference between God the Father and Jesus the Son—accused Alexander of Sabellianism for insisting on their equality.

A follower of monarchianism or the other aforementioned variations might say that God the Father creates; God the Son redeems; God the Holy Spirit sanctifies. In

> We are reminded of Nicaea almost every Sunday at Mass when we recite the Nicene Creed.

other words, it's all God, we just see different aspects of God and give God different names when we observe God acting in different ways. Not so, said the bishops at Nicaea. Even if every theologian admits our language for the Trinity—in terms of persons or essences or unities or functions and more—is by nature imprecise and approximate, for the Nicaean bishops as much as in any other area, the language still mattered. There is one God; that God exists in three persons.

All of the theological terms above might sound a bit academic—or a bit of a mystery—to the average Joe, but they were fighting words in certain times and places in the church. Violence broke out, and bishops and theologians were exiled over matters such as this. Even today, East and West remain divided over Western Christianity's addition of the famous "*filioque* clause" to the Creed beginning in the sixth century, stating that the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father *and the Son*." Even if theologians now agree that both sides mean more or less the same thing, the words remain different.

A Common Date for Easter

A more concrete result of the Council of Nicaea was the establishment of a common date for the celebration of Easter, recognized as the church's primary feast and a point of desired unity for all Christian communities. That happy result was confounded 12 centuries later when the Catholic Church chose the Gregorian calendar over the Julian one in 1582, separating East from West. The date of Easter in some years can differ by as much as five weeks between Eastern and Western churches (almost all Protestant denominations follow the Roman Catholic calendar regarding Easter).

While the consensus at Nicaea on a common date can be seen as a remarkable expression of the desire for Christian unity, the decision may also have been an attempt to decouple Easter from the Jewish celebration of Passover, as the date of the commemoration of the latter in Judaism is determined by a similar but slightly different calculus. While Scripture makes it clear that the events of Jesus' death and resurrection were closely tied to the Jewish celebration of Passover, our differing calendars don't always reflect the connection.

Returning Sinners to the Flock

A relatively minor detail—but one with significant repercussions in sacramental history—dealt with at Nicaea was the question of the status of Christians who had fallen into public sin. Could they be welcomed back into the Christian community? If they were ministers in the church, were the sacraments they administered somehow defective or invalid?

It was a question that bedeviled the early church for centuries, particularly during periods of persecution, when some Christians apostasized but then later attempted to return to the community. The canons promulgated at Nicaea made it clear that a consensus was developing among the church's bishops: Sinners can come back. There might be public penances, it might not be a *kumbaya* moment for all, but they can come back.

Historical theologians will point to decisions such as these as important in our development of the sacrament of reconciliation over time—the notion that even grave sin can be forgiven by God and through God's church.

Legends of Nicaea

So what *didn't* happen at Nicaea? The prominence of Nicaea in Christian history has contributed to the durability of certain legends about the council that have very little basis in fact, but provide some color.

Perhaps the most dramatic legend is that the bishops in attendance at Nicaea placed all the books of the Bible then believed to be canonical on an altar and waited to see which ones fell off the pile, thus giving us the contemporary canon. It's completely false; many venerable Christian churches included different books in the Bible for centuries after—ever read 3 Corinthians? Western Christians can largely blame Voltaire, who revived an ancient tall tale, for the persistence of this legend.

The second legend—one popularized in social media with endless memes—is that Santa Claus hopped up at Nicaea and slapped the heresiarch Arius across the face. What's this? As the story goes, Nicholas of Myra, the venerable saint who developed into Santa Claus in Western cultures, was listening to Arius go on at length that Jesus the Son could not be considered equal to God the Father. Nicholas finally decided enough was enough and gave Arius the back of his hand.

Since no one mentioned the story for half a millennium after Nicaea ended (and it's not clear that Nicholas was even at the council), this tale too seems a bit too tall to be believed—even if it still slaps.

Nicaea and the Future

Pope Francis has openly expressed the hope that the Chris-

tian churches can agree on a common date for Easter again. By happy coincidence, this year and in 2028 it will fall on the same day in almost every Christian church, be it Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox. Will the 1,700th anniversary of that council be the occasion when the Christian churches can settle this beef?

While the Trinitarian and Christological controversies debated at Nicaea can sometimes seem like ancient history, they do still crop up today. Even in recent years, for example, the Catholic Church has ruled illegitimate those baptisms done with the *au courant* formula of "the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sanctifier." Why? Because it's a formula that fails to express the Trinity's relationality, and it is modalism all over again. Similarly, the teachings of some Christian sects today still embrace the notion of Jesus as God's created son, or of the Holy Spirit as an action of the Father and the Son rather than a person of the Trinity, notions anathema to Christian denominations since Nicaea.

Perhaps the greatest impact of Nicaea is not theological in nature, but ecclesial. It showed that the Christian community, wracked though it was by theological, political and social divisions, was capable of coming together in a way modelled by Scripture itself in the Acts of the Apostles—and in that walking together, capable of hearing each other out and reaching a consensus on important issues. We have a word for that these days, too. Is it too much of a stretch to call Nicaea a consummate example of synodality at work?

———

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

America's "Inside the Vatican" podcast dives into the history of the Council of Nicaea and Pope Francis' efforts toward a common date for Easter. The April 10 special episode features Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant scholars. Go to **www.americamedia.org** or scan the QR code to listen.

MATINS

By Jerry Harp

The four corners of the wind cry out
that they will never be contained, not as long
as the cheerful globe keeps turning
on its subtly shifting axis,
and the stars go on spreading, dice
cast in the septillions
into the dark that until recently
scared me terribly,
but I must have gotten over it sometime
during that last breakdown.

Before his public ministry, Jesus went into
the desert, where the wily accuser
tempted him in just the way to confuse a savior:
All this I will give you. It must have been really dark
out there, dark as Hell, and Jesus must have been
tired of it all, sick and tired.
No wonder the ministering angels showed up.

The air holds a little light in suspension.
The roseate sky comes into sight just enough
to tilt into another day, just enough,
and when it's over, if
we make it that far, the dark
will creep up again, from legs to shoulders and head.
I'll lean into the savior's lesson—the dark
will do no permanent harm,
and after long enough becomes
its own kind of solace.

———

Jerry Harp's *books of poems include* Creature, Gatherings, *and* Spirit Under Construction. *He is the author of* For Us, What Music? The Life and Poetry of Donald Justice.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

"Two Men Contemplating the Moon" (c. 1825-30), by Caspar David Friedrich

Painting Our Common Home

Caspar David Friedrich and the search for God in art and nature

By Maurice Timothy Reidy

I went to the Met to take in the landscapes. I didn't expect to find an old friend.

"Caspar David Friedrich: The Soul of Nature" arrived at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York this winter after a series of shows in Germany in 2024 marking the artist's 250th birthday. You may not know his name, but it's likely you know his most famous painting. "Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog," the centerpiece of the exhibit, has been imitated numerous times, by artists like Anselm Kiefer and Kehinde Wiley, not to mention Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who used it to pitch the Green New Deal.

The painting, of a single, well-dressed hiker standing on a rocky ledge and gazing out over a foggy landscape, is a classic scene of man alone with nature. It's the sort of work that puts you in mind of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden,* which was published 40 years after Friedrich composed his painting.

But the "Wanderer" can be a little misleading. Most of Friedrich's work is not interested in a single human being alone in nature. Some of my favorites were of families or friends taking in the natural world around them. And those without people often featured religious imagery, like crucifixes on mountaintops. This is especially true of his early work.

Later in his career, he sought to evoke the "soul of nature" without any explicitly religious images. But God was there nonetheless. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas writes that God "produced many and diverse creatures, so that what was wanting to one in representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another." That is Friedrich in spades, capturing shards of divine beauty wherever he could find them.

I found that last quotation in "Renewing the Earth," the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter on the environment from 1991. I read the document after visiting the Met because I had a hunch that it was ghostwritten by my friend and former boss at **America**, Drew Christiansen, S.J., who died in 2022. And it was Drew, even more than Thoreau or Aquinas, whom I was surprised to encounter amid the German landscapes on the Upper East Side.

Finding Solace

When I began working at **America** in 2006, Drew had been editor in chief for just over a year. He worked out of a large editorial office on the second floor of America House, which was then located on West 56th Street in Manhattan. I worked a floor above, in a small office that had once been a room in a hotel before the Jesuits acquired the building. Drew would often stop by my office to chat, and often our conversation turned to nature. When I told him I was going to the Catskills he recommended a trail in Claryville. Over the winters he advised me as I took up cross-country skiing.

Drew liked to take walks in Central Park to find solace. "The park has become for me, as for so many, a haven where I can breathe the light, smell the earth and listen to birdsong," he wrote in one of his many Of Many Things columns. As a boy growing up in Staten Island, he would hike in the Adirondacks or the Catskills. Later, while studying and teaching in Berkeley, Calif., he would take long retreats in the mountains with his fellow students and other Jesuits. "In the summer, we would often camp and hike for a week at a time," Drew wrote. "In the best years, it has meant three weeks outdoors for retreat and vacation."

When I knew him, Drew did not have the same freedom to take weeklong retreats in nature because of age and some physical ailments. But that didn't deter his enthusiasm for the natural world. At least once a year he recommended a nature scene for the cover of the magazine. One picture, of a cardinal sitting on a snowy tree branch in winter, provoked a lot of discussion among our readers. What was **America** saying about the hierarchy? Drew just liked the photograph.

When Drew died, 10 years after he left **America** for Georgetown University, my colleague Jim Keane wrote a lovely essay about his nature writing for the magazine: "The opening lines of his 2004 cover story for **America,** 'Into the High Country,' read like a cross between Tolstoy and Jack London: 'The days were lengthening. Daylight itself seemed brighter. The sap was rising in the trees, and with it I felt the wanderlust rising in me.'"

Drew's love for nature found its way into his work for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, where he helped build on the themes introduced in "Renewing the Earth." Walter Grazer, who served as director of the environmental justice program for the U.S.C.C.B., spoke about the importance of that document at a forum at Georgetown University. "We have to remember that this pastoral was released at a time when the broader religious community, and certainly the Catholic Church with the exception of a few bishops' conferences, had not yet placed concern for the environment on their agendas," Mr. Glazer said. "In this sense it was a prophetic pastoral."

> **This is Friedrich in spades: capturing shards of divine beauty wherever he could find them.**

Christ and the Landscape

Caspar David Friedrich arrives in New York at a time when the environment is on everyone's agendas. (Well, almost everyone's.) Nature as a fount of wisdom, spiritual or otherwise, has been conventional wisdom for some time now. So it's interesting to note how Friedrich's work was received in the 19th century.

One of the painter's critics was his fellow German Basilius von Ramdohr, who took him to task for his painting "Cross in the Mountains," which placed a crucifix in the background of a distant landscape. He saw it as a sign of disrespect for Christ. It would be "a veritable presumption, if landscape painting were to sneak into the church and creep onto the altar," he wrote.

