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A POPE OF THE AMERICAS

The first days of Leo XIV

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The Race to Claim Pope Leo

Besides the Chicago White Sox, what team does Pope Leo XIV root for? Whose side is he on?

Many variations on this question have been asked in the brief time since his election as the successor of Peter, and not just about sports. (The Chicago Cubs started off early with a social media post less than four hours after Leo's election featuring a Wrigley Field sign declaring "Hey Chicago. He's a Cubs fan!" This was quickly refuted by the pope's brother.)

Almost everyone, our team at **America** very much included, was interested in how Pope Leo would carry forward Pope Francis' legacy. A month and a half into his papacy, it is at least possible to draft an answer: in profound continuity with the substance of Francis' reforms, but with a more restrained style.

During his very first blessing from the balcony of St. Peter's, Pope Leo described the church as synodal, making it clear that neither he nor the College of Cardinals who elected him were trying to reverse course from Pope Francis. But he also appeared on that balcony wearing the traditional papal regalia of red mozzetta and stole, which Pope Francis had declined to wear immediately after his election. In his first Sunday appearance in St. Peter's Square, Pope Leo led the crowd in chanting the "Regina Caeli," the Marian hymn for the Easter season.

Even as all of this was going on in Rome, journalists, commentators and influencers across the world were scrubbing through every word, picture and video related to Robert Prevost, trying to figure out who he was and what he thought about, well, everything.

In those first few days, two of the pictures I saw circulate most often on social media set out what seemed to be the poles of the debate. In one, then-Bishop or Cardinal Prevost (the timing and sourcing of the image was unclear) was in an older style of liturgical vestment, a "fiddleback" chasuble, prompting a rush of hopeful speculation among champions of the pre-conciliar Mass that he might roll back Pope Francis' restrictions on use of that form of the liturgy. In another, he was seated on horseback in Peru surrounded by a crowd of children, a missionary bishop going to visit his people. Alongside this picture, I would often see one of him in his Augustinian habit with a traditional Peruvian scarf and hat, registering how much he had inculturated in his adopted homeland.

On the one hand, this fascination with the man who is now pope is completely understandable, natural and even edifying: Catholics want to be close to the Holy Father and knowing people better is part of the path of coming to love them. On the other hand, in its more obsessive forms, this scrubbing through his history looking for clues amounts to reading tea leaves, having more in common with fortune-telling than anything else.

In addition to those pictures, there were minor news cycles around his views on L.G.B.T. issues and his history of dealing with abuse in the church. The former was about a 2012 intervention then-Father Prevost had given during the Synod on the New Evangelization, when he was prior general of the Augustinians, in which he criticized mass media's promotion of "abortion, euthanasia and the homosexual lifestyle." In a 2023 interview after he was made a cardinal, he was asked if his views had changed. He spoke about how Pope Francis had made it clear that the church needed to be welcoming.

With respect to abuse, reports have focused on his role as a regional superior of the Augustinians with respect to where a Chicago diocesan priest could live in 2000 (before the national standard that came into force after the 2001 era of the abuse crisis). Reports have also examined his handling of an allegation of abuse in Chiclayo, Peru, in 2022 when he was a bishop there.

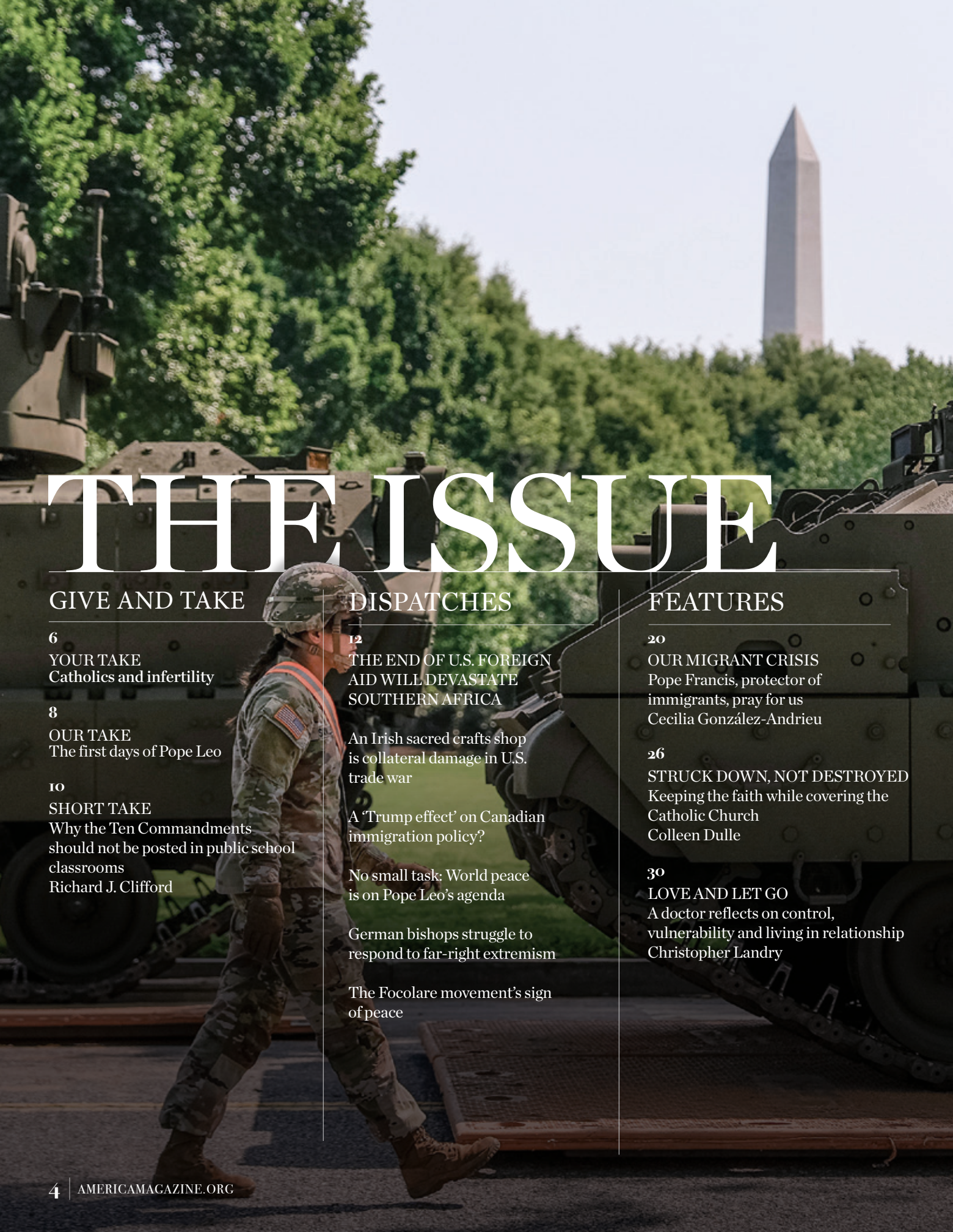
I bring those issues up not because I have anything new to add to the reporting (often better characterized as speculation), but because it is worth taking a step back to think about our own motivations as we are fascinated by reports like these.

There are paired temptations here of tribalism and divination. We can read voraciously in moments like this, looking for reassurance that the new pope is "on our side" or, in the shadow manifestation of that desire, indulging in self-righteous anger that he is not. We can obsess over scraps of information as if they can reveal the future to us, telling us what this pope will do about a host of issues before he has done any of it—so that we can be either exhilarated or furious about it in advance.

Instead, as I once wrote about Pope Francis at the beginning of his papal ministry and about the Synod on Synodality at the opening of its second session, it would be far better to ask what needs to change *in us*.

We should approach the new vicar of Christ looking not for his alignment with the set of questions we bring to him, but for the invitation God is offering the church through his example and preaching—or to put it another way, with trust that the Holy Spirit is at work.

Sam Sawyer, S.J.



THE ISSUE

GIVE AND TAKE

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AP Photo/Julia Demaree Nikhinson

A U.S. Army soldier walks past a Bradley fighting vehicle ahead of the June 14 parade marking the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Army in Washington. Elsewhere in the country, protestors participated in "No Kings" marches against the Trump administration's policies.

Cover: Pope Leo XIV leads, for the first time, the midday recitation of the "Regina Coeli" prayer on May 11 at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

FAITH & REASON

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Catholics and infertility: reactions from our readers

In the June 2025 issue of **America**, senior editor J.D. Long García explored the struggles with infertility faced by many Catholic couples attempting to conceive. Our readers responded with their own thoughts about the church's teaching on in vitro fertilization and related topics.

After invention, there is compulsion. When science comes up with a way to do something that was once thought impossible, there is a feeling that everyone ought to make use of it. Doctors may not be pressuring all patients to pursue in vitro fertilization, but there is a cultural attitude that says, "Well, there's an obvious solution to your problem." It's the church's job to help us sort through these developments and to hold them up against the Gospel in making moral judgments. Often, it can be hard to accept its teaching, and we turn away.

That's why we need to pay close attention to the places in Mr. García's story where couples said that in their suffering, isolation and confusion they didn't find support from their parishes. Online support groups are great, and they help to fill a gap. But if anyone is going to have the strength to go against the overwhelming tide of popular scientific thought, they're going to need the closeness of a parish family that really knows and cares about each other.

Laura Fratus

If the church teaches that the important part of marriage is to bring children into the world—or, worse yet, to give your husband a child—something is drastically wrong. If the church would teach that having a child is a gift from God if you are physically able, in addition to walking your journey together with your spouse in seeking God, it seems there would be a lot less anxiety over whether or not you are able to be a biological parent.

I do pray for those who are unable to conceive, but no matter how they are conceived really, it always is up to God. The whole process is a conundrum, filled with the possibility of heartbreak. Perhaps a question to reflect on is, "What else can we, as a couple trying to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, give birth to that may be a benefit to the world?"

Mary Nausadis

The Catholic Church opposes I.V.F. because it separates procreation from the marital act. Life is a sacred gift from God, not a right, and children should be conceived through the conjugal love of their parents. It is in listening to and following Catholic teaching that women and men become what God wills them to be.