Such a sentiment seems antiquated today, of course. We all like to find God in nature: Just ask the pastor who has to explain why a Catholic marriage must be celebrated in a church rather than outdoors. But time has also perhaps made it more difficult to see God's fingerprints in Friedrich's paintings. A Christian imagination, for example, might look at the artist's famous painting "A Monk by the Sea" and see a solitary man wrestling with the vastness of the world and God's place in it. The exhibit's catalog notes that Friedrich was "trying to express, through landscape, the conditions of belief itself: an experience of the ineffable." Yet a critic today looks at it and sees nothing but a man alone in the universe. A critic for The New Yorker called it a "portrait of the most impossible thing in the world to represent: emptiness."

In contrast, consider this quotation from John Updike, a Christian, who wrote about Friedrich for The New York Review of Books in 1991: "If Friedrich meant to imply Presence with his controlled, emptied vistas, and we can feel only absence, well, Absence is an old friend, and we wouldn't know what to do with Presence if It came up and hit us in the face."

What, then, does Presence look like? One can look, of course, to the religious images in Friedrich's paintings. In addition to crucifixes, he painted the ruins of cathedrals in the German countryside. "Ruins of Oybin" (c. 1812)

Finding Presence in a landscape can be more difficult. But start by looking to the skies.

features a derelict Celestine monastery, which he encountered during a hiking trip. Friedrich's practice was to sketch his scene on site, and then complete the final painting in his studio. In this case he added a crucifix, an altar and a sculpture of the Madonna and child to his final work.

Finding Presence in a landscape can be more difficult. But start by looking to the skies. "While light is the commonest metaphor for divinity," Updike wrote in his essay, "Friedrich's skies, which often take up more than half of his picture-space, show an especial tropism toward the realm of the glowing impalpable."

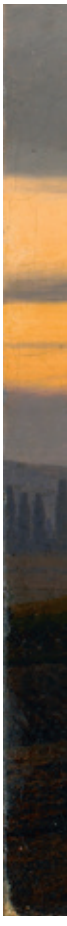
For examples, see "Coastal Landscape in Morning Light" (c. 1817) or "The Evening Star" (c. 1830), both on view at the Met (the exhibit is open through May 11). The latter caught my eye because of the way it brings together nature and people. A boy, gesturing toward the evening sky, stands apart from his mother and, presumably, his sister. The Dresden skyline, marked by cathedral spires, can be seen in the distance. "The Evening Star" is Venus, but the planet is almost impossible to make out without the help of the painting's accompanying text. Indeed, the boy is the star of this painting, at least for me; he, not the sky, is the subject of his mother's gaze. He is with his family, but apart from them, and their distance foreshadows the day when he will leave home.

Triggers for Prayer

In his essay "Into the High Country," Drew wrote that "the mountains hold natural triggers for prayer." For Drew, it was flowing water or a field of wildflowers. For others, it was an encounter with animals. But friendship was also key. At the end of each day's hike, Drew and his fellow backpackers would gather for Mass and spiritual conversation. At night they would sit by the fire and watch the stars. These were moments of "emotion recollected in tranquility," to quote Wordsworth's definition of poetry, but with another ingredient added to the mix: conversation.

Daniel Groody, C.S.C., vice president at the University of Notre Dame, accompanied Drew on some of these hikes as a graduate student. He remembers them fondly, especially the way the graces of the retreat would carry

"Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog" (c. 1817) Hamburger Kunsthalle



over into the months and years to follow. Drew sometimes could not complete a hike because of physical limitations, but those moments in nature "profoundly affected him," Father Groody told me.

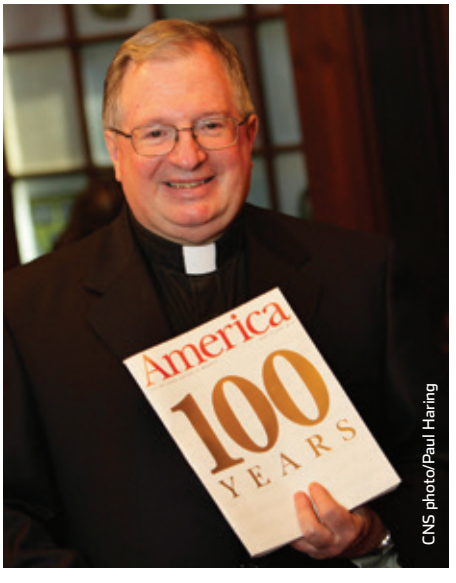
Drew was particularly inspired by the Jesuit paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin, who saw creation as imbued with the Spirit. "He often pointed me in that direction," Father Groody recalled, "and it gave me a whole new way of understanding the sacramentality of creation."

In "Two Men Contemplating the Moon" (c. 1825-30), Friedrich paints two men on a hillside looking at the moon in the distance. One man holds a walking stick, while the other rests his arm on his friend's shoulder for support. The taller, older man is thought to be Friedrich himself, and the second his student, August Heinrich. Unlike in the "Wanderer," these men do not face the world alone. They contemplate life's beauty and its mysteries together. Is God present? It would depend, it seems, on the viewer. When Samuel Beckett saw the painting a century later, he was inspired to write "Waiting for Godot," a play much more about Absence than Presence. But the evening star is there, once again, and the spring moon suggests nothing so much as the "glowing impalpable."

In "Renewing the Earth," the U.S. bishops tried to

Frankfurter Goethe-Haus

"The Evening Star" (c. 1830)



CNS photo/Paul Haring

Drew Christiansen, S.J., in 2009

strike a balance. They worried that "twentieth-century Americans have.. grown estranged from the natural scale and the rhythms of life on earth." They invoked Scripture ("Mountains and hills, bless the Lord...") and the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins to turn our hearts toward the goodness of the natural world. That call has been heard, most notably by Pope Francis.

But while God can be found in nature, the bishops noted, nature is not itself God. It can only offer glimpses of God. What's more, nature cannot be seen apart from the humans who inhabit—to use a more recent phrase—"our common home." "A distinctively Catholic contribution to contemporary environmental awareness," the bishops write, "arises from our understanding of human beings as part of nature, although not limited to it."

It is this mix, of people immersed in nature but also finding time to care for one another, that I found most compelling in the work of Caspar David Friedrich, and which reminded me of my friend Drew. So go to the Met, or pick up the catalog, and revisit the bishops' pastoral letter from 1991. It ends with a prayer I remember well from my early days at **America**, for Drew recited it at the beginning of every meeting:

> Send forth thy Spirit, Lord
> and renew the face of the earth.

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

My Ecumenical Marriage

Our faith and our relationship are strengthened by our different perspectives

By Damian Whitney

I have been an active and devout Catholic my entire life, and my wife is faithfully and resolutely Protestant. We both strive to make our Christian faith the center of every aspect of our life, including our marriage, despite the fact that we come from and continue to follow different faith traditions.

Still, when I had coffee with our parish priest to discuss my interest in teaching in our parish adult Christian initiation program, I mentioned our differing beliefs to him. I admire my wife's strong and vibrant faith, but I admit that it makes me worry about how we are perceived by some in our parish. I was afraid it might somehow compromise my ability to lead newcomers into the church, especially since most of them would be coming from Protestant backgrounds, like my wife.

It was not easy to start this conversation. But I needn't have worried. Our priest was enthusiastic. He pointed out that this kind of "mixed Christian marriage" is increasingly common, and having laypeople representing a happy, faithful, "mixed" marriage in the parish will give others a sense of shared experience and someone relatable to talk with.

Of course, our marriage, like any relationship, takes work. My wife and I took a long time to develop a mutually supportive and robust sense of shared faith. Before we began dating, we each shared mixed experiences of encounters with the other's faith background. Personal and historical baggage at times inspired competition or comparison rather than collaboration in our discussions on faith. We loved each other and we wanted to be married, so the pressure to find a compromise added to the strain of our religious debates.

Everything changed when we realized that we were having rich and fruitful conversations about faith, not in spite of our different perspectives but because of them. What began as challenging debate evolved into a supportive and ongoing dialogue. It occurred to me that if I had married a Catholic woman with a similar perspective, as I had imagined I would, I would have missed out on this kind of lively faith building discussion that my wife and I now treasure. Being challenged in my faith encourages me to engage in it more deeply, rather than slip into a kind of spiritual inertia that does not nurture a healthy, growing faith life.

We found that these discussions have become an engine that drives our mutual growth in God. My Catholic identity and my wife's Protestant identity continue to endure, and our faith has developed together in greater harmony, knowing that our love for each other was ultimately

grounded in our love for God. To emphasize this understanding of our marriage, we engraved our wedding rings with a reference to the passage from Ecclesiastes that describes a rope as stronger with three cords, an image popularly used to illustrate that God is the transcendent third party in a marriage.

When I began a theology program at Marquette University, I found myself drawn to the subject of ecumenism as an area of emphasis, perhaps because of the way I have experienced it in our marriage and the way it shaped my own faith. Eccumenism is an important aspect of the post-Vatican II church, and yet it seems underdiscussed among the laity, especially considering the growing proportion of "mixed Christian marriages."

As in our marriage, much of the ecumenical progress made between the Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations evolved gradually and had to overcome a sense of embattled competition before building a collaborative, respectful atmosphere. The recent progress in ecumenism is more than just abstract, theological discourse. Significant advances have been made in repairing historic animosity, and even violence, between churches, establishing theological common ground as new focal points in dialogue, as well as creating new spaces for meaningful, collaborative outreach where different Christian churches pool resources and work together. These ecumenical milestones are recorded famously in Cardinal Walter Kasper's book *Harvesting the Fruits*. Cardinal Kasper stresses that ecumenism is not about relativism or agreeing on the lowest common denominator. Rather, it is a matter of taking our theological differences seriously and seeking common ground while being careful not to minimize our very real disagreements.

Cardinal Kasper observes that the broad aim of ecumenism is unity in Christ. It is also the guiding principle that my wife and I use to characterize our marriage, as our ring inscriptions remind us. This ideal of Christian unity is a common thread in all the major ecumenical works, including the Second Vatican Council's "Decree on Ecumenism" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*). The introduction to this document boldly states that believers who are content with division in Christianity proceed as though Christ himself were divided. It goes on to state that those who seek unity are witnesses to the triune God, either as individuals or institutions. The document emphasizes that the laity must live out ecumenism on behalf of the church through different aspects of daily life, including marriage.

There are many reasons why I think the average parishioner would benefit from learning more about ecumenical family life between Christian denominations. A personally relevant one is that ecumenism provided a vocabulary for me to better understand my marriage and to situate it in my family's parish life. Our marriage is not just an image of ecumenism; it is a real micro-example of ecumenism being lived out by regular Christians. Our discussions push our faith to grow and evolve, but we do this in the ecumenical spirit by recognizing that our unity is in Christ and our marriage is given to us by the Holy Spirit. This is why I now think of us as having an ecumenical marriage, rather than a "mixed Christian" marriage. Like the post-conciliar church and its denominational partners, we let the discussions about our real differences lead us to unity in Christ.

Ecumenism provided a vocabulary for me to better understand my marriage.

Before we were married, we assumed one of us would end up feeling like a guest at the other's church. That changed at the marriage encounter retreat we did in preparation for our wedding. We had to discuss why we wanted to get married in the Catholic Church. I tried to explain that to me, the church was like the vine that connected us to Jesus, to each other and to other Christian denominations. My wife later told me that conversation helped her see what being involved in a Catholic parish meant to me. She said: "After that talk, I really felt like it was my church too, even if I don't totally agree with you theologically." Similarly, I thrive off of her ability to make a relationship with Jesus the lens though which she sees everything. It makes every interaction she has a kind of prayer, and her example has helped me evolve more spiritually than any theology I have studied. At church, she is deep in prayer when I return to the pew after Communion and we hold hands. This, to me, illustrates the fruits of ecumenism.

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Springtime in the French Church

By Jason M. Baxter

If I told you that I visited Notre-Dame de Paris in March of this year and that, while there, I had begun to get this strange feeling that something warm and new was stirring within the French Catholic Church, you might smile at me and point out that nothing is more clichéd than spring in Paris, and I would have to admit that this year on Ash Wednesday, the weather in Paris really was on its best behavior.

But I might counter: "Yes, but things are happening!"

"Like what?"

"Like 800 people attending a weekday Mass on Thursday in Lent. Or 2,000 people attending one of the three Masses on Ash Wednesday. Like young people coming to Mass and saying the responses and singing out loud and kneeling on those really hard stones, and asking tourists not to take photos during the consecration."

"*Shouldn't* those things happen in church?"

"Sure, but do they happen in our suburban parishes? Anyway, there's more."

"Go on."

"For instance, I saw an Italian woman, standing in front of the 14th-century 'Virgin of the Pillar,' weeping after Communion. At other times, on the same spot, I saw a Black French woman stretching out her arms in front of the statue of our Lady and, later, a woman with Asian features

OSV News photo/Ludovic Marin/Reuters

The facade of Notre-Dame de Paris is seen on Dec. 7, 2024, ahead of its official reopening ceremony after more than five years of reconstruction work.

hiding behind a column but praying as well. And the priests stop their procession to say the Angelus in front of the statue at noon. I saw French families on their knees praying after Mass and solitary people leaning their heads on the wooden chairs in front of them, even after the organ postlude died away. The celebrant told us on Ash Wednesday that we had come here because we had the desire to repent, and on the following Friday, the celebrant enthusiastically preached, *'Jésus se donne à nous dans l'Eucharistie! Jésus se donne à nous dans l'Eucharistie!'* And did you know that Notre-Dame de Paris has Eucharistic adoration Fridays in Lent? Something felt different this time. Of course there were the usual tourists, whose photos, somehow, seemed even more narcissistic. But it's almost like La Cathédrale de Notre-Dame de Paris feels young again, almost—dare I say it?—*holy.*"

"But this is Paris. And you're talking about Notre-Dame. Shouldn't it feel 'holy'?"

"But that's my point! To understand why these sprigs of hope are so exceptional, we have to remember that this *is* Paris and this *is* Notre-Dame."

"What do you mean?"

"Let me back up."

Back From the Dead

In the mid-20th century, after World War II, Europeans were convinced that European culture was almost dead. Grumpy Evelyn Waugh, for instance, wrote the *Sword of Honour* trilogy to explore how the protagonist, Guy Crouchback, from an old, recusant English Catholic family, wanted to go to war in order to rekindle the dying coals of his family's chivalry. What he found was a world of calculations, bureaucracy, waiting and paperwork. The modern machinery of war grinds up chivalric impulses. Waugh has one of his characters say to Guy: "Can't you understand men aren't chivalrous anymore...?" And if chivalry was dead across Christendom, the Jesuit Karl Rahner was convinced that piety had also entered a "wintry season." Rahner said that while our ancestors might have been able to enjoy the "luxury" of "elaborate systems of devotion," we have to reconcile ourselves to the fact that "in this wintry season, the tree of...devotion cannot be expected to bear such an abundance of leaves and blooms in the form of the various devotions and pious practices of the past" ("Christian Living Formerly and Today").

It is difficult to deny that France is now in such a "wintry season" of piety. Official statistics report that only 29 percent of French citizens now identify as Catholic, and, of those, only 8 percent are "practicing" (which, for the government, means attending Mass once a month). That means that only about 2 percent of French people now rise even to the level of a tepid Catholicism. To put this in context, there are now—again, according to governmental statistics—more practicing Muslims than practicing Catholics in France.

This winter has been a long time in coming, in part due to the centuries-long inimical relationship between church and state in France. There was the persecution of Catholic priests after the Revolution and the closing of the monasteries during the reign of Napoleon; but then there

The whole cathedral feels bright, colorful and playful, both joyful and serious at once.

was the Law of Association (1901), which led to the dramatic expulsion by the military of the monks of the Grande Chartreuse. France has its own sexual abuse scandals, too. An English-speaking religious I met with during my stay in Paris told me that on his first day in the city, he came up out of the Metro, wearing clerics, and within five minutes, a man approached him and spat on him. "I never figured out why. Maybe a victim of abuse? Or maybe centuries of anti-Catholicism? I don't know." Welcome to the wintry season for the faith in Paris.

In the midst of wintry conditions—those of us from cold climates know this so well!—any sprig in the springtime is cause for rejoicing. In Waugh's novel, Guy receives a letter from his father, which he carries with him at all times in his pocket. His favorite lines are these: "The Mystical Body doesn't strike attitudes or stand on its dignity. It accepts suffering and injustice.... Quantitative judgements don't apply."

Perhaps this explains—at least in part—the shock and horror of the burning of Notre-Dame in 2019, because it felt to many that this was more than an architectural emergency; it was a symbol that Catholicism in France was on the verge of collapsing. A college professor, Philippe (mid-30s), a native Parisian of several generations, adds this: "It was the symbol that our whole country was burning." Another young Parisian (mid-20s), Max, a bilingual journalist in the U.K. and France, told me something I had never heard on the news. He said that while Notre-Dame was on fire, thousands of concerned, young French Catholics spontaneously assembled in front of the cathedral to pray the rosary. I asked him: "Why? Did it feel to them, almost, that the spiritual heart of the country was on fire?" He answered: "That's exactly how they felt." He said the young people there, who assembled spontaneously, were moved by a sense of shock, but also hope. They felt that they were ready to reaffirm their spiritual heritage.

Whatever the reasons, the numbers are interesting. As the English-speaking religious told me, "France has always been a country of piety and pious practices. So you've got to look for signs of revival there." For instance, there is an annual pilgrimage from Paris to Chartres, as well as daily pilgrimages to Lourdes. These are growing. The Dominicans sponsored a rosary procession during the summer. It was much larger than all expectations. Then in 2024 there was a 30 percent nationwide increase in Easter baptisms (the time for converts): 7,000 adults and 5,000 teenagers. And a surprising number of those entering into the Catholic Church were former Muslims, who face alienation from their families and, in some cases, are threatened with punishment for apostasy. The Diocese of Paris has set up charities to help converts to Catholicism.

Young, Devout and French

After a weekday Mass at Notre-Dame, I spoke to three Parisians in their mid-30s. I had noticed one of them, Fitzgerald (a native Parisian, but named after the American who loved Paris so much), asking tourists around him to stop taking photos during the consecration. They talked to me about what it felt like to be young, devout Catholics. Alexis, a tour guide, told me: "There are few of us, but we believe. And I also believe in reason. John Paul II says that faith and reason are like two wings, upon which we can fly. The French tried to live by reason alone during the Revolution, but man is a spiritual animal."

I asked them what they would say to someone who speculated that Catholicism is going to die out in France within 20 years. Aurélie passionately shook her head: "No! You cannot predict what happens in the heart." I don't think she meant to echo Pascal, but she did. Then she added: "I know this. Because it happened to me. I came back to the church 10 years ago." Fitzgerald, an affable actor and comedian, gave me a passionate explanation: "People in their 30s and 40s are coming back. We try to be engaged, to pray every day and to speak to others. Some of us even dare to share our faith publicly by participating in a movement called Anuncio. This is a time of renewal."

There are other signs of renewal, they told me, like

Sipa via AP Images

The first Mass for the public at the restored Notre-Dame de Paris is celebrated on Dec. 8, 2024.

the charismatic movement Emmanuel. They told me they had witnessed healings. I went to a vigil Mass at Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs on the Saturday before I departed, and although I didn't witness anything miraculous, I was impressed by the quiet devotion of the priest, who uttered the words of the consecration, word by word, and held the host exalted for almost 60 seconds. A simple print-out of the face from the Shroud of Turin hung from the altar, the priest told me, to replace the usual flowers. When I asked him if there were any signs of renewal, he said: "Well, today 639 people presented themselves at the cathedral, formally requesting the sacrament of baptism this Easter."

My friend, Philippe, admits to having more traditional tastes, although he hastened to add, "I am not schismatic, and I understand that there are many sensibilities." Nevertheless, he tells me, the traditional Latin Mass is rapidly growing in popularity in France. Philippe—who was trained in theoretical physics—explained the appeal: "God is outside of time. He is eternal. Thus, for me, the church should not bother too much about being current. Ancient things, because they are old, feel more like eternity."

When I asked Fitzgerald, Alexis and Aurélie if this renewal had anything to do with the burning and restoration of *la cathédrale*, I got a surprising answer: "Before the cathedral caught fire, I thought of this church as a place for tourists. It was only a national symbol. But now it has a 'taste.'" I asked him to explain what that "taste" was: "We feel so honored and privileged to be here, where it is new and clean and light. The image of Notre-Dame on fire was an open wound, a trauma. But people can now feel that a place like this has been a house of prayer for 800 years. Prayer has accumulated within these walls."

Fitzgerald is right to emphasize how bright and young the cathedral feels now. French restorationists sprayed a liquid latex on the walls, which, after coagulating over several days, was then peeled off, like a sticker in a children's book. It took all the dirt and grime with it, revealing the creamy white limestone from 800 years ago. It's so clean and brilliant that the light coming through the windows in the clerestory casts its changing patterns along the oppo-

Archbishop Laurent Ulrich of Paris inaugurates the reopening of Notre-Dame de Paris by knocking on the doors with his pastoral staff, or crosier, on Dec. 7, 2024.

iStock/Johan10; iStock/Elena Shilina

site walls. In addition to this, restorationists found layers of paint on columns that had grown dull. They freshened up those colors, too. The whole cathedral feels bright, colorful and playful, but in a way the organ music is both joyful and serious at once.

Almost losing the cathedral to the fire helped draw attention to details that might have previously passed unnoticed. I had forgotten, for instance, the logic of the sculptures on the facade. On the rightmost of the three great portals, there is a carved image of the Nativity, told in comic-book style, in a narrative band, but without frames. Above this lintel, on the tympanum, we have another image of Mary, seated on a throne and holding Christ (the Throne of Wisdom). But this is a Mary who is outside of time, although hovering above an image that took place within time. Above the Throne of Wisdom, an angel seems to peel away the mist that separates our vision from heaven, temporarily emerging into our space, from eternity. It looks as if he's coming from inside the cathedral to the outside, into our secular, outdoor space.