Amelia Chavez

Did you know you can adopt embryos from another family and treat them as your own children? This is what my wife and I did, and now we have a 6-month-old baby girl who is one of the best things that has ever happened to us.

Brian Jens

Dr. [Marguerite] Duane's assertion that "infertility is not a disease" undermines the decades of advocacy efforts by patients and health care providers alike to get insurers to recognize infertility as a disease and provide insurance coverage for infertility diagnosis and treatment.

In addition, the notion that fertility doctors don't treat underlying causes of infertility is insulting to those of us who provide holistic fertility care, including I.V.F. Now, could fertility physicians be more aware and sensitive to our Catholic patients' specific needs? Sure. We should not roll our eyes when couples or patients ask to limit the number of eggs fertilized or decline preimplantation genetic testing. As long as patients understand that this may limit their success rates, accommodating these requests is consistent with patient autonomy.

Paula Amato

As a medical writer for 40 years, I have done deep dives on both the "assisted reproductive technology" industry and the Catholic-approved alternatives. There is value and also dishonesty on both sides. The I.V.F. business is acknowledged as a "Wild West" even by insiders; it spins out promises to desperate couples (as Mr. García's article notes) despite abysmal success rates to the older couples most likely to seek their services. It also makes no effort to track the long-term consequences on women's bodies of unnatural and stressful procedures like ovarian stimulation.

"Natural" alternatives also warrant skepticism. Their approach, at least for baseline evaluation and management of infertility, is brilliant, and should be standard. However, there is a cultish, stand-apart atmosphere around NaPro [natural procreative technology]. Their efficacy statistics are also suspect, and their data is not robust.

There is no secret sauce or magic cure for infertility beyond intense monitoring and testing, counseling, and treatment for fixable problems.

Brenda Becker

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XII
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Pope Leo and Our Shared Search for Truth

More than two months have passed since the election of Pope Leo XIV, but the promise and excitement that many felt at his accession to the chair of St. Peter—especially from the people of the United States and Peru, his homeland and adopted home—have hardly dissipated. Like Francis before him, Pope Leo has captured hearts in the honeymoon period of his papacy. As the church and the world adjust to this new pontificate, what can we expect in the future?

The historically minded can be sure that a pope who took the name of Leo will have a strong and welcome focus on Catholic social teaching. From "Rerum Novarum" to Pope Francis' "Fratelli Tutti," the social doctrine of the church has been a primary concern of numerous popes since the last Pope Leo wrote the first "social encyclical" in 1891, but the challenge of how to break out of the echo chamber remains a real one. The desire of Leo XIV to link his own papacy to the development of Catholic social teaching was made clear the day he was elected, when papal spokesperson Matteo Bruni said his choice of name was a "direct recall of the social doctrine of the church and of the pope that initiated the modern social doctrine of the church."

What will that look like in terms of papal teaching and practice? In a world plagued by violations of human dignity and a growing sense that technology and globalization will destroy worker autonomy, an encyclical on the rights of labor is a likely first step. The role that the development of artificial intelligence is playing in eroding workplace security is also a concern of the new pope. Many American politicians and corporations may not like what Leo will have to say on the subject— "*mater sí, magistra no*" remaining an unspoken conviction for many at the top of the global economy—but perhaps nowhere else is the church's teaching authority and credibility more needed than on questions of human dignity and a just economy.

At the same time, Pope Leo has made it clear that the promotion of Catholic social teaching requires dialogue and attention to economic realities, noting that the church's social teaching "seeks to encourage genuine engagement with social issues. It does not claim to possess a monopoly on truth, either in its analysis of problems or its proposal of concrete solutions."

That conviction that the church has a role to play in creating just structures will feed into what is likely to be a second major focus for Leo: synodality. Whether he pursues it in the same style as Francis or not, Leo made it clear that synodality would continue. Early administrative moves by Leo, including the appointment of Tiziana Merletti, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, as the first high-level appointment of his papacy, suggest that he will follow Francis' lead in continuing to recalibrate curial governance. At the same time, he may take a more friendly and less chiding tone than Francis in his relationship to the Curia, which he described as "the institution that preserves and transmits the historical memory of a church."

Leo has also made it clear that "synodality and ecumenism are closely linked" in his discussions of the celebration of the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Any continuing rapprochement with the Eastern Orthodox churches will require some rethinking on the part of Rome regarding structures of governance, so another welcome consequence of a continued focus on synodality might be greater steps toward Christian unity.

Leo's comments on Catholic social teaching, synodality and ecumenism all share another common thread, one perhaps unexpected when coming from a pope but welcome nonetheless: an emphasis on our shared search for the truth. Some of Francis' detractors made it clear that they found his pontificate a source of "confusion," and that they hoped for greater emphasis on doctrinal precision from his successor. The first days of Leo XIV's papacy have not lacked for clarity, but rather than correcting Francis, Leo has endorsed his teaching, describing him as "masterfully and concretely set[ting] forth" the path for the universal church following the Second Vatican Council in his first apostolic exhortation, "Evangelii Gaudium."

In his remarks on May 13 to the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation, founded by Pope John Paul II in 1993 to disseminate the church's social teachings, Leo remarked on the relationship between dialogue and doctrine. While for many the two seem incompatible, doctrine does not have to mean only "a set of ideas belonging to a religion." It can also, he said, "be seen as the product of research, and hence of hypotheses, discussions, progress and setbacks, all aimed at conveying a reliable, organized and systematic body of knowledge about a given issue." The church's social doctrine, in other words, can be understood as "a common, collective and even multidisciplinary pursuit of truth."

Because of that commitment to a common and collective pursuit of the truth, Pope Leo called "indoctrination" an immoral act, one that "stifles

critical judgment and undermines the sacred freedom of respect for conscience, even if erroneous. It resists new notions and rejects movement, change or the evolution of ideas in the face of new problems." With regard to the church's social teaching, he said, doctrine "aims to teach us primarily how to approach problems and, even more importantly, how to approach people. It also helps us to make prudential judgments when confronted with challenges."

To be clear: The pope was speaking in this context of the church's social teaching, not suggesting a universally applicable model for interpretation and development of doctrine. However, the connection he makes between dialogue and doctrine as aspects of a shared search for the truth could have broad implications for how he teaches and how the church receives his teaching. For those whose instinct is to treat challenging questions about church teaching as tantamount to formal dissent, it may ask them to develop greater openness to processes of dialogue. For those whose instinct is that contemporary questions point to a need for change in church teaching, it may ask them to deepen their appreciation for doctrine as a collective, systematic and reliable body of knowledge.

Of course, the church and the world learned over the last 12 years that whatever we might expect of a new pontiff, the only guarantee is that we will be surprised. So, too, this time around, we should be prepared for most if not all of our expectations and predictions for Pope Leo to be insufficient to the man and the office.

In his homily for Pentecost on June 8, Pope Leo suggested his own yardstick for measuring the work of the church: our openness. "We are truly the church of the Risen Lord and disciples of Pentecost if there are no borders or divisions among us," he preached, "if we are able to dialogue and accept one another in the church, and to reconcile our diversities; and if, as church, we become a welcoming and hospitable place for all."

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Should the Ten Commandments be posted in public school classrooms?

Pressure on state legislatures to post the Ten Commandments in classrooms has only increased after Louisiana's 2024 law requiring it. North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee and Texas have all also seen recent attempts to pass similar initiatives. What is usually forgotten, however, is that the Bible itself contains the most powerful argument against making the Ten Commandments a moral guide for all citizens.

As a scholar of the Bible with 55 years of experience teaching at Boston College, I would like to argue that posting the Ten Commandments contradicts the Bible itself—as well as the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

To interpret the commandments, it is imperative to understand the narrative context. In Exodus 20:1-17, the older of the two instances in which the Ten Commandments appear in the Bible (the other is Deuteronomy 5:5-21), God fulfills his earlier promise of progeny and land to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Exodus, God comes to the aid of Abraham's family, who had been forced by famine to migrate to Egypt, where they are now on the verge of extinction at the hands of the pharaoh. Moses, however, empowered by the Lord, succeeds in leading the people's escape to the safety of the Lord's mountain, Sinai. There the Lord asks the beleaguered people to be his people, and when they accept, he comes into their midst to announce the Ten Commandments—detailing how they are to live.

The First Commandment (Ex 20:1-6) grounds the Lord's claim on the people and sets forth the people's orientation to their God:

> I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not have other gods beside me. You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything—in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or serve them. For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their ancestors' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation but showing love down to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Scholars are in agreement that the Ten Commandments are the textual expression of a solemn covenant, a legal agreement, between the Lord and the people. (Ancient Near Eastern peoples did not hesitate to use legal language and instruments to articulate their relations to their deities.) According to the Franciscan Old Testament scholar Leslie Hoppe, "To detach the commandments from this narrative framework risks misunderstanding the significance of the commandments themselves. The commandments, then, are not arbitrary regulations but the revelation of the God who freed the Hebrew slaves."

In *The Ten Commandments: A Short History of an Ancient Text*, Michael Coogan writes: "Nor did the biblical writers intend the Decalogue to be universal. It is rather a contract between God and one historical group, the Israelites newly escaped out of Egypt and their descendants—not between God and the Egyptians, or the Midianites, or any of the other groups mentioned in biblical narrative, nor for that matter the rest of the world." Coogan concedes that "In Jewish tradition there are such supposedly universal laws, the so-called Noachian or Noahide laws [Genesis 9:8-17], the commands given to Noah and his descendants after the biblical Flood, but not the Ten Commandments."

Further, Moshe Weinfeld of Hebrew University, who has written authoritatively on the Ten Commandments, observes:

> These commandments are not intended as concrete legislation, however, but as a formulation of the conditions for membership in the community. Anyone who does not observe these commandments excludes herself or himself from the community of the faithful. *This is the function of the Decalogue.*

The above interpretations represent the consensus of critical biblical scholars from the Jewish, Catholic and Protestant traditions. Such a well-nigh universal scholarly view of the Ten Commandments constitutes a decisive argument against posting the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms. Why? Because the Ten Commandments lay the foundation for the relationship of Jews and Christians to their Lord, but not for adherents of other religions or of no religion.