Above the left portal, we have an image of the Coronation of the Virgin, where yet another angel is "emerging" from the cathedral, into our space. And high above the central portal, of course, is the great rose window—miraculously undamaged during the fire. From outside you cannot see its color, only the intricate patterns of the stone tracery. And yet, a statue of Our Lady, standing on top of the triangular pinnacle, is in the direct line of sight between us—on the ground—and the rose window of eternity. She has been elevated, lifted up beyond the world of time, and pulled up into an Eternity. In other words, the whole facade feels like a T. S. Eliot poem carved in stone, playing on the paradoxes of inside and outside, eternity and time, inwardness and outwardness. The facade acts like an iconostasis—or in the medieval West, an altar screen—where mysteries from deep time make discreet manifestations into ours, while the lowly and holy are pulled up and into it. "Quantitative judgments don't apply."

Restoration and Renewal

I asked Fitzgerald if he thought the restoration had anything to do with the renewal: "I'm sure that people have been converted because of it. They suddenly realized what all this is." He pointed to Our Lady of the Pillar: "That statue right there, of Notre-Dame? Paul Claudel converted, suddenly, on the spot. And now this statute has been preserved. Even though stones and molten lead were falling all around it, it wasn't damaged. It was a miracle. In fact, Notre-Dame should have collapsed. It was about to. Yes, the firefighters helped, but it was the prayers made by those outside to Our Lady to preserve her cathedral that saved it from total collapse. This place is not a reconstruction: It is a resurrection!"

He was pointing to the statue of Mary in front of

which I had seen so many people devoutly praying. Here again, you can note that, at its base, an angel is, yet again, emerging from some deeper world into ours. Mary is very young and graceful, but also grave. Though serious, it feels as if she could burst into a smile at any second, looking at the infant. Her face is stylized and has a beauty that could be Asian, African and European, somehow at once.

Not everyone is quite so optimistic. The English-speaking religious reminded me that "you have to remember that Notre-Dame feels to many in France like the Statue of Liberty feels like in America." And yet, if you thought the stump was dead, you tend to be excited over any new sprigs that it puts out in the spring. The English-speaking religious put it like this: "A historian I admire makes the distinction between 'intention' and 'motivation.' The reality is that most of the time we don't live up to our 'intentions.' We're motivated by something else. And yet, it's only our intentions that we can actually control. But if we do, we might, retroactively, transform our motivations. I think something like that is happening here. Everyone in France is telling the young people: 'We tried that already. It doesn't work. The church is compromised. It's lost its voice.' But then they do it anyway, they go out and engage in those practices of public piety, despite the utilitarian calculations and despite contemporary perception. They don't do this with a sense of heroism, but they do it against the pragmatists."

Notre-Dame de Paris felt to me almost like a giant hospital. When I attended Mass, there were nearly 2,000 people who came, as the celebrant put it, because they were moved with a desire to repent. The procession was made up of about 20 priests—needed to take ashes and the Eucharist among the people—following behind a simple, silver cross, elevated above all of our heads, as the tourists turned from photographing the building to making videos of the procession. If the burning of Notre-Dame was a fitting symbol for the de-Christianization of France, could the restoration of Notre-Dame be a hopeful omen for an unlooked-for springtime, in which the young are leading the way?

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From the Ashes

OSV News talked to friends and admirers of Notre-Dame about the cathedral's phoenix-like resurrection.

"When the fire happened at Notre-Dame, it cut me so deep as I watched it in real time," said Ron St. Angelo, a photographer who documented the cathedral during repairs. "It felt like we were watching something that I would compare to seeing the Crucifixion." Circling the cathedral with his camera, however, St. Angelo became more optimistic. "I started seeing all of the reconstruction and scaffolding and everything—and I thought, 'They're bound and determined to recreate this,'" he said. "So, in a way, it was akin to the Resurrection—because it was brought back to life."

Among those entrusted with that task was Jennifer Feltman, an associate professor of art history at the University of Alabama who specializes in medieval art. She is a member of the Chantier Scientifique de Notre Dame working group organized by the French government to play a role in the cathedral's preservation.

"When I saw the Paris skyline without the spire of Notre-Dame, it was deeply sad. At the same time, it felt hopeful to see the energy of the workers and to meet researchers involved in the restoration, with whom I have been working," she said. "There is a great sense of pride among all and a collective energy of being part of something that is much bigger than us."

The river of funding that flowed to Notre-Dame after the catastrophe perhaps defied expectations—or not, given the apparently universal affection for the cathedral. St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York established a "St. Patrick's to Notre Dame" fund to contribute to the rebuilding effort. The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington also aided the effort.

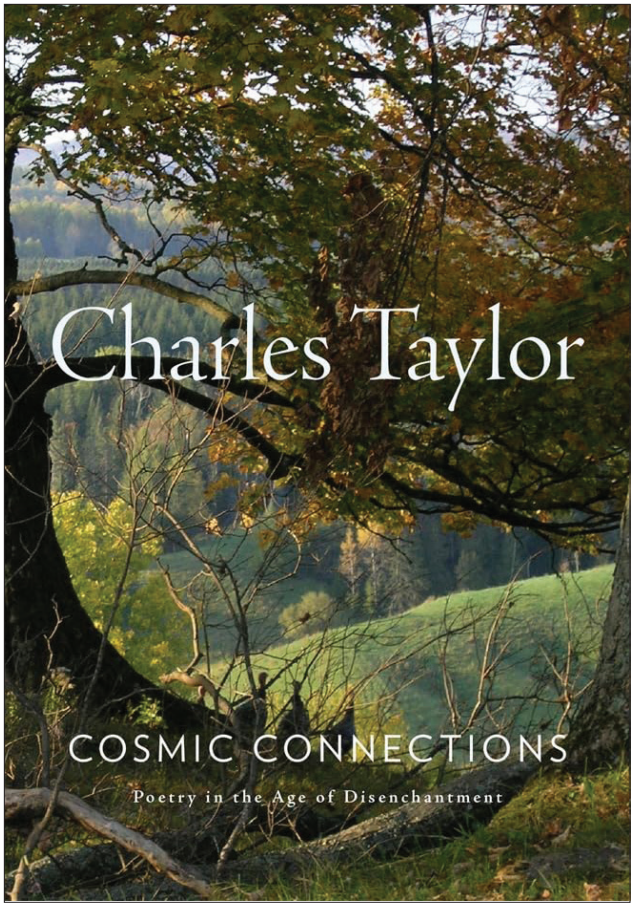
Vanessa Corcoran, a medieval scholar and advising dean in the College of Arts and Sciences at Georgetown University in Washington, said such collaboration was key.

"In a world that's so filled with division right now, the desire to unite across different disciplines and interests in order to save Notre-Dame—and to restore it to its glory—is an amazing thing," she said.

"The reopening of Notre-Dame in Paris once again allows for a unique encounter with the Divine," said Father Edward Looney, secretary of the Mariological Society of America. "Many seek out the cathedral for its history and beauty, while at the same time they come in contact with the Lord, his mother, and the saints. A visit offers a person grace—whether they realize it or not."

—Kimberley Heatherington, OSV News.

POEMS OF ENCHANTMENT



Harvard University Press / 496p $38

To my mind, the career of the Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor embodies the very spirit of "Gaudium et Spes," the Second Vatican Council's revolutionary vision for the church's engagement with the modern world. Its famous opening paragraph reads like the backstory of Taylor's body of work over 60 years:

> The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.

In massive—and massively influential—books like *Sources of the Self*, *A Secular Age*, *The Language Animal* and now *Cosmic Connections*, Taylor sympathetically enters into the grief and anguish, the joys and hopes of modern humanity. He is a philosopher of remarkable erudition, but his philosophical brilliance is, fundamentally, an act of service to fellow humans. Taylor is a thinker with heart. His rigorous philosophical analysis is, in the end, existential: He wants to help us understand ourselves. He wants to help us articulate our longings and losses. He wants to hear, even in our grief and anguish, a still small whisper that calls us to something more. He wants us to find fulfillment.

If there is one theme that shapes all of his work, it is human *yearning*. Human longing for meaning seems remarkably durable despite all the revolutions we've experienced in modernity—political, scientific, industrial. Taylor carefully tracks all the ways we have "disenchanted" the world, even reaching a point where we imagine this world is all there is (what Taylor calls "exclusive humanism" or "naturalism"—a worldview that excludes souls and Spirit). Even if he personally disagrees with this, his curiosity is genuine and open-hearted.

How do people make sense of themselves if we live in this claustrophobic "immanent frame" of our own making? Taylor is intrigued by the enduring human need to make life *meaningful* even if people give up on God or eternity. We don't seem to be the sorts of creatures who can remain satisfied with the flattened world of instrumental reason, technological mastery or mindless consumption. So many of us keep looking for an elusive "more," what Taylor likes to call "fullness."

In this latest book, Taylor (again) ambitiously covers hundreds of years of modern "disenchantment." But this time he focuses on how art, and poetry in particular, both expresses and responds to the unique human experience of "being modern." We live in a world that the gods have fled and, often enough, the reality of God is far from obvious or axiomatic. This is what it is to be modern. For Taylor, Rilke's poetry faces the reality of "ontological insecurity" (we don't know what's real anymore) and names the "existential insecurity" that flows from this: We feel vulnerable, exposed to meaninglessness. We can't shake the sense that, as humans, we are *called* to something, that our lives should have meaning. But in the malaise of modernity, it's hard to hear the call, to know how to respond.

This diagnosis of the modern condition is deepened in the poetry of Baudelaire, who regularly addresses the "spleen" of modernity, by which he meant the distinct pain of soul we experience as melancholy or ennui. For Baudelaire, this was heightened by urban and industrial environments (he couldn't yet imagine full immersion of our consciousness in technology, which only amplifies this alienation). Taylor's point is that it is poets who help us understand (how) we are modern. The poets find the words to name a new experience of being human. The poets name our modern anguish.

But it is also poetry that uniquely responds to this new

reality. By naming our experience, poetry already begins to transform it. "It articulates spleen," Taylor says, "and this is a first step toward reversing it." It's why we listen to sad songs: the plaintive voice of Phoebe Bridgers or Adrianne Lenker isn't just an occasion for me to wallow in despair. Their expression of that despair makes me feel less alone in the world. In that solidarity, it is as if the cosmos begins to resonate with a sense of belonging. Poetry effects communion. This resonant chamber of shared experience produced by poetry, putting us in touch with a reverberating cosmos, is what Taylor calls the "interspace."

And in poetry, another possibility arises. Poetic language practices its own resurrection of meaning, enchantment. Thus Rilke's elegies can also invoke a mystery:

> *Earth, isn't this what you want: to arise*
> *in us* invisibly*? Isn't it your dream*
> *to be invisible someday?*

If the scientists and tech titans teach us to dominate and instrumentalize the earth, the poets teach us the song of the cosmos that reminds us of our connection to something bigger than us. Poets provide glimpses and epiphanies, what Taylor calls "break-in experiences." Poets "transfigure" the everyday for us, turning the mundane inside out to expose us to a fullness buried in the banal. Again, consider an exhortation from Rilke:

> *Show, my heart, that you* aren't *without them.*
> *That when figs ripen, they have* you *in mind.*
> *That when their winds grow almost visible*
> *Amid the flowering branches, it's* you *they embrace.*

Humans exhibit a perennial desire to (re)connect with the cosmos, with something bigger than consumption, production and the monotony of modern existence. Taylor is interested in "the evolution of human longing for reconnection."

"But what could convince us of this?" he asks. Here the usual tools of philosophy—arguments, syllogisms, apologetics—seem ill-suited and ineffective. Which is why we must turn to the poets. "It can only be that, when we break through all the barriers, and draw on the lived meanings that the things on earth have for us, we transpose them in the transparent medium of poetry; then the realities of earth and sky show up in all their glory, and in response we experience a heightening, a fullness of existence," he writes. Taylor doesn't offer proofs. The best he can do is share with you his experience of the poetry of Hopkins or Mallarmé and ask whether they transfigure what you see in front of you. Then, with Rilke, you might be able to say, *Hiersein ist herrlich*: "To be here is glorious."

There are moments in *Cosmic Connections* where Taylor's philosophical confidence wavers with an all-too-human admission—a kind of rhetorical stutter where the philosopher becomes vulnerable. At one point, expounding on the power of Romantic poets like Hölderlin and Novalis who speak "so directly and powerfully to us," Taylor inserts a parenthetical aside: "or is it just me?" The question is an admission, a confession, almost. Here at the end of a stellar career, in the twilight of a life (Taylor is 93), the lauded philosopher of international repute pauses to wonder: *Is it just me?*

Cosmic Connections is Taylor's most personal book to date—if you read between the lines. I read it as what some have come to call a "bibliomemoir," a personal narrative of one's encounter with books (like Rebecca Mead's *My Life in Middlemarch* or Rick Gekoski's *Outside of a Dog*). Of course, Taylor is articulating an argument about our experience of being modern; but in these moments of admitted doubt—*Or is it just me?*—we hear not Taylor the philosopher but Taylor the fellow human, wayfaring in modernity, yearning but often uncertain, hoping but not without questions.

What becomes clear is that Charles Taylor, the philosopher-pilgrim, has been sustained in his quest by poetry. When he expounds on Wordsworth and Keats, Hölderlin and Hopkins, Baudelaire and Milosz, you sense that he is also sharing with you the art that has kept him afloat in the wreckage of modern life. There is an urgency to his endeavor because he wants to invite us all into the life raft he has found in poetry. Commenting on Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," for example, Taylor admits the struggle of conveying what matters. "I still feel that I haven't really brought out what is remarkable in these passages," he says. "There is a magic here which I can't fully fathom."

In Milosz's poem "Bells in Winter," the poet, with eyes wide open, faces the slaughterhouse of history and the church's complicity with atrocity, yet still finds an open possibility: "Perhaps only my reverence will save me." In commenting on this, there is a curious slip where Taylor owns this movement in the first person: "But this reverence at least allows me to say, along with the prophets," then quoting Milosz again:

> *For God himself enters Death's door always with*
> *those that enter*
> *And lies down in the grave with them, in Visions of*
> *Eternity*
> *Till they awake and see Jesus and the Linen Clothes*
> *lying*
> *That the Females had woven for them and the Gates*
> *of their Father's House.*

One senses that it is the poetry of Milosz (and Hopkins and others) that has enabled Taylor, the modern philosopher, to still find a way to believe.

It feels that way to me, too. If a yearning for something more—something eternal and transcendent—continues to reverberate in modern human hearts, perhaps we shouldn't be surprised to find that poets are those most attuned to this resonance. (In his "Letter on the Role of Literature in Formation," Pope Francis explores the affinity of the poet and the priest.) The poets continue to find words for our anguish and hopes. If Taylor is trying to convince us of anything, it is to recognize the limits of reason and entertain the possibility of something more—to hear, still, the question posed by Milosz:

Wasn't it always our
greatest wish
to live and dwell for ages in
brightness?

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LINES COMPOSED A FEW MILES ABOVE THE AIR FORCE ACADEMY CHAPEL

By Reynolds Dixon

My six-fifteen banks over the Rampart Range
Steeply, and as the cumuli derange

The campus appears, the parade ground,
Terrazzo and dorms only luckily found

From altitude when the chapel's steel spires
Incandesce in early sun. But awe tires,

Like underclassmen kept up reciting
Speeches and the American Fighting

Man's Code of Conduct, the boggling tallies
Of Luftwaffe aces, specs of what flies

And kills and sees like an owl or falcon
(stooping at how many knots?). Halcyon

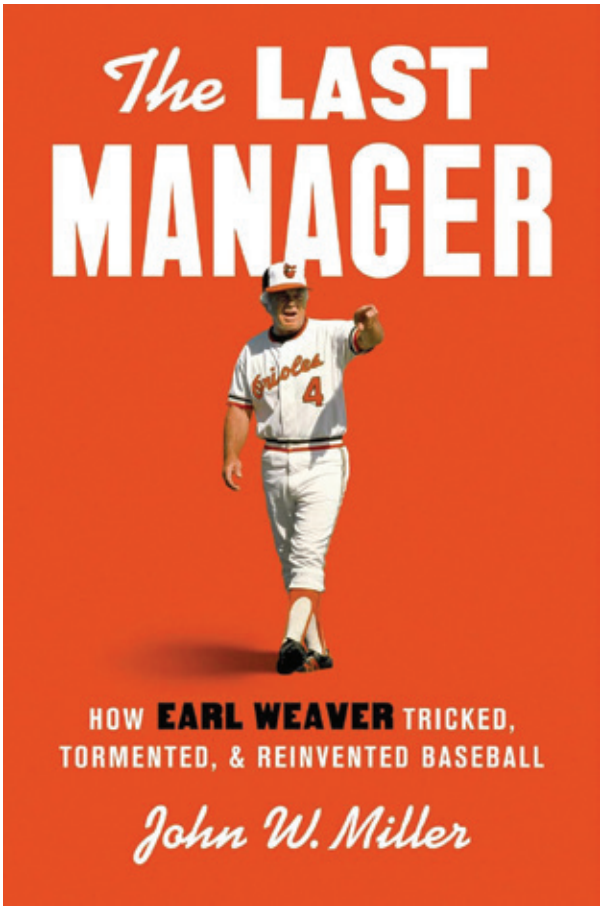
Daydreams and memory are saving some
Down there from shame and a few to become

What they can't yet guess, and when they kneel
To contemplate the cruciform steel

Blades they know as an airscrew they pray
Not for the smiting of the enemy

But as children in a homesick trance,
For mercy without talons, mothers' hands.

Reynolds Dixon's *work has appeared in the Iowa Review, Oxford American, Poetry, Prairie Schooner, TriQuarterly and other outlets.*



Avid Reader Press / 368p $30

Baseball fans too young to remember the Baltimore Orioles manager Earl Weaver (1930-2013) are of two minds about the man. It all depends on whether they like baseball for the stories or for the statistics.

The ones who like stories like Earl Weaver, the cartoon character—the one whose mic'd up tête-à-tête with umpire Bill Haller ended with the famous "you're a liar, Earl / no, you are" back and forth; the one who exploded on cue when teaching Bob Uecker how to argue with the umpire on "This Week in Baseball"; the one whose profane responses to reader questions on the "Manager's Corner" radio program have become the stuff of memes. Viewed through these 2025 eyes, Earl Weaver is Donald Duck in a baseball uniform.

The statistically minded baseball fan may like Earl Weaver even more. He is their voice calling out from the wilderness of the pastime's past. Before *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game* became baseball catechism, Earl Weaver was a self-taught baseball statistician whose intuitive sense for the game foreshadowed the findings of advanced analytics, commonly referred to as "sabermetrics." Personality-wise, Weaver was a throwback to the curmudgeonly managers of the 19th and 20th centuries; but as a manager, he was a window to the game's third century.

John W. Miller, a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal and a contributing writer for **America**, marries stories and statistics in this fascinating account of the diminutive, cantankerous skipper who is the winningest manager since the moon landing. During his first run with the O's (1968-82), Weaver never had a losing season, and he won six division titles, four pennants and a World Series. His only losing season was his last one (1986), part of a two-year return to the dugout that resembled the "Hundred Days" of his doppelgänger, Napoleon Bonaparte.

The stories abound: a boozin', brawlin', chainsmokin' two-decade odyssey through the minor leagues as a player and a manager; the 96 ejections from the game that made Weaver the crown prince of old Memorial Stadium, including the two occasions when he got tossed from both games in a doubleheader; his love-hate relationships with players and management; and, most interestingly, his rough childhood in Depression-era St. Louis, which proved to be great preparation for adult superstardom in a similarly gritty city that also sat in the shadow of a more esteemed metropolis. (Baltimore, in fact, sits in the shadow of two, "a traffic jam between New York and Washington," in the words of the Baltimore filmmaker Barry Levinson.)

Miller includes plenty of discussion of Weaver's proto-analytic prowess as well. He was the first big-league manager to make regular use of a radar gun to measure a pitcher's velocity. He made his pitchers throw strikes and expected his fielders not to beat the team with mental or physical errors. Weaver stopped bunting because he viewed such small-ball tactics as wasted outs. He built his batting orders through attention to statistical detail, trying to maximize the offensive output and defensive performance of his lineups.

Electronic Arts cemented Weaver's reputation as the thinking man's manager when they tapped him in 1986 to help develop the first-ever baseball simulation video game, Earl Weaver Baseball. Weaver taught the programmers from Electronic Arts (whose EA Sports division became the first name in sports video games) the ins and outs of the sport, which they incorporated into the game. Earl Weaver Baseball is among the most critically acclaimed video games of all time and had a significant influence on the strategic development of how the game is played on actual diamonds.

Miller roots Weaver's statistical *savoir faire* in a story. One of the bright spots in Weaver's difficult childhood was his close relationship with his Uncle Bud, who brought him often to ball games at St. Louis's Sportsman's Park, home of the Cardinals and Browns (who, incidentally, moved to

Miller marries stories and statistics in this fascinating account of the cantankerous skipper.

Baltimore in 1954 and became the Orioles). Bud Bochert just happened to be a bookmaker and an associate of Al Capone. Bochert took bets on all manner of athletic pursuits, including baseball. Miller makes a convincing case that Weaver's bookmaking uncle cultivated the youngster's analytical eye for the game.

"Young Earl Weaver didn't just watch baseball; he analyzed it, via the sport's daily roulette wheel of precise, probabilistic outcomes," Miller writes in "Gangs of St. Louis," the book's most compelling chapter.

Weaver enjoyed casting lots and making wagers throughout his life, though there is no indication he ever bet on baseball.