Incompatible With Pluralism

Two more important reasons for not posting the Ten Commandments should be noted: First, the Tenth Commandment accepts as normal the enslavement of another human being: "You shall not covet your neighbor's

OSV News photo/Jason Reed, Reuters

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

wife, *his male or female slave*, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." And second, the First Commandment rejects religions that are not the developed forms of Judaism and Christianity.

In other words, the Ten Commandments *establish a particular religion*; but the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is unequivocal: "Congress shall make no law respecting an *establishment of religion*, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." To detach the Ten Commandments from the covenant between a particular deity, the Lord, and a particular people, Israel, and to treat them as a moral and philosophical text applicable to everyday life, is to misunderstand the original purpose of the Ten Commandments and to disregard the Bible's own narrative.

It is worth noting that posting the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms is also not in line with the Second Vatican Council's teaching. In the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" ("Nostra Aetate"), the church recognizes the good in other world religions—such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism. But when a state sponsors the Ten Commandments as a model for *all* its citizens, it favors one religion over another, even denigrating the others.

The Ten Commandments themselves make no claim to universality. In fact, the Ten Commandments distinguish Israel from other religions. Unfortunately, the culture wars in the United States make opponents of posting the commandments seem hostile to religion, even though the majority of them believe firmly in the Bible and the Constitution.

Let me offer an alternative for American classrooms: the Golden Rule, treating others as one would want to be treated by them. It is found in the Old Testament, Leviticus 19:18, as "Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord," and in the New Testament, Matthew 7:12, as "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." A version of the Golden Rule is found in several places in the Bible and in almost every religion in the world. It is inspiring and gives a challenging ideal to strive toward, rather than an abstract text.

Richard J. Clifford, S.J., *is professor emeritus of Old Testament at Boston College. Formerly general editor of The Catholic Biblical Quarterly and founding dean of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, he was also an editor of* The Paulist Biblical Commentary.

The loss of U.S.A.I.D./Pepfar will devastate communities in southern Africa

By Russell Pollitt

Barbara Staley, M.S.C., first went to Eswatini in 2004 at the height of the AIDS pandemic. The country then had the highest percentage of people infected with H.I.V. anywhere in the world. "Forty-two percent of the people in Eswatini were infected with H.I.V.," the Cabrini sister from the United States remembers. "Everybody was dying, there was no anti-retroviral medication at that time."

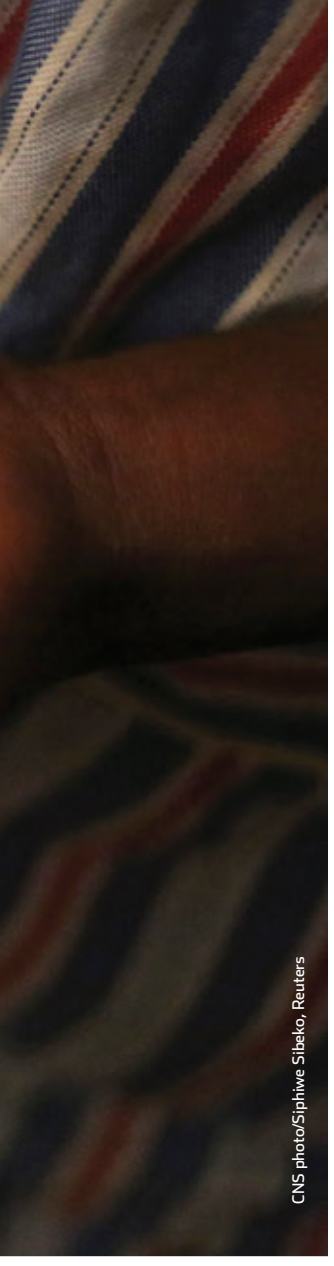
Eswatini, known as Swaziland until 2018, is a landlocked country in southern Africa, primarily bordered by South Africa, with a small border shared with Mozambique. Eswatini's agriculture-based, free-market economy relies heavily on trade with South Africa. Income inequality is high and poverty is widespread, with almost 60 percent of the population living below the national poverty line.

The Cabrini sisters maintain a rural mission, St. Philip's, some 20 miles from the small town of Big Bend, named after a massive turn in the Great Usutu River, which flows to the Indian Ocean.

Eswatini still endures one of the highest rates of H.I.V. infection among adults 15 to 49 in the world. The virus and the costs associated with responding to it remain significant economic and social burdens.

Conditions at government health facilities are often poor. Even with international aid, the health care sector struggles to provide a robust service to the country's citizens. Improvements in health care in Eswatini have relied for years "on the generosity of the American people," Sister Staley says.

During the height of the H.I.V./AIDS pandemic, Eswatini's population plummeted, and life expectancy dropped from 61 in 1988 to 44 in 2003. It reached 61 again in 2023, almost two decades after the first emergency response from the U.S. Agency for International Development to Eswatini's AIDS crisis. "That's the success—what U.S.A.I.D. did for this



CNS photo/Siphiwe Sibeko, Reuters

A 9-year-old boy displays antiretroviral pills before taking his medication at Nkosi's Haven, near Johannesburg, South Africa.

country," she says.

In fact, the United Nations reports "a remarkable result" in Eswatini, "achieved with the support of US funding." Eswatini managed to reduce new H.I.V. infections from a peak of 21,000 per year in 2000 to just 4,000 in 2023.

José Luis Gerardo Ponce de León, I.M.C., is the bishop of the Diocese of Manzini, the only diocese in Eswatini. He was in a state of disbelief when the Trump administration announced the termination of U.S.A.I.D. contracts around the world.

"It was completely unexpected...and there was [no] preparation time," he says. Casualties so far have included not only U.S.A.I.D., but the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which had been administered primarily through U.S.A.I.D. Pepfar had been credited with saving 26 million lives in 54 countries.

Sister Staley says that "the gift" of Pepfar and the U.S. State Department's Global Fund had helped transform Eswatini.

When she arrived in the country, the Cabrini sisters had just opened a residence for orphaned children, and conditions were bleak. She says that at the time, U.S.A.I.D. institutional literature on confronting the crisis spoke of the need to assist "single orphans" and "double orphans," referring to a child's loss of one or both parental caregivers to AIDS.

"Well, I used to say that what I have living with me are quadruplet, quintuplet, sextuplet orphans" because their mothers, fathers and all other family caregivers had died. "People didn't even know to which families [the children] belonged."

With the help of Pepfar, Sister Staley says, conditions in Eswatini improved dramatically. "All these people that are living with H.I.V. have undetectable H.I.V.," she says. "They're healthy; they're robust; they're living well. They're having children [and] they're taking care of their children; they're working."

Lamenting the withdrawal of aid, she says that the current situation means that the sisters "watch people crossing the mission, some of whom are their employees, knowing that in six months they are all going to be dead."

"There was hope that [the withdrawal of U.S.A.I.D.] would be seriously reviewed," says Bishop Ponce de León. That has not happened. He adds that hearing how Elon Musk labeled U.S.A.I.D. a "criminal organization" that "must die" made him angry.

The bishop says that "every organization needs constant monitoring and evaluation, but to label it in that way can only mean ignorance of the good work that is being done."

Bishop Ponce de León reports that the church in Eswatini has been affected on two levels by the end of U.S.A.I.D. Catholic Relief Services had approved a project intended to help the poorest in the diocese, but now the effort will likely never get underway. But the most affected in the diocese are the Cabrini sisters and the various efforts they managed. The sisters have been forced to dismiss almost 90 percent of their employees at the mission.

The job losses are creating tragedies for families across Eswatini. Many of the first people to lose their jobs had been part of a professional class that was emerging in Eswatini because of their work with international organizations—social workers, educators and nurses among them.

"These individuals are often the breadwinners in their families, supporting their mothers, fathers, the elderly and children," Sister Staley says. "This sudden cut had a profound impact on the livelihoods of thousands of employees. Then there were also the beneficiaries of all those services."

Sister Staley describes another aspect of the loss of U.S. support. U.S.A.I.D. funding for direct services also included requirements aimed at improving professionalism in local and national government and among other nongovernmental organizations at work on social issues.

That capacity building, she says, extended to the government level, improving performance at Eswatini's ministries of health, education and social work. Over time, that investment translated into significant improvements in the overall health care system. Those various efforts reverberated across Eswatini society. "And now it will all collapse," Sister Staley worries.

In 2004, the Cabrini sisters were caring for orphans with an initial U.S.A.I.D. grant of $15,000. That effort had expanded a hundredfold—to more than $1.5 million in funding from U.S.A.I.D.—by the beginning of this year, when the relationship was abruptly severed by Mr. Musk's decision to, as he put it, feed the agency into a DOGE-administered wood chipper.

"I am coming across Catholics in the diocese who have just lost their jobs at an age when it is not easy to find another one," Bishop Ponce de León says. "I foresee that, sooner or later, it will affect the income of the diocese in a way parallel to the Covid pandemic in 2020-21, which will also mean the inability of the diocese to continue helping the poor."

Bishop Ponce de León says that "the main question mark regarding the H.I.V./AIDS fight in our country is what will happen now, as Eswatini had been leading the world in what is known as the '100 percent/100 percent/100 percent' approach."

This containment strategy aims for 100 percent of people living with H.I.V. to know their status, 100 percent of those who know their status to be on treatment and 100 percent of those on treatment to have a suppressed viral load.

"The country has been well over 90 percent in all three levels, and this was thanks to the work being done by U.S.A.I.D.," Bishop Ponce de León says. "Will the government be able to continue this with the same strength? How will the cut in funding affect the distribution of the antiretroviral treatment? These are big questions."

Sister Staley says, "When I used to go do fundraising in the United States at different parishes, trying to get money to support our work in Eswatini, I used to say to people, 'most of our funding comes from Pepfar, which comes from your tax money.' People were proud."

She believes that Americans are a generous people because the obligation to help their neighbor is ingrained in U.S. culture. "It's deep in us that if you are privileged, you have to help the underprivileged," Sister Staley says, "and that's not just in your own place, it is anywhere. Now there is an administration that is preventing people from being generous, and that is what I find so sad."

———

Russell Pollitt, S.J., *Johannesburg correspondent.*

Measuring Pepfar's impact: What is at risk when it's gone?

26 million: Number of lives saved by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief since 2003

8 million: Number of babies worldwide born HIV-free to HIV+ mothers since 2003

21 million: Number of people, including **566,000** children, who received treatment through Pepfar in 2024

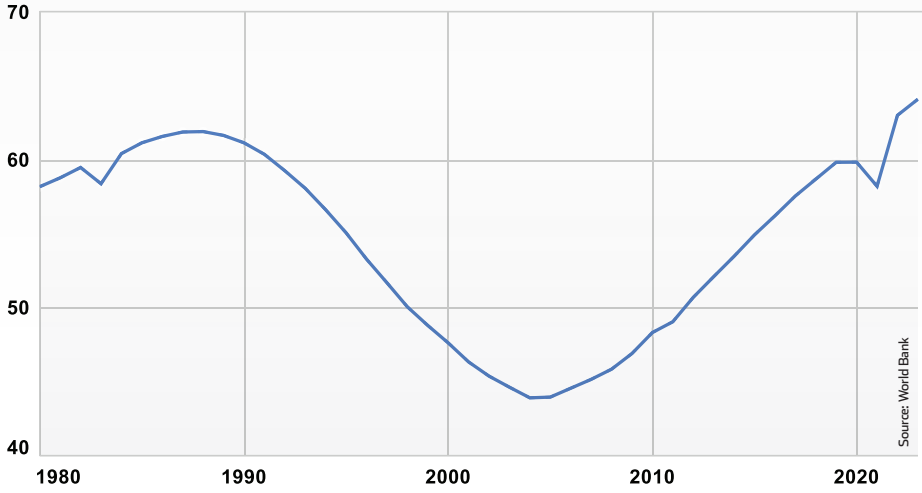
55: Number of countries Pepfar had been active in with an ambition to end H.I.V./AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. There were **52%** fewer new H.I.V. infections in 2023 than in 2010 in nations supported by Pepfar, compared with a **39%** reduction globally.

84 million: Number of people worldwide tested for HIV through Pepfar-funded initiatives in 2024

90: The percentage of H.I.V. pre-exposure prevention programs worldwide supported by Pepfar in 2024

Source: Global Health Security and Diplomacy, U.S. Department of State

The AIDS crisis and Pepfar recovery in Eswatini: Changes in average life expectancy



During the height of the H.I.V./AIDS pandemic, Eswatini's population plummeted, and life expectancy dropped from 61 in 1988 to 44 in 2003. It reached 61 again in 2023, almost two decades after the first emergency response from the U.S. Agency for International Development to Eswatini's AIDS crisis.

An Irish sacred crafts shop becomes collateral damage in Trump's trade war

Courtesy of Wild Goose Studio

A bronze rendering of St. Brendan and his monks, made by Wild Goose Studio in West Cork, Ireland

Perched above the picturesque village of Kinsale in West Cork, Wild Goose Studio is one of the most famous craft workshops in Ireland. Famed for its meticulous attention to detail, the studio began in 1970, when Kathleen Smyth, who passed away last year, would sit at her kitchen table carving little pieces of art, killing time while on call for her job as an X-ray technician at the hospital in nearby Bantry.

She and the co-founder of Wild Goose, Brian Scott McCarthy, began selling their creations through Ireland's emerging network of design and craft stores, and the workshop quickly took off. Wild Goose has quietly exported its art around the world ever since. Its current managing director, Jamie McCarthy-Fisher, estimates that a third of the workshop's total business comes from U.S. customers.

Each piece that crosses the Atlantic is more than a small work of art and beauty. It is an evocation of memory, an expression of devotion and of the distinctively Catholic conviction that beauty should be durable, elemental and infused with meaning.

This gentle trade has lately found itself in stormy waters. Tariff policy may once have seemed an arcane concern to these artisans in Kinsale, but since April it has become much more than an abstract threat. Small-scale exporters like Wild Goose find themselves casualties in the macroeconomic realignment being attempted by President Donald Trump.

"Our hope would be that because Wild Goose's offering is unique and there is no equivalent anywhere else in the world, that our customers will recognize the artistry and the quality and continue to support us, even if the tariffs mean higher prices," he says.

Mr. McCarthy-Fisher remembers the studio's origins in what remains one of its most beloved pieces, a work inspired by a conversation with a local parish priest. The pastor had mentioned that there was an ancient standing stone that might prove an inspiration for a new creation.

When Ms. Smyth went to visit the site, she found the age- and weather-worn Kilnaruane Pillar Stone standing in a field. "She rubbed grass onto it to bring up the patterns that were there and revealed a boat with St. Brendan the Navigator," Mr. McCarthy-Fisher says.

St. Brendan was a sixth-century Irish monk, best known for a legendary sea voyage described in *The Voyage of St. Brendan the Abbot*. The sixth-century text describes an encounter with a sea monster and discoveries of an island of silent monks and a settlement of incredibly strong men, among other marvelous adventures, before a landing in what some speculate was North America.

The image from the stone that Ms. Smyth eventually translated into bronze is remarkable in part because it depicts a type of boat, the currach, that is still in use today in communities along the Irish Atlantic seaboard. Featuring four hard-working oarsmen, the piece that Ms. Smyth created displays a simple elegance.

Like many pieces that have emerged from the studio over decades, it has established Wild Goose as one of the exemplary expressions of contemporary Irish artistic craft. The story of Wild Goose Studio—of sacred objects crafted with care and shipped across seas—echoes a much deeper rhythm in the European Christian tradition. Long before tariff codes and trade wars, the movement of relics and other holy objects across borders was already a matter of consequence.

The pieces exported from Wild Goose Studio are not relics in the strict sense, of course. But they are part of a related tradition of sacred materiality, a distinctively Catholic view of human endeavor that sees labor as meaningful beyond mere economic benefit.

A Catholic vision of the economy begins not with profit margins or protectionist calculations, but with people—craftspeople and customers, stories and symbols, all bound together by a shared imagination. One of Mr. McCarthy-Fisher's concerns is that the friendships that Wild Goose has established in the United States have become collateral damage to rising tariffs. Bringing that connection to an end because of an import tax ruptures something valuable, he suggests. "These are real relationships," he says.

Kevin Hargaden, *Dublin correspondent.*

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney attends an event at the Liberal Party election night headquarters in Ottawa on April 29.

Did the 'Trump effect' propel Canada's new restrictions on immigration?

Mass deportations, enforcement raids and the detention of international students have been some of the punitive aspects of U.S. immigration policy since President Donald Trump returned to office. But the United States is not the only country taking action to restrict asylum claims and immigration.

Under Prime Minister Mark Carney, who took office in March, immigration policy in Canada seems to be testing the same harder line adopted by its southern neighbor.

On June 3, the minister of public safety, Gary Anandasangaree, introduced the Strong Borders Act. The federal government promises that the legislation will "keep Canadians safe by ensuring law enforcement has the right tools to keep our borders secure, combat transnational organized crime, stop the flow of illegal fentanyl, and crack down on money laundering."

The legislation increases restrictions on asylum claims by prohibiting migrants who have been in Canada for more than a year from applying for asylum (currently, there is no limit on when migrants can file for asylum). For migrants who came to Canada after an intermediate stop in the United States, the time limit to apply for asylum is now 14 days.

The bill also expands Canadian officials' authority to open mail and to inspect goods being exported from the country. In an effort to combat drug trafficking, the bill also adds restrictions to financial transactions of more than 10,000 Canadian dollars, about $7,300. Mr. Trump has claimed that fentanyl is entering the United States from Canada.

In a press conference in Ottawa on June 3, Mr. Anandasangaree said, "There are a number of items in the bill that have been irritants for the U.S., so we are addressing some of those issues. But it's not exclusively about the United States."

The bill is facing backlash from politicians and immigrant rights groups in Canada.

Syed Hussan, a spokesperson for the Migrant Rights Network, said in a press release: "Prime Minister Carney campaigned on being different from Donald Trump, yet his very first bill is a shameful capitulation to racism and xenophobia, which abandons Canada's legal and moral obligations to refugees and migrants."

But the act is consistent with Mr. Carney's campaign platform on immigration policy. Ahead of the federal election last April, Mr. Carney and other members of the Liberal Party promised to stabilize immigration levels, saying that the Liberal government under former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had permitted an "unsustainable" rise in immigration.

"Like many countries, Canada, which has traditionally been a welcoming nation, is facing a political backlash on immigration, as immigrants are being scapegoated for a slower economy and housing shortages," J. Kevin Appleby, a senior fellow for policy and communications at the New York City-based Center for Migration Studies, wrote in an email to **America**.

"Carney is responding to the backlash but also to the Trump effect, which is placing more pressure on Canada to tighten its border. Hopefully, any final legislation will reflect that Canada, like other nations, needs the contributions of immigrants to thrive economically and culturally."

As national immigration policy grows less welcoming, Canadian bishops have urged Catholics to keep the rights and dignity of immigrants in mind. In a statement released ahead of April's federal election, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops implored Catholics to "advocate for the most vulnerable in our society: those living in poverty, victims of human trafficking, individuals suffering from mental illness and addiction, the homeless, and immigrants—each deserving of both social and legal support."

"As people of faith, we are called to welcome the stranger," Norbert Piché, the national director of the Jesuit Refugee Service Canada, wrote in an email to **America.** "This proposed bill does nothing of the sort. It seeks to prevent people from seeking asylum."

"God calls on all of us, especially our leaders, to not harden our hearts," Mr. Piché said. "But throughout the Western world, that is what is happening. The late Pope Francis and now Pope Leo XIV have stated unequivocally the importance of the preferential option for the poor, walking with the migrant and the refugee. Let us heed their call."