Baltimore proved to be the perfect base of operations for the boisterous Weaver, and not just because of the presence of Pimlico Racetrack. Few places glory in their rough-around-the-edges reputation as thoroughly as the city by the (Chesapeake) Bay. At times, Weaver's on-field antics seemed straight out of a skit about "Charm City."

Then and now, Baltimore was a pro football town. The Colts and now the Ravens have been loved more broadly and deeply than the Orioles ever were. Nevertheless, no coach in the history of either Baltimore professional football franchise garnered love like Weaver. Whether it was Weeb Ewbank or Ted Marchibroda, Brian Billick or John Harbaugh, they just didn't seem as Baltimore as the little ruffian from St. Louis.

Football and basketball coaches seem particularly taken with the notion of sports having a deeper meaning than what the scoreboard says. The likes of Vince Lombardi, John Wooden, Mike Krzyzewski and Lou Holtz exemplify the sports-as-moral-enterprise coaching ethos. And in Matt Hoven's *Hockey Priest* (2024), the author chronicles the life of the Rev. David Bauer, founder of the Canadian national hockey team. Bauer treated sports as his ministry, a space for uplift, gentlemanly conduct and a vehicle through which young men could gain access to higher education. Even a football coach like Bill Belichick, who is known to bend a rule or two, glories in the order and discipline of his sport.

Not so for Weaver, who did not present the game as a character-building exercise. It may be that baseball, with its historic lack of timekeeping and relatively pastoral gameplay, is not well suited for the kind of spiritual formation that the likes of the Fordham-educated Vince Lombardi instilled in his charges. It could also be that the summerlong life-on-the-road grind of a professional baseball player mixes poorly with the deliberate enterprise of character building. When one looks at the list of baseball's great managers, few of the names jump out as figures of moral uplift. Certain players (think Christy Mathewson, Jackie Robinson and Honus Wagner) exemplified classical virtue and diligence, but not a lot of big-league skippers.

The closest comparison to Weaver among the game's pantheon of managers may be John McGraw, who cut his teeth as a player with the original Baltimore Orioles of the 1890s. McGraw shared Weaver's irascibility and perennial playing of all the angles to win. He, too, was a strategic innovator who cut against the grain of the baseball nostrums of his age. Miller, too, makes the comparison of Weaver to McGraw, noting that Weaver himself would have liked the juxtaposition.

Throughout, Miller's admiration for his subject comes through in this superb portrait of one of baseball's most significant and interesting figures.

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Simon & Schuster/ 320p $19

Tara Isabella Burton opens her novel *Here in Avalon* with a time-honored line: "Once there were two sisters." Right away, we know what awaits. This is a fairy tale. But entering into the realm of fairy tale is far from a guarantee of happy endings for all involved. Nor is it a signal that the story is meant for the immature: Fairy tales did not begin as stories only for children. Once they were stories for whole communities, stories that pointed the way back toward the recovery of lost identities, broken hearts and potentials long gone to rust and dust.

Where a lesser work might lean on the borrowed finery of mythic grandeur, *Here in Avalon* turns immediately to laying out circumstances of contemporary life. Burton takes care to ground her story in the obviously and materially *real*: We may or may not believe in fairy tales, but we can believe in Rose and Cecilia because we have met them, or women who may as well be them.

The two sisters represent the time-tested antithesis of Good Girl and Rebel, though Burton prevents this from being burdensomely allegorical by stitching some contrast into the tapestry.

Rose in her way is also a rebel against the sisters' bohemian upbringing, and Cecilia in her own way refuses to be satisfied with an unexamined life. While Cecilia has spent years chasing meaning and experience in dozens of forms—"from lover to lover, from continent to continent, from ashram to monastery"—Rose has always sought instead "the feeling of building a life: something clean and complete and self-contained."

By the time the plot begins to move, their overlapping quests have resulted in each sister acquiring the quality of character she did not seek: Rose's rectitude has brought her experience in the forms of both romance and worldly shrewdness, while Cecilia's impractical instability and self-inflicted sufferings have gone hand-in-hand with wide-eyed receptivity and an unjudging—perhaps at times undiscerning—but surprisingly clean heart.

The story's point of view, a sympathetic but cool third-person perspective, tracks closely to the savvy and worldly responsible sister of the pair: Rose, an app developer engaged to Caleb, a man whose clean whiteboard of goals is positioned to be the first thing he sees when he wakes up every morning. Cecilia, by contrast, lives the kind of life that gets labeled a *hot mess*: disheveled hair, laddered tights, undone laundry covered by a haze of fragrance, big childlike questions that Cecilia either cannot or will not numb down or paper over.

Through this study in contrasts, Burton gives presence to both the Apollonian seduction of self-improvement—with its quasi-Pelagian promise that our will's good efforts always reap rewards in the realm of nature if not of grace—and the Dionysian undertow of desire that pulls with such heavy traction against the noble lie of Apollo's myth.

The sisters' names are a deliberate allusion to "Snow-white and Rose-red," two fickle sisters from the Brothers Grimm who in the course of their classic fairy tale have to be told, "Don't beat your lover dead."

The lover in this case is Paul, Cecilia's ex-husband. Despite their breakup, Paul becomes a serious agent of the story's development, as he becomes Rose's ally in her protracted, largely futile effort to protect Cecilia from herself. He suffers intensely for his principles, yet without ever grandstanding or calling undue attention to his pain; he is an imperfect man, awkward, sentimental and ill-adapted to modernity, but also reliable, generous, unassuming; he never uses his imperfections as an excuse or a crutch. For all these reasons and more, readers are likely to find Paul especially admirable: Here is a man who manages to be Christ-like without the weight of savior or martyr complexes.

Here in Avalon appeals to a sense of playfulness with its profuse, sometimes sly, but never coy web of allusions. For example, later in the story, Rose has to take up an undercover alias; her choice of "Lily" resonates with a deliber-

Burton gives presence to both the Apollonian seduction of self-improvement and the Dionysian undertow of desire.

ate attempt to recapture innocence over experience. That departure awakens the reader's own imagination to try to predict what other out-of-character choices Rose may make next.

Not only fans of the Grimms and the Greeks, but audiences for Arthurian legends, Romantic poets, German opera and the Christian devotional tradition will find plenty of thematic suggestion that nevertheless cleverly slips free of strict allegory. Still, this deep-rooted, thickly layered story can also be enjoyed for its own sake without an acquaintance with older books—a difficult trick for a writer to pull off, but Burton's light touch makes the feat possible.

A complex revelation that lands rather early in the plot arc proves to be only the first of a series of spiraling rotations up the novel's seven-storey mountain. Inside the fictional frame, and in a certain limited sense, it turns out that *fairies are real*.

The idea that something thought not to be part of reality could turn out to be so may appeal not only to adult readers who grew up on childhood fantasy but also, in an analogous sense, to the religious believer. After all, a belief in *anything* unseen strikes many as equally improbable, and raises the same questions for many in this era of broken trust: Are you sure that what you think is real is really real, or is your belief just the result of your own disorder and your desperation for rescue? Are these supposedly superior beings just using you—for power, control, some obscure and nefarious satisfaction of their own? Or might they really, under all the smoke and mirrors, have your good in mind?

The porousness of the self in the face of such questions underlines an implicit assertion of Burton's fictional rhetoric: No matter how much effort we pour into narrating, mythologizing and transforming ourselves, we are always also *given* to ourselves by others' responses to us.

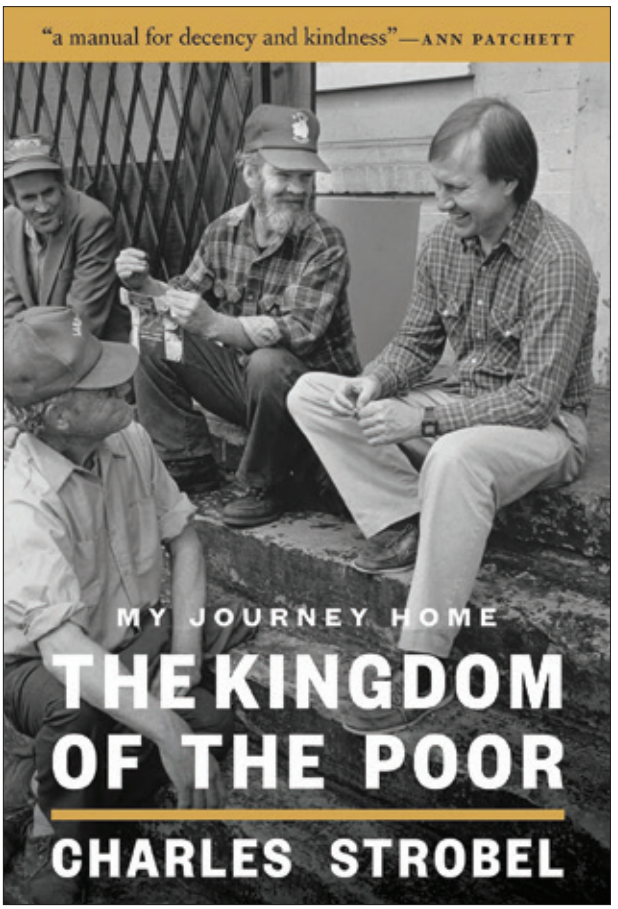
Whereas the floating life of the second half of the novel might leave some readers struggling with having their patterned expectations of novelistic action overturned, I found it sublime. It would have been sublime enough merely to spend time among "the fairies" in their enchanted enclosure, worshippers of an Eros without Venus—an idyllic neverland of flowers, music, incense, glitter, silk, velvet, damask and gilding. But in a brave move, Burton also takes us behind the scenes of the enchanted enclosure, showing us the deep humanity of her lost souls—to an effect that the fictional fabric, and the play-within-a-play it weaves, becomes denser, richer and more compelling.

Burton understands how dangerous beauty, or "bad enchantment," can embody the deathly illness at the heart of distorted love, and how that love leads to destruction unless and until it becomes fully spiritual.

Like all fairy tale magic, the enchanted enclosure of Avalon has rules. This Avalon's rules are those of medieval courtesy, or courtly love: Never cheat; love jealously; lie only in the service of the loved one; and, above all, never, ever drop the facade. As with courtly love (and as in heaven), there can be, in Avalon, no marriage, no consummation, no pairing. Its *ethos* reflects less a genuine, untroubled childhood than a perpetual early adolescence: the first hints of desire but without fulfillment, for as one character says of married life (things such as an adolescent easily believes), "That's the world's love, not ours. That kind of love corrodes. And is always corroded." Another echoes: "All the greatest love stories are the unconsummated ones."

If what we need now is the kind of story that restores wonder to the world, *Here in Avalon* provides one avenue to that destination. Against the world's many broken stories of love that can never be either finished or completely fulfilled, the novel sets the vision of a more mysterious love that says, simply, undyingly: "My dear one. My dear, dear lost one.... We've been waiting for you."

Katy Carl *is editor of Word on Fire Luminor and writer in residence at the University of St. Thomas–Houston. She is the author of* As Earth Without Water *and* Fragile Objects.



Vanderbilt University Press / 178p $30

There is a sentence in the Rev. Charles Strobel's posthumous memoir, *The Kingdom of the Poor: My Journey Home,* that gave me pause.

Even as I write that, it seems silly. The whole book gave me pause. But stick with me. It's in Chapter 20, when Strobel is telling the story of Gwen Bedford, one of the longtime guests of Room in the Inn, the program in Nashville, Tenn., that Strobel started in 1986 to provide support and shelter for the unhoused. Many nights, Bedford would wind up sleeping on Strobel's back porch with a friend or two, choosing to go to Strobel's house instead of the shelter, and sometimes arriving as late as 3 a.m.

Here is the sentence: "She invariably brought her typical ruckus and commotion with her, but my sleep was too deep to get up and address the matter." It's that "sleep too deep" that got me.

How did this remarkable man and Catholic priest sleep so well? He not only created Room in the Inn, a program that has a permanent downtown Nashville campus and 200 partner congregations in a variety of denominations in Nashville and beyond; he also founded an offshoot shelter for working men called Matthew 25, started the city's Loaves and Fishes Community Meal, co-founded what has become Safe Haven Family Shelter for unhoused families, and has had a hand in countless other policies, organizations and benefit events for the unhoused.

One might think that Father Strobel carried the weight of the world, or at least the unhoused world, on his back. That he was so troubled by a society ripe with seemingly insurmountable inequity and poverty at every turn that it kept him up at night. But no. The answer as to how—and in retrospect, the answer is the entire book—comes in the epilogue with another sentence:

> Take heart that if you do work that is for peace, you will be in communion. And if you are in communion, you will be at peace even in the presence of divine discontent.

The Kingdom of the Poor, with help from editors Katie Seigenthaler (Strobel's niece) and Amy Frogge, is his story of how he came to be in communion every day of his life. How he came to embody the "useless servants"—Strobel preferred the "worthless servants" interpretation—in the parable Jesus shares in Luke 17: "When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty.'" And ultimately, how he came to the "why" in his life, as he quotes Mark Twain at the opening of the book: "The two most important days of your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why."

Strobel, who died in 2023, wrote the book with the aid of Seigenthaler and Frogge as he came to the end of his life. He chose to tell his story—characteristically, as we discover—through the stories of other people.

"But as much as we like to think of ourselves as self-made by our initiative and determination, our bootstraps mentality is a myth," he writes. "We have received through our lives wonderful gifts of love and support from so many generous people. Often these people appear on our journey to care for use when we are most in need."

These people include Clayton Massie, a homeless man who held court in "The Jungle," an unkempt patch of land just south of where Strobel grew up in what was then a poor, working-class neighborhood adjacent to North Nashville (and is now known as Germantown). Massie and his friends befriended the 12-year-old Strobel and taught him "how I should treat everyone."

There was George Orskiborksy, the janitor at Strobel's nearby parish, The Church of the Assumption, whose simple, single room, outfitted with the bare essentials to live, got Strobel thinking about how much is enough, a question that never left him and portended a theory about our

Strobel chose to tell his story—characteristically, as we discover—through the stories of other people.

shared poverty. "More than an economic condition, it's the awareness that we cannot be happy all by ourselves," writes Strobel. "This is our poverty, and all the riches in the world won't erase it."

Strobel introduces us to the Rev. Dan Richardson, the pastor at the Church of the Assumption who became a father figure to Strobel after the death of his father, Martin, when Strobel was 4 years old. It was Father Dan who first inspired in Strobel a desire to become a priest. "We were a poor parish," writes Strobel, "and we didn't get a lot of respect, but Father Dan made us believe we were special people living in a special part of town—worthy of the highest respect."

We also meet Michael "Bear" Hodges, a veteran who once lived in a community of the unhoused on the east bank of the Cumberland River and who camped out in the parking lot of Strobel's East Nashville parish one freezing night in 1985. Strobel invited Bear and others to sleep in the church's cafeteria that night and the many freezing nights that followed. Had it not been for Bear, Strobel considers, Room in the Inn might never have come to be.

Of the many people through whom Strobel tells us the "why" of his life, special regard is reserved for his mother, Mary Catherine Strobel, the most worthy of "worthless servants," whose life is one of remarkable resilience and terrible tragedy. A single mother of four young children after her husband died, she took her husband's secretary job and became the first female employee of the Nashville Fire Department. "Mama," as Strobel calls her, "loved the multitudes, the bigger the crowd the better as far as she was concerned. She believed God would provide [but] believed God needed a little help and imagination from us."

Ultimately, Strobel writes, his mother taught him to have a "confident faith and wield it to serve." Mary Catherine's inexplicable murder in 1986, as one of six people to die in a killing spree by an escaped prisoner of a psychiatric prison, stunned Nashville and had a profound effect on Strobel. His writing about the event, his full-time devotion in the aftermath to working with the homeless, his conviction about forgiveness and his activism against the death penalty offer some of the more moving segments of the book.

There is joy and heartbreak in *The Kingdom of the Poor*, but mostly joy. Its closest literary companion, I think, is *Tattoos on the Heart*, the 2010 memoir by Greg Boyle, S.J., another remarkable priest in daily communion with those who have fallen out of what Strobel refers to as "the seven systems society creates to support its members": education, health care, mental health, employment, housing, family and organized religion.

There is also hope.

"We do not need to settle for this," writes Strobel. "We don't have to accept patterns of oppression and violence that seem so rooted and ingrained in our culture. Our faith, however small, can uproot these old destructive patterns and replace them with caring and reconciled relationships—especially with the most marginalized in our world."

It reminds me that Jesus, after healing someone, doesn't say "I have healed you" or "I have saved you." He says, "Your faith has saved you."

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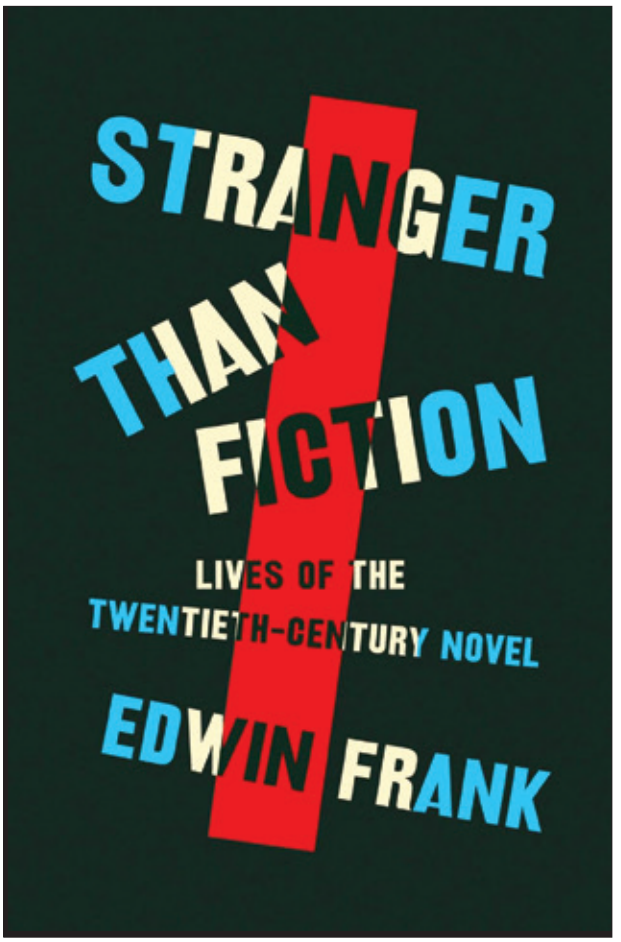
WHO WILL SHAPE FICTION'S FUTURE?



Farrar, Straus and Giroux / 480p $33

"How to go on after all that has gone on?" This question, suggests Edwin Frank in his new book *Stranger Than Fiction: Lives of the Twentieth-Century Novel*, became one that both society and individuals had to ask as the 20th century wore on and nations slogged through global wars. Through it all, the nature of existence itself remained central.

Frank explores how reality has been presented and even transformed through the way it is molded in fiction—and how the novel evolved from the 19th century novel to that of the 20th century. He enumerates many differences in the two developmental stages of literature's most popular form. There are also explorations of point of view, plot and the birth of metafiction, as well as the use and manipulation of time.

Yet whose interpretation of life and death are we experiencing when we read this time period's fiction? Frank's book cannot help but reflect the bias of the subject it chronicles, one that was for much of the 20th century focused on the experience of two world wars and then on the Cold War that followed. Along the way to making his argument about the differences in the novel across centuries, Frank gives us insight into dozens of authors and their works, ranging from Marcel Proust to Gabriel García Márquez.

For fiction aficionados, this will be a slowly unfolding joy that provides as much information about the authors whose minds created the literature as about the novels themselves. We learn about the upbringings, ambitions, loves, struggles with sexuality, illnesses and pedigrees of the writers—as well as their competitiveness and correspondence with each other, something that suggests how closed of a world literature has been for so long, even if an interloper does steal in every so often with a masterpiece no one saw coming.

What Frank's book largely does not grapple with, but will be painfully obvious to the discerning reader, is how much the novel has been the product of the wealthy and otherwise idle classes: "Gide did not need to make money from his writing, and he despised the thought of doing so." His characterization of D. H. Lawrence is that it was "improbable" he became a novelist due to the "obstacles that in his day barred a working-class English boy from the so-called world of letters." The lens we are looking through when we read 20th-century literature is that of a well-to-do, overwhelmingly white population—and a male one.

There are exceptions: Chinua Achebe, Ralph Ellison and Virginia Woolf are included. Frank also discusses how Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro* helped contribute to the development of world literature.

Frank centers his literary criticism of books that developed the 20th-century novel on 32 writers, and he provides an extensive list of additional writers in the book's appendix. Of the 32 whose works we can call main characters, only six are women. In discussing Gertrude Stein, one of the six, Frank describes her character Melanctha in *Three Lives* as someone whose "sex and race and life place her outside the space of 'proper' storytelling."

The changes that are being chronicled are those experienced by the privileged white male demographic—and it is only recently that, here in the United States, publishers have begun to actively seek voices outside of this community through initiatives such as We Need Diverse Books. This nonprofit works to promote diverse literature through mentorships for writers and to provide classrooms with books so that all children can see themselves in a story.

As certain narratives are now being removed from classrooms, how will this impact the future novelists of the 21st century? Not only how will it affect these writers and their sense of possibility within a novel's pages, but how will it influence who becomes a writer and who

Frank gives us insight into dozens of authors and their works, ranging from Marcel Proust to Gabriel García Márquez.

believes their perspective belongs on the page for others to read?

These remain open questions in an age when diversity, equity and inclusion are demonized. As a result of a wave of anti-diversity agitation in recent years, books exploring race, gender and sexuality have been increasingly banned in school libraries. Banned Books Week, organized by a coalition of literary organizations, free speech organizations and publishers, began in 1982 in response to a rise in the challenges to books read in school—and has continued every year since then. The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, established in 1967, chronicles the top 10 most challenged books each year. Of the top 10 for the year 2023, the latest year available, seven were deemed objectionable due to L.G.B.T. content.