Grace Copps, *editorial intern.*

Cardinal Rossi: Pope Leo's greatest challenge will be world peace

Pope Leo XIV "is the man the church and the world need right now," and his greatest challenge, "the one he'll carry most in his heart, is peace in the world."

That is what Cardinal Ángel Sixto Rossi, S.J., 66, one of the four Argentine cardinals who voted in the conclave that elected the first American pope, said in an interview with **America** conducted in Spanish in Rome on May 12. He shared his experience of the conclave and expressed his belief that Pope Leo will continue along the paths opened by Pope Francis, but "with his own personal or new contributions."

This was your first conclave. How did you experience it? Was it as spiritual as people imagine, with the Holy Spirit, or less so?

There's a whole inner journey that accompanies the conclave. Just as it has its outer path, the conclave also unfolds within one's own heart, right? Where you begin to perceive, fundamentally, the grace of God. One has to conclude that the Holy Spirit truly does work—sometimes with us and sometimes despite us. But it is clear that this is of God. And I think in some way, the outcome, what we ended up with—Pope Leo—is the confirmation of a gift from God. I truly believe this is the man the church and the world need right now, as far as one can perceive. We're not infallible, but you do begin to sense it. So yes, I think he's a gift [of God].

Especially coming from the affection we had, and still have, for Francis. He has been laid to rest, [but] not in our hearts. Some may be quick to bury him, but for us, he's alive. And I think Leo, without trying to imitate him—which would be a mistake, he's not a copy—still moves in the same direction. It would be very sad to squander all the paths opened by Pope Francis. And I think Pope Leo respects that path and continues along it, with his own personal or new contributions, which can be full of grace—and necessary too.

You said some are still burying Francis. And we see on social media people saying this new pope isn't in continuity—he spoke Latin during a prayer service, used the mozzetta, might live in the Apostolic Palace. Why is it hard for people to see the continuity?

Maybe some external things—a more traditional style, you could say. But he's no dinosaur. He isn't trying to go backward. When he speaks, he's clear and original. It's not in opposition to Francis; it's the same line, with his own touch. If he prefers some traditional elements, it's a sign, but it's not essential. What matters is in his words, which are very telling. He mentions Pope Francis almost daily. If he didn't care for him or opposed him, he wouldn't even mention him—many don't. So, I think that speaks volumes.

Cardinal Ángel Sixto Rossi speaks to reporters while approaching the Vatican on April 28.

What do you think will be Pope Leo XIV's biggest challenge?

I don't know if it's the hardest, but the one he'll carry most in his heart is peace. The issue of war. Peace is a legacy of Francis too—but it's also in him. If we had to name the greatest concern today, it's peace in the world.

It came up even before the conclave because there were people directly involved in war: cardinals who'd been imprisoned, tortured, isolated. They weren't talking about something they saw in a movie. Francis left this "holy obsession," let's call it, of stopping the games of war and embracing peace. His harshest critique was that every war is miserable. I haven't heard Leo say that, but I'm sure he believes it. If a mother or child dies, the war is already lost.

There's a video of his farewell from Peru. He says when Francis was elected, he thought he'd never be a bishop—because they'd had differences. But he was the kind who speaks his mind, and Francis appreciated that.

Yes, Francis valued honesty. He used to say of certain people, "This is one of the few who dares to criticize me to my face."

Was he one of them?

One of them? I won't say.

Gerard O'Connell, *Vatican correspondent.*

Elekes Andor, WikiMedia Commons

In Germany, the church grapples with the growing appeal of the far right

When the Alternative for Germany, an extreme-right party, came in a close second in general elections at the end of February, Germany's bishops reiterated their previous instruction to German Catholics that the party could be no home for them in exercising their civic duties.

"Germany and Europe experienced the rise and fall of several extremist ideologies and movements in the 20th century," the bishops wrote in "Racial Nationalism and Christianity Are Incompatible," released in February 2024. "Their catastrophic consequences remind us to remain vigilant today. The Church therefore emphatically rejects all forms of extremism. They are irresponsible threats to the common good and the liberal order. Right-wing extremism currently poses the greatest extremist threat to our country and to Europe."

Not all of the AfD's positions seem bound to offend Germany's bishops. The party opposed efforts by the last German government to loosen abortion restrictions. Its social platform includes delivering monetary support to families with children, elevating the social prestige of motherhood and protecting life from the moment of conception.

But the AfD laments the arrival of poor and low-skilled immigrants in Germany, accepted in previous decades, and views "the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country...as a danger to our state, our society, and our values." And statements by leading party members often betray extremist tendencies.

Despite admonitions from church leaders, the AfD has become more popular than ever. Father Karl Jüsten, the head of the commissariat of the German bishops' conference, told the German news site Cicero that the church needed to consider "how we reach the people who voted for the AfD."

But how to proceed? Even as bishops have urged dialogue among Catholics across Germany's political spectrum, Claudio Kullman, an advisor to the church in Erfurt, an AfD stronghold, told **America** he has been instructed not to engage with AfD members.

German Catholics who support the AfD say concerns about its extremism are overblown. "We're just saying we don't want endless immigration," Natalie, a Catholic AfD voter who preferred not to share her last name, told **America**. "The church is universal, but nation-states are not."

"People want law and order," she said, adding that preserving the viability of Germany's welfare programs is also a Christian value.

Among the AfD's signature proposals, alongside severely curtailing immigration, is its advocacy for the traditional family and efforts to promote higher birth rates among Germany's native-born. Endorsing those positions through support of the AfD "doesn't make us Nazis," Natalie said.

Alice Weidel, co-chair of the Alternative for Germany party, speaks at the CPAC Hungary conference on May 30.

She also lauded the AfD's opposition to many of the restrictions put in place during the Covid-19 pandemic and its call for a negotiated peace in Ukraine instead of continuing German military support for Ukraine.

"I'm proud that [the AfD is] a party of peace," Natalie said. "We're asking: 'What is Christian?'"

Church leaders know many people in the pews find the bishops' assessment of the AfD too harsh, according to Mr. Kullman.

"While the bishops have been praised by the majority for their clear stance, they have also been heavily criticized, even among their own members," Mr. Kullman said. But he believes the church has little choice but to resist the AfD's growing popularity among Catholics, given Germany's experience with fascism and the Holocaust.

"The church must take a firm stance in a country that was responsible for the greatest crime against humanity of all time," he said, adding that it is not impossible such a tragedy could happen again.

The bishops acknowledged that the AfD's popularity stems from Germany's challenging economic and cultural times. Like other European states, Germany has been rocked by successive economic and social crises, among them the financial crash in 2008, the Covid-19 pandemic, ongoing economic stagnation, the war in Ukraine and technological change leading to significant job losses.

Mr. Kullman noted that Catholics are subject to the same stresses and temptations as everyone else in Germany, while the "constant need for compromise and balancing of interests" required by a mature democracy can feel daunting.

"Not a few feel overwhelmed by the rapid changes in the world," he said of Catholic Germans. "The more insecure and irritated people are in society, the stronger populist parties like the AfD in Germany become."

Bridget Ryder *contributes from Spain.*

Focolare president pursues peace on U.S. visit

Pope Francis meets with Margaret Karram, president of the Focolare movement, at an interreligious conference sponsored by the movement at the Vatican on June 3, 2024.

The deadly shooting of two employees of the Israeli Embassy at an event in Washington on May 21 cast a pall over the Sustainable Peace Networks Conference, then meeting nearby in Silver Springs, Md. The conference, sponsored by the Rome-based Focolare Movement, convened Jewish, Christian and Muslim organizations dedicated to peace work.

Speaking to media on May 23, Margaret Karram, president of Focolare, said the attack only demonstrated the urgency of efforts to bring people from diverse faith backgrounds together to work for peace. "That's what we needed: to bring some hope to our minds, to our hearts and to the people who are working in these many organizations," she said.

Ms. Karram's own background makes her efforts as a peacemaker especially poignant as conflict rages on in the Holy Land. She was born in Haifa, Israel, to an Arab Catholic family. Her connection with the movement began at the age of 14, after she encountered Focolare when some of its young members visited her school in Haifa.

Focolare, named after an Italian word for a fireside or hearth in a family home, is an international peace movement founded in 1943 by the Italian author Chiara Lubich.

Against the backdrop of a dramatic escalation in the war in Gaza, Ms. Karram deplored the brutality of the conflict. "My dream for Gaza and for Israelis is that they meet and learn about each other," she said.

Israelis and Palestinians, she said, "are two people with many things in common, even if they have different stories and different languages."

"Both of them suffer. And I think the suffering that they both share can be the solution to the conflict. But they have to make the others' suffering part of their story."

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

Our Migrant Crisis

Pope Francis, protector of immigrants, pray for us

By Cecilia González-Andrieu

What can I tell you? That I witnessed Pope Francis' first miracle just hours after his death? That at the time I was far from Rome and, truthfully, scared? That the insights of the vulnerable poor into God's ways are invaluable? Let me back up.

I live in California, and at the time Pope Francis died we were still experiencing Easter Sunday. This has a meaning many of us cannot shake. I met him on Sept. 30, 2024, as part of a delegation visiting Rome during the Synod on Synodality, and his principal questions to me were about migrants and refugees. What was happening in the United States troubled him, and he recognized that a new administration could be disastrous for vulnerable displaced people.

At that meeting, I experienced Pope Francis' preternatural ability to take a global issue and flip it on its head, to begin with the details and struggles of daily life and then discern the big picture. Migrants were not numbers to him but individuals with lives and dreams. They were our siblings and God's beloved.

On that sunny morning, I was in his library office at the Vatican with a small group of women from around the globe involved in pastoral leadership. He wanted to know what was happening on the ground. When we said goodbye, the Holy Father asked me to pray for him, a constant refrain of his, a reminder of his fragility and of the fact that he was always simply just one of us.

This Easter, my phone was off in the evening, so I did not know of Papa Francisco's death until the next day, but I slept badly because I was worried. My ministry with immigrants had taken an urgent turn beyond my classroom and, as Francis might say, "into the streets." I had planned the car routes and calculated time, but I had never been to

A Venezuelan man lies in bed with his daughters in Aurora, Colo., on Jan. 30, 2025. Despite having legal documentation to reside in the United States, they fear reports that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents may come to detain immigrants for deportation.

OSV News photo/Kevin Mohatt, Reuters

immigration court before. The first thing on my mind as I awoke was the potential outcomes of our day in court, but then my family heard my anguished gasp at the deluge of messages. *El Papa Francisco había muerto.*

I got myself together in a daze. Media requests were coming in, but I put off news interviews until the evening and headed to the university where I teach. The campus was waking up as I walked into one of the stores on campus to grab a juice. The cashier was visibly sad, and we shared our grief at the loss of *nuestro amado* Papa Francisco. The woman's eyes moistened as she recounted the fear of her neighbors and friends, fellow immigrants.

"Our community is suffering so much right now," she told me. I nodded agreement. And then unexpectedly her eyes lit up at the insight that had just occurred to her: "Now el Papa is in heaven; he can do so much more for us from heaven!" The clarity of her grasp of prayer and of the promise of advocacy from our ancestors in faith has stayed with me.

To Be a Displaced Person

I was a child when my family arrived in the United States as refugees from Cuba. Although the painful memories of our days of departure are seared into my mind, I am less sure about what happened next; we were three little girls alone with our mother. But we had family in the United States (a requirement in those days for being granted refugee status), and they provided the vital bridge we were about to cross between worlds.

I hope you understand why the rest of this story has no names or places. An immigration expert put it to me this way: "Some of this [what the Trump administration is doing around immigration and deportations] is so outside of what is normal that there are no policies to follow." The fear is not conjecture; it is reality.

As I prepare to drive to immigration court, three generations walk toward me: an older woman, a young woman and a little girl. The elder, her stoic face marked by a lifetime of struggle, begs me to keep her informed; the child looks on wide-eyed and unknowing; and the young mother hugs her daughter tight before she gets into my car. As we drive away, she confides to me that she is so terrified she considered not showing up for court. We speak about Pope Francis and his preferential love for immigrants, mirroring God's care. We both imagine the Holy Father holding our hands. She has come, she tells me, because she has faith. I recall Pope Francis' words to immigrant children in 2016: "Migrants are not a danger, they are in danger."

That day in court, things could have gone very wrong. Yet at every turn human dignity and compassion were winning. As she was dismissed, the young mother's face beamed with peace. Did she really understand everything? Had things gone as well as she thought? We looked at each other and felt the power of intercessory prayer. Yes, from heaven, Pope Francis could do so much.

A devotion to Francisco, protector of immigrants, is being born.

Pope Francis Led the Way

So where do we go from here in our care for migrants? There's been much said since Pope Francis' passing about his legacy: What had he accomplished? What had he left undone? But perhaps these are not the right questions to ask of a disciple of Jesus. I prefer to frame the approach needed now as he does in his book *Let Us Dream*: See, choose, act. What did Papa Francisco *see* that we need to see? What tools do we have so we can *choose* correctly? And how do we *act* following our discernment?

My ministry with vulnerable immigrants began years ago when a student came in for advising. He was a charismatic leader committed to our university's priority of being dedicated to "the service of faith and the promotion of justice." That afternoon he told me about being elected to lead the social justice initiatives for the student government. Then, his eyes filled with tears. He would have to decline because this was a "job," and he couldn't legally work. The top student in my upper division theology course lacked immigration status.

The promise of advocacy from our ancestors in faith has stayed with me.

When the newly elected Pope Francis chose to visit the island of Lampedusa as his first trip, it was not the island he wanted the world to see, it was the ocean. He wanted to remember the hundreds of migrants who had died in shipwrecks off the shore. As he dropped a wreath into the lapping waves, he focused our attention on that mass grave most of us ignored.

"Immigrants dying at sea, in boats which were vehicles of hope and became vehicles of death. That is how the headlines put it," he told the world. "It has constantly come back to me like a painful thorn in my heart. So, I felt that I had to come here today, to pray and to offer a sign of my closeness, but also to challenge our consciences lest this tragedy be repeated."

Like Pope Francis' broken heart, the encounter with my student precipitated the work I have done for immigrant justice since.

At this point, you might expect statistics and a clear sense of the current moment, but I cannot give you that. The situation surrounding immigration is so volatile that anything I say will be outdated in an hour. The number of legal cases challenging the current administration's lawless abuse of immigration laws and the dignity of immigrants is staggering. Although most courts have upheld the rights of "noncitizens" to due process, that we are having to debate this at all tells us how far we have descended from the guarantees of the 14th Amendment that no state may "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law." *Any person.* Two words that can truly make the difference between life or death.

Taking an Honest Look at Ourselves

To pay attention means to look at what is happening now, and also to learn from what has happened before. The description of the United States as a "nation of immigrants" is generally traced to John F. Kennedy's book *A Nation of Immigrants,* published when he was a senator. In a similarly titled speech in 1963, President Kennedy described this nation as constituted of the descendants of people "who left other countries, other familiar scenes, to come here to the United States to build a new life, to make a new opportunity for themselves and their children."

Kennedy stressed that it was "not a burden but a privilege" to embody a spirit of welcome and opportunity. He saw this as central to preserving the "inheritance" he defined as the "great experiment of democracy." He foresaw that without a commitment to the truth that the majority of this nation were descendants of displaced peoples, the very foundation of this nation would be in danger. Was he right?

The problem (or maybe the purpose?) of selective amnesia is that it strips away history's capacity to offer a corrective to the present. We might often hear in opposition to immigrant rights that they are lawbreakers and that "my family came here the right way." As we discern our response we can ask: What time period are we talking about?

A Complicated Past

President Kennedy surely remembered that in the 1840s, half a million desperate Irish immigrants came to the eastern United States fleeing the potato famine. At that point there was no right or wrong way to come; people came. Roughly at the same time, the United States went to war with Mexico, a large sovereign nation sharing the North American continent. Fueled by a desire for the shipping ports that could be built on the West Coast, the United States fought all the way to Mexico City. To save itself as a country, Mexico, which just two decades before had been New Spain, agreed to the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. It lost half its territory, its history, its people.

The diverse peoples of New Spain—Indigenous, Black, Spanish and their mixed-race descendants—had lived on those lands for at least 375 years. Believing that might makes right, people from the east, the United States, came: taking their lands, displacing and, when possible, erasing them. These are the lands of present-day California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, most of Arizona and Colorado, and portions of Wyoming, Kansas and Oklahoma. In other conflicts, other territories with deep histories as New Spain were also lost, including all of Texas and Florida. As many members of these historical communities often say, they never crossed the border, the border crossed them.

In the 19th century, the discovery of gold in the newly seized lands of California ignited a new migration from China. While there was a boom economy, workers were welcomed, but soon sentiment turned and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was passed. It banned Chinese workers from entering the United States, even to reunite with their families. Astonishingly, this act was not formally repealed until 1943. This was the very first law restricting migration.

Back on the East Coast, in the span of about 50 years, close to 25 million people sought to immigrate from Eu-

OSV News photo/Mike Blake, Reuters

Migrants look through the border fence on Sept. 12, 2023, toward food brought by aid workers. The migrants gathered between the primary and secondary border fences at the U.S.-Mexico border to await processing by U.S immigration officials in San Diego.

rope. There were no laws applying to groups; only individuals might be turned away if they were suspected of being "prostitutes or convicts." Out of those many millions, only 1 percent were not admitted.

However, as the 20th century moved forward, nativist public sentiment turned once again against immigrants. Laws were passed requiring European immigrants to pass literacy tests, and an Asiatic Barred Zone was created affecting most of Asia. But none of these immigration policies affected the American continent from Canada to Tierra del Fuego. There were no laws controlling the free flow of peoples within the Americas.

It was in the 1920s, following the surge of refugees fleeing Europe after World War I, that quotas were established. It bears noting that the American continent was still not part of this quota system. The racist underpinnings of immigration laws become clear when we look at how the quotas intentionally boosted Northern European numbers while curtailing Southern European, African and Asian migration. It was also not until the 1920s that the first deportations, visas and border patrol system were created.

War displaces the vulnerable and divides people, and so World War II's horrors resulted in new immigration measures, such as the Alien Registration Program. Questions of migration, which had been tied to economic issues through the Department of Labor, were now revised as security issues and moved to the Department of Justice. World War II prompted an exceptionally shameful chapter in U.S. history: Executive Order 9066, which forcibly incarcerated Japanese Americans in internment camps. Families who were American citizens lost homes and businesses solely because of their Japanese ancestry. Many returned home after the war only to find their properties confiscated, people living in their homes, their trucks, farms and orchards rezoned or sold.

With labor shortages brought on by the war, the Bracero Program was instituted in 1942 to recruit agricultural workers to the United States—after many Mexicans (and Mexican Americans) had been forcibly deported during the Great Depression. The *bracero* (the word means "hard work with your arms") workers had no path to permanent residence and were often exploited and exposed to dangerous chemicals. In 1954, with xenophobic sentiment again on the rise, the Eisenhower administration carried out Operation Wetback (using a racial slur against Hispanic

> **Look at what is happening now. Learn from what has happened before.**

persons). As The Los Angeles Times reported at the time, "border patrolmen and immigration officers, acting on intelligence gathered over a period of months, will sweep through...and ferret out illegal Mexican aliens."

In 2015 a very different Los Angeles Times took stock, reporting that "the Eisenhower-era operation...was accompanied by scores of deaths and shattered families. In some cases, U.S. citizens were apprehended and deported alongside unauthorized immigrants.... In the pre-civil rights era, few spoke up on behalf of the immigrants...."

The question of migration continued to vex a nation that had never approached it comprehensively or even intentionally, only haphazardly. Some clamored for humanitarian laws, and a few were passed, including the 1948 Displaced Persons Act—the first asylum legislation admitting displaced persons from Europe and allowing some already in the country to regularize their status. The 1953 Refugee Relief Act also provided some visas for refugees, primarily from Europe, and was followed by targeted programs for refugees from communist countries.

It is not until the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that migration caps were applied to the American continent. This created a system of preferences in place until recently: 1) family reunification, 2) employment and 3) refugees, in that order. During the Reagan administration, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act allowed almost three million immigrants to normalize their status while also increasing border enforcement and employer requirements. Although helpful to individuals, the legislation did not address the underlying issues with the immigration system.

In 1990, Congress created a category called Temporary Protected Status for asylum seekers from designated nations with extremely dangerous conditions because of war or political instability. The current Trump administration has revoked T.P.S. designation from several of these nations—and all are set to expire eventually. The laws tightening employer sanctions have also created a cascading effect of constant immigration upheaval, and repeated attempts at comprehensive immigration reform, including the bi-

CNS photo/pool

partisan Dream Act, have failed in Congress. In response, President Barack Obama created the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, in 2012 through an executive order. It has been repeatedly challenged.

Acting for Others

That morning in immigration court, I saw a courtroom full of young immigrants trying to do the right thing: go through the process, follow the law. If their stories are anything like that of the young mother I accompanied, they are fleeing persecution, torture and death in parts of the world where the powerful operate with impunity and lawlessness prevails. Earlier that week we had been to Catholic Charities and saw how the cuts to federal funds for refugee resettlement have decimated their programs. As the downcast social worker explained, the lawyers working on asylum cases had been let go. I could see the painful results: In that courtroom no one had a lawyer. What can any of us do?

In 2017, Pope Francis established a special section in the Roman Curia for migrants and refugees. It has articulated three simple overarching principles that may help guide our actions and advocacy in the United States.

First, people should be able to stay in their own lands.

Pope Francis tosses a wreath of flowers into the Mediterranean Sea off the Italian island of Lampedusa on July 8, 2013. The pope threw a wreath to honor the memory of immigrants who have died trying to cross from Africa to reach a new life in Europe.

Most migration comes from being forced from one's land. Pope Francis is explicit about what is necessary for people to be able to stay and thrive in their own countries: the three Ts of *tierra, techo, trabajo* ("land, lodging, labor"). When these necessities are lacking, people are forced to migrate.

Second, people should be free to move to sustain life and the lives of their families. Simply put, immigrant rights are human rights. When conditions cannot sustain a dignified life, people have a right to migrate in search of better conditions. This is the history of humanity, and especially of the United States. Curtailing this right to movement causes suffering and death. People today move because of armed conflicts, because poverty and the widening economic gap have created conditions where 10 percent of the world's population does not have access to safe and nutritious food. And as we read in "Laudato Si'," wars and hunger are related to the growing instability of our climate and the loss of ecosystems and habitats.

Finally, the third principle is: People should be free to return to their lands. The focus is on freedom as a necessary condition for human dignity.

What is happening in our world right now is overwhelming, but Catholics need to stay informed about the legal challenges. Understanding the problems and the laws will help provide hope for relief for the most vulnerable. We are all protagonists in this story, and each of us is called to active love of immigrants.

So what can you personally do?

Stay informed. Show up. Speak up. Cultivate community and a sense of radical interconnectedness. Volunteer with immigrants' rights organizations. Teach others. Get training to provide pastoral care. Raise money. Highlight the beauty of others. Engage your heart. And of course, look to heaven:

Francisco, protector of immigrants, pray for us.

Cecilia González-Andrieu *is a professor of theology at Loyola Marymount University and a contributing writer for America.*

Pope Francis meets migrants during his visit to the Mavrovouni camp for refugees and migrants on the island of Lesbos, Greece, on Dec. 5, 2021.

The Vatican's migrants and refugees section developed four action points to follow with regard to migrants and refugees in local communities.

1. *Welcome*. What can you do to create a welcoming climate for migrants? "Migration should be safe, legal and orderly, and the decision to migrate voluntary."

2. *Protect*. What can you do to fulfill the duty to safeguard migrants grounded in the centrality of the human person?

3. *Promote*. It isn't enough to arrive at a new place; the dignity of persons requires that we work to help those staying long-term to develop as human beings and contribute to society.

4. *Integrate*. This does not mean erasing anyone's roots but creating the conditions for them to be full members of the community while undoing systems that perpetuate marginality.

Struck Down, Not Destroyed

Keeping the faith while covering the Catholic Church

By Colleen Dulle

The first time I saw St. Peter's Basilica, I felt nothing. It was not the reaction I had thought I would have. I was a lifelong Catholic who had once seriously considered becoming a nun, and who now reported on the Vatican for a Jesuit magazine. But just a few days before, on a silent retreat, I had been red-faced, tears burning down my cheeks, as I hurled all my anger at God for standing by, apparently unmoved, as tens of thousands of children were sexually abused by Catholic priests over decades.

It was winter 2019. The previous six months on the religion beat had been wall-to-wall sex abuse coverage, starting with the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, which recounted in harrowing detail 70 years of abuse and cover-up. Then came the once-beloved Cardinal Theodore McCarrick's fall from grace, when his serial abuse of minors and seminarians was exposed by a few brave survivors and journalists. And finally, there was Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò's attempted coup, in which he hijacked the church's legitimate reckoning with abuse and the systems that enabled it, twisting it into an 11-page manifesto claiming that Pope Francis himself had covered for Mr. McCarrick.

Covering this news day in and day out, hearing and working to confirm, as much as possible, the harrowing details of how children were abused, along with discerning the intentions of people like Archbishop Viganò who wanted to use victims' trauma to further their own agendas, was excruciating. Those of us journalists who were younger had a particularly hard time; we had mostly been shielded

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St. Peter's Basilica and Square in Vatican City

from the abuse crisis during the first wave of revelations in 2002, having been too young to understand. Now, we were having to confront the evil within the church as employees and representatives of the institution. We all believed that for the church to move forward in any credible way, it first had to confront the whole truth. That was the mantra of what was quickly nicknamed the "summer of shame": The church needs to face the truth in order to heal.

That noble aspiration carried us only so far. I, for one, was compensating for the days of reading through the Grand Jury report and fact-checking Archbishop Viganò's claims by drinking even more than I already did. In fact, I first read the Viganò letter in the bathroom of some bar in Brooklyn I could never locate again.

I realize now this was because the way I had usually processed difficult things had been ripped out from under me: Whereas I used to find comfort slipping into the adoration chapel in St. Patrick's Cathedral near **America**'s office or relaxing into a pew in the church next door to my Bronx apartment to just talk through it all with God, now the place I had gone for consolation had become the focus of my anger.

I remember feeling comforted at Mass only one time during that summer—it was one Sunday when the first reading was, "Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the Lord." *Indeed*, I thought. *This is exactly what our church leaders have done, and they deserve divine punishment*. Immediately afterward

I would emerge either an atheist or, miraculously, someone with new resolve.

came the responsorial psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd." While the shepherds of the church continued to anger and disappoint me, the true shepherd, God, was there. I clung desperately to that sliver of hope.

In Search of New Resolve

I wasn't the only one struggling. The Washington Post oped section released a video of its many Catholic editors talking about how the abuse revelations had shaken their faith. Several friends stopped going to church; some have never come back. One told me even his devout parents could not bear to go to church anymore, so they decided as a family to stay home. Everywhere I turned, the feeling was the same—to quote Yeats, "things fall apart; the center cannot hold."

Although the epicenter of the crisis was the United States, Archbishop Viganò's letter, dropped during the pope's trip to Ireland, ensured its shock waves were felt everywhere, and Rome felt the need to take action. Pope Francis announced that he was gathering the heads of bishops' conferences from around the world to come to the Vatican in spring 2019 for a euphemistically named summit on "the protection of minors." Vatican reporters called it what it was: the summit on sexual abuse.

Most reporters were skeptical: There was no talk before the summit of imposing new rules or consequences for bishops who failed to report abuse. Expectations were that nothing would change. Nevertheless, it was going to be a huge media event, and I, like hundreds of others, requested temporary accreditation from the Holy See to cover it.

It just so happened that my trip to Rome for the summit bridged two other scheduled trips: I would go from a silent retreat in Montreal directly to Rome for the summit, and then to Israel and Palestine to work on one of **America**'s guided Holy Land pilgrimages. My faith was wobbly at best and painful at worst, and I would be facing it head-on during the retreat, then marching directly into the center of the church's failures, and afterward having to put on a nice, pious face for pilgrims making a once-in-a-lifetime visit to Christianity's holiest sites.

I sensed I would emerge either an atheist or, miraculously, someone with new resolve. If God was going to intervene, I thought, now would be a good time.

The Vatican summit, as expected, produced few immediate results. Although the bishops had heard powerful testimonies by abuse survivors from every continent—and even one from a female journalist who vowed to be the bishops' "worst enemy" if they did not take action—follow-up reforms would only begin gradually, months later. Trying not to lose hope, I vowed to track the next developments closely.

'A Soul Bowed Down'

Directly after a few whirlwind days covering the Vatican's summit, I boarded a flight to Tel Aviv, where I joined the pilgrimage through the Holy Land. I was exhausted, having had no time for reflection in Rome except a few stolen moments that morning when I had gone to St. Peter's Basilica at dawn. My primary feeling in that enormous cathedral was ambivalence: I prayed for friends I had promised to pray for, but when it came time to sit with God, I did not hear much. Walking out, I had a humorously decisive thought for someone who had only just stepped foot in Rome and never been to Galilee: "I think I'm more of a Galilee Catholic than a Rome Catholic."

When I reached Galilee, the natural surroundings were beautiful, but time to reflect remained elusive because of my work responsibilities. It was only at the very end of the pilgrimage, at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the site believed to be Jesus' tomb, that I finally had a moment of quiet.

Exhausted emotionally, mentally and physically by the marathon trip, having spent the last few hours defending our group's spot in line from other groups of impatient pilgrims, I finally collapsed kneeling at Christ's tomb for my allotted three seconds. (Really, there is a guy with a stopwatch there.) Still, it was enough time to feel a swell of consolation and to hear God say unmistakably: "Here is your only hope."

I knew exactly what this message meant. Just days before, on that retreat in Montreal where I'd grappled with my anger with God, I'd read two quotations from one of my favorite Catholic writers, Madeleine Delbrêl: "For the Gospel to reveal its mystery, no special setting, no advanced education, no particular technique is required. All it needs is a soul bowed down in adoration and a heart stripped of trust in all things human." Here I was, physically bowed down, adoring at the Resurrection site, with no hope left in the human institution of the church. Even this holy site was a place filled with aggression, divided among factions in fragile peace.

The second Delbrêl quotation was, "Unless you take

Above, Colleen Dulle stands in a crowd of reporters just outside the Vatican in 2019. At right, she interviews the journalist and historian Lucetta Scaraffia in Rome in 2019.

this little book of the Gospel in your hand with the determination of a person who is holding onto his very last hope, you will neither be able to figure it out nor receive its message." *Here* was my last hope: Despite humanity literally killing God Incarnate, God rose again, deciding we were worth saving.

Minutes later, we attended Mass in a nearby chapel. My colleague Father James Martin celebrated. He read from St. John's account of the Resurrection—the one where Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene.

Listening, I thought about Mary Magdalene's unjust reputation as a sex worker, a characterization started centuries after her lifetime. Her name might actually mean "tower," a tribute to her strength. In all the places we had visited, all the places where I had felt so spiritually dry, she had stayed by Jesus' side. Even when male disciples had fled, Mary Magdalene never left; like so many victims of unjust treatment at the hands of church leaders, she also never got her due.

Father Martin, reading the Gospel, choked up when Mary Magdalene, mistaking Jesus for the gardener, demanded to know what had happened to his body. I imagined being her: bereaved, incensed, missing my dearest friend. And how Jesus, after going through hell and back, wanted to see her first.

"Mariam!" Father Martin's voice cracked. Tears filled my eyes. "Rabbouni!" he whispered her reply.

I couldn't stop crying—even now, that two-word exchange moves me deeply. *Here* was my only hope, the exchange that makes this broken world, this broken church, worth living in.

Against all odds, I didn't return from my travels as an atheist, but with a new resolve to keep pushing forward—with my reporting, my wrestling with the institution of the church and my belonging in it, grounded in prayer, assured that that was where God wanted me. I'd collapsed at God's tomb, bereft of hope in human institutions, and when I rose, I heard the Gospel anew: A woman whom Jesus so deeply loved was entrusted with the very message he became incarnate to deliver—that despite everything, death was defeated, sin and evil did not win out.

Colleen Dulle *is an associate editor at America, co-host of the "Inside the Vatican" podcast and author of the book* Struck Down, Not Destroyed: Keeping the Faith as a Vatican Reporter, *from which this essay is adapted.*

LOVE AND LET GO

A doctor reflects on control, vulnerability and living in relationship

By Christopher Landry

Healing means control. That is what I learned when I started medical school nearly a decade ago. It's a belief embedded so deep in our understanding of medicine that it usually escapes conscious notice. But if you have ever seen a doctor for anything more serious than a cold, you have probably experienced it yourself. The doctor asks questions, pokes and prods, and then locates some aspect of your internal order that has fallen into chaos: blood pressure that is too high or too low; an underactive endocrine system; an overactive nervous one; organs failing; cells turning malignant. When the normal processes of the body fail by deficit or excess, the work of a doctor is to restore order—to regain control.

And what is true for physical ailments, I was taught as I passed through medical school and entered training as a psychiatrist, is just as true for mental ones. Physiological signs—the racing heartbeat of a panic attack, the sluggishness of depression, the boundless activity of mania—are matched by psychological symptoms like distorted thinking, irrational acts, even episodes of psychosis, in which participation in shared reality is all but lost. Working in hospital and emergency services, I discovered that, in psychiatric medicine, the control of symptoms requires the control of people.

In these institutions, I helped treat patients who were a danger to themselves and sometimes others—and unable to understand that this presented a problem. In such situations, the use of violence (effectively imprisoning patients

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on hospital wards, restraining them to stretchers, forcibly administering medications by mouth or injection) seemed a grim but necessary reality.

One young woman I helped to treat heard the voice of a dragon parasite in her belly commanding her to cut it free. Had she not been kept in the hospital under involuntary treatment for weeks, she might well have tried. After her treatment she returned to a life she was eager to live. As unpleasant as it seemed, without coercive control she might not be alive today.

But psychiatric crises begin outside the hospital. As my training went on, it became clear to me how rare the apparently clear-cut choices we faced on inpatient wards are in the everyday lives of people living with mental illness. The urgency of stopping someone on the brink of inflicting irrevocable harm has too often seemed to justify systemic responses founded on violence. I learned about the full, stark extent of this from one of my supervisors, a psychiatrist who spent decades working with some of the most seriously mentally ill people in New York.

She told me of a patient of hers some years ago with schizophrenia who was slowly becoming more paranoid and less able to care for himself, and who finally stopped making his appointments altogether. With the best of intentions, and spurred by his family's growing concern, she requested a mobile crisis visit—a response by medical and social workers to non-life-threatening mental health crises. During that visit, the mobile crisis worker, by his account, saw the patient open a drawer containing a knife, so he called 911. When police arrived and the patient would not open the door, they broke it down. Though my supervisor never learned exactly how it happened, the patient died falling from a window. Our apparently caring response to those in crisis—a control underwritten by the threat and use of violence—did not result in healing, but in death.

In my supervisor's story, I glimpsed the dark side of the compassionate control I was being taught to exercise over my patients. And although her patient's story was extreme, it was far from uncommon. Mental health advocates estimate that about a quarter of people killed by police each year are suffering from acute mental illness, and many of these killings occur in the context of a 911 call asking for assistance.

When Fear Impedes Help

In the United States, when someone in need or their loved ones ask for help, they are answered by people with guns. And this condition, despite the atmosphere of fear it creates—the everyday harm it inflicts on patients, and our demonstrable failure to accurately predict patients' violence or suicide—goes largely unquestioned by medical professionals. Our reliance on control has become so habitual and ingrained that it is accepted even amid manifest and continual failure. Even when that failure has a body count.

That body count, I realized not long into my residency, was far larger than even the rolls of those killed by the police. One of my patients, a woman in her 30s whom I knew for two years, has suffered from severe depression since late in college. After nine months of our working together, her father died, and her desire to continue living seemed to evaporate. Talking with her about this, it was only logical, only caring, to ask if she was thinking about suicide. She told me she was not.

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Treating symptoms—even treating illnesses—is not the same as treating a person.

In the weeks that followed our conversation, her condition seemed to worsen precipitously. Worried about her rapid weight loss and increasing inability to wake up for work in the morning, I contacted her therapist. I discovered her suicidal thoughts were not only present but extensive, leading her to search online for which method of suicide—jumping from a bridge? an overdose?—would be least painful and most effective. At our next session, I shared this information with my patient and asked her what had made it easier to talk with him than with me. She answered that as a medical doctor at a large hospital, I seemed to her more likely, if she spoke of suicide, to hospitalize her involuntarily. In this assessment, I realized, she was almost certainly correct.

I later learned that she had followed that judgment to a logical conclusion and told the therapist I had spoken with that she would no longer discuss her suicidal ideation with either of us. The prospect of involuntary commitment so frightened her that she withdrew from the relationships that might otherwise have helped her find good reason to live. This was, I discovered, far from uncommon. Studies indicate fears of being forcibly hospitalized erode trust between patients and professionals, making the former significantly less likely to seek out future mental health care and, when they do engage, less likely to speak honestly about their experience, including suicidal thoughts.

As a psychiatrist, I had hoped to explore my patient's feelings about suicide with her, discover their meaning together, and perhaps find a language for her pain other than death. But insofar as she remained subject to my overriding professional responsibility to control her behavior, her inner world—the allure of dying, grief for her father, rage that he could not care for her—became impossible to meaningfully discuss. Instead of discovering meaning in a dialogic relationship, she faced a simple choice—worse, a choice invested with precisely the agency she felt her interactions with medical professionals had taken from her—whether to live or die. Once again, the control intended to enforce health had pushed someone in pain toward death, not away from it.

My experience with this suicidal patient heightened the contradictions I had begun to encounter as a psychiatrist. In simply possessing the power to coerce my patient, I had cut off the free communication, the genuine relationship from which understanding and healing could come.

'Dead Zones of the Imagination'

Violence forced the breadth of my patients' experience—and of those who suffer from serious mental illness in general—into narrow, preset formulations. Patients could not meaningfully influence my actions. The corollary was that I could not understand theirs. I found a phrase from the work of the radical anthropologist David Graeber that described this phenomenon: "dead zones of the imagination."

The constant threat of asymmetric force—violence invoked at will by one group upon another—creates, Graeber argues, an asymmetry in knowledge. Between equals, relationships demand "debate, clarification and renegotiation": a constant effort to be open to the other, to understand another person's interior world. Violence and the threat of violence obviate those demands.

"Violence may well be the only form of human action,"

Graeber writes, "by which it is possible to have relatively predictable effects on the actions of a person about whom you understand nothing."

Those threatened have to constantly anticipate the actions of those deploying force, a process Graeber calls "interpretive labor." But the inverse is not true: "Those relying on the fear of force are not obliged to engage in a lot of interpretive labor, and thus, generally speaking, do not." Control does not just produce poor relationships, in Graeber's view; it produces non-relationships, or systemic, unconscious refusals of humanity and agency.

We see this most explicitly on our society's margins—consider how police habitually mistreat racial and social minorities, especially those without property or status. But I think the thesis applies just as much to psychiatry, even where practitioners are trained to be minutely sensitive to subtle communication from their patients, constantly engaged in the work of making sense of the experience of another. As I had discovered, at precisely those moments and with those people where this work of relationship is most necessary, it breaks down entirely. We enter the dead zone.

When the Covid-19 pandemic enforced