While being a 20th-century novelist was largely the undertaking of a select class whose members trained themselves through extensive reading and perhaps informal mentorships, one development in the late 20th century was the creation of graduate programs especially designed to train novelists. But although becoming a novelist is now an ostensible career path with hundreds of graduate programs devoted to preparing students to publish fiction, it remains largely an exclusive endeavor.

With the splintering of our attention and media consumption, will this century, like the last, be defined by formative geopolitical events that preoccupy novelists and collectively grip the lives of their readers? Perhaps. For American readers, 9/11 served that role at the turn of the century, as the War on Terror dominated our screens and psyches.

But for some writers, the preoccupation with language supersedes everything. Frank quotes James Joyce: Answering a question about how he spent World War I, Joyce said, "Oh yes, I was told there was war going on." This, despite the fact that *Ulysses* is considered by Frank one of the "direct responses to that war, reports from the novel's front line."

In the epilogue, Frank spotlights the brilliant W. G. Sebald and his masterpiece *Austerlitz*, which prefigured the multimedia storytelling that continues to evolve today by combining haunting images with his text: "In their mingling of image and text, Sebald's pages bear a certain resemblance to pages online, as though the internet were mimeographed."

In the early days of widespread availability of generative artificial intelligence, we are seeing the potential for creators to call forth visual depictions of the product of their imaginations—and for those depictions to take different shapes depending on the words used to summon them or even the order of the words. It is as if humanity is generating external brains that can conceptualize and make real our wildest dreams. A.I. does this, in part, by drawing on the reservoir of thousands of novels that were uploaded into it without the permission of the writers.

Frank subtitles his deeply researched opus "Lives of the Twentieth-Century Novel." Whose lives will take up the privilege and responsibility of creating the 21st-century novel, and what literary forms will follow it?

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Easter: A Different Kind of Rejoicing

In May, the readings offer four Sundays completely steeped in the Easter experience. On the Third Sunday of Easter, which begins the month, the featured psalm continues the sentiment that flowed from the previous month. "At dusk weeping comes for the night, but at dawn there is rejoicing" (Ps 30:6). This rejoicing becomes a theme for the readings in May. For the apostles, however, rejoicing in the kingdom of God after the resurrection takes on a distinctly unique reorientation.

Each Sunday in May, the first readings highlight the nascent church experience according to the Acts of the Apostles. On that first Sunday, Peter found his voice in the midst of turmoil. In fact, there seems to be mostly growing pains for the new community of disciples. The highest religious council at that time, the Sanhedrin, attempted to mute the first apostles in Jerusalem with a cease-and-desist order for teaching in that name. Peter was able to respond, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). This boldness was costly, however, as the Sanhedrin had the group flogged along with Peter. According to Acts, the apostles felt like they had won the lottery, "rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name" (Acts 5:41).

Meanwhile, the next several Sundays recall the journey of Paul and Barnabas. On the Fourth Sunday of Easter, the duo discovered favorable crowds in the Hellenistic town of Antioch in Pisidia. The people loved their preaching, especially those Gentile converts to Judaism. The leading men and women of the town, however, persecuted and expelled the two apostles, who spoke "in the name" that brought light to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47). After being roughed up and run out of town, the whole group of believers were filled with joy and the holy Spirit.

It becomes clear that rejoicing in the kingdom of God after the resurrection was tied to the hardship of presenting the light of Christ to newer generations of believers. This remains a good lesson in contemporary times, when Christian efforts seem to hit against a somewhat antagonistic world. The early accounts from Acts of the Apostles continue to encourage and inspire renewed faith today. "It is necessary," said Paul and Barnabas, "for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER (C), MAY 4, 2025
Peter learns to speak

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 11, 2025
Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 18, 2025
Church formation through prayer and fasting

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 25, 2025
A parish in need of answers and discernment

Victor M. Cancino, S.J., lives on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana and is the pastor of St. Ignatius Mission. He received his licentiate in sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.

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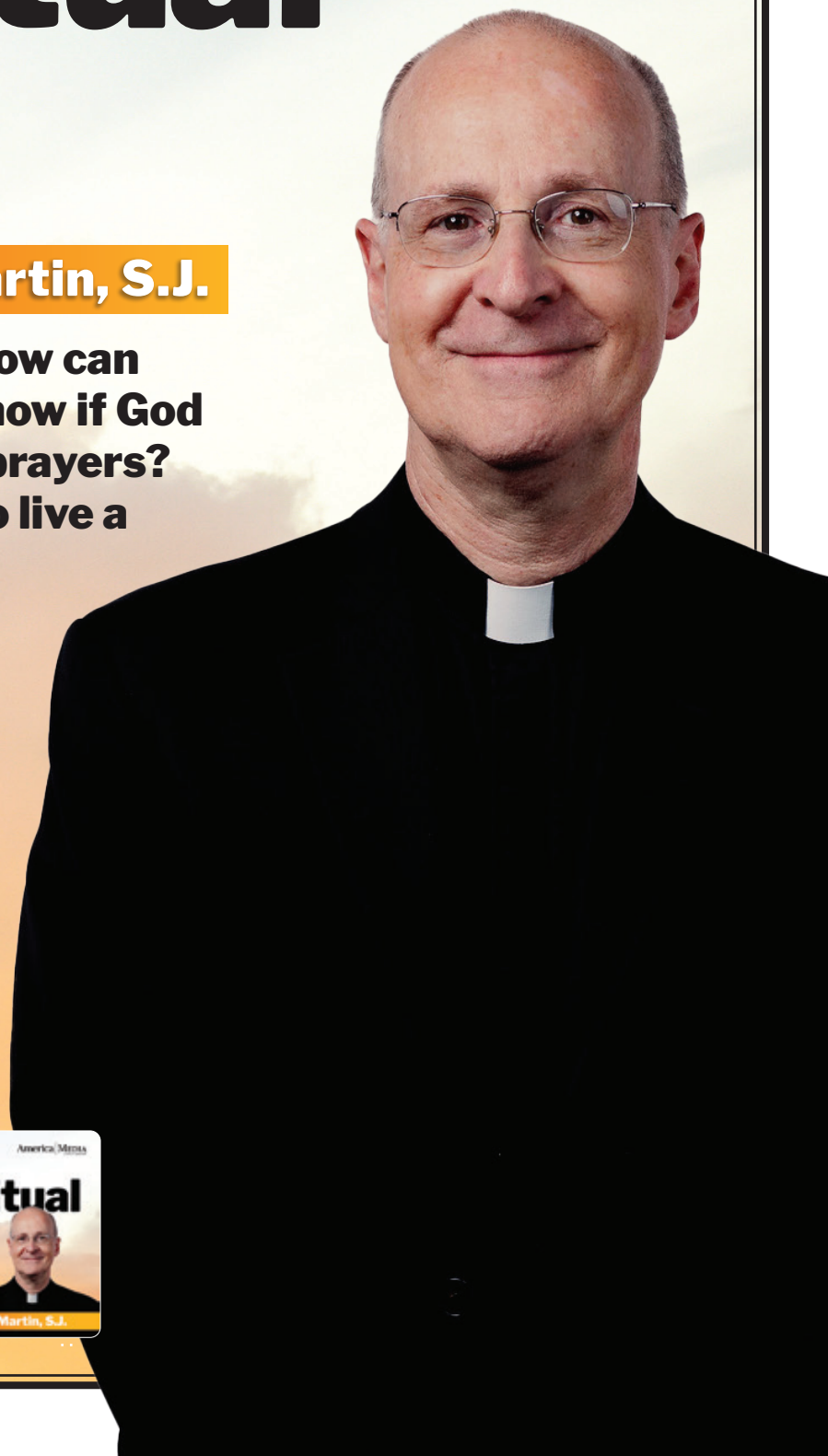
The Spiritual Life

with **Fr. James Martin, S.J.**



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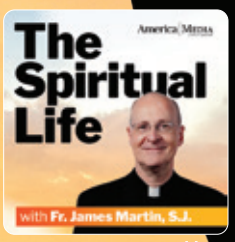

A Time for Encounter

Welcoming the 'invisible' to our liturgical spaces

By William I. Orbih

Have you ever wondered what it means to not be seen by others? There are many people who, not feeling welcomed in the parishes where they worship, eventually make the hard decision to leave the Catholic Church.

As a non-citizen myself, I know many immigrants—mostly those who are non-white or who don't speak English—who were Catholic when they first arrived in the United States but who have since stopped going to Mass. And as a Black person who regularly attends and sometimes ministers in predominantly white parishes, I can appreciate how easy it is to feel out of place in those spaces. I can testify that it makes all the difference to people who might easily feel out of place in a liturgical assembly to hear words of welcome addressed to them. Christ, by his words and actions in the Gospels, teaches us that it is not enough to merely tolerate the presence of the other. We must extend our hands, hearts, touch and kindness to them.

While it is our collective responsibility, St. Paul urges us, "to accept one another" just as Christ has accepted us (Rm 15:7), we must always give special attention to people whose life situation makes them particularly vulnerable.

The synthesis report from the first session of the Synod on Synodality acknowledged that poverty can render people invisible even in their church, and that poverty can take many forms, affecting migrants and refugees, "those who suffer violence and abuse" (especially women), "victims of racism," and "others living on the peripheries."

Addressing these different forms of poverty begins when we consciously try to ensure everyone we encounter feels seen, welcomed and accepted. "Every individual Christian and every community," says Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium," "is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society" (No. 187).

The pope also reminds us that the Gospel invites us to constantly "run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction" (No. 88). This encounter with others is the indispensable starting point of mission, evangelization and every Catholic social action. In a world where an unprecedented number of people suffer from isolation and feel unloved, unwanted and judged without compassion, God is calling us to reach out and invite everyone, especially those who are most vulnerable, into his tender compassion.

This must begin in our worship spaces and liturgical celebrations. As we continue to support the work of evangelization and the charitable outreaches of the U.S. church to the poor all over the world, we must become more attentive to the poor and vulnerable people who show up in our own parishes. We must be sincerely concerned about the different challenges that immigrants, minorities and all vulnerable people face daily. We must never stop actively advocating for the human dignity of everyone, irrespective of their race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation. We must not fear to reach out to the "stranger" who shows up in a parish, to touch them with the kindness of Jesus, to learn their names, to invite them to share a meal with our families or to include them in other events.

In *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, the Catholic theologian M. Shawn Copeland urges us to imitate Jesus, who confronted the system of oppression and exclusion of his time "through lived example, intentionally choosing courage over conformity, moral conflict over acquiescence, and boldness over caution." According to Dr. Copeland, "With all his heart and soul, mind and body, Jesus resisted religious and social attempts to reduce God's *anawim* ['poor ones'] to nobodies."

To paraphrase the second-century church father Irenaeus, nothing gives more glory to God than human beings fully alive and flourishing. As we give praise and glory to God through our songs and prayers during Mass, let us ensure we are also attentive to the suffering and struggles of all people, beginning with the people who join us in our liturgical spaces.

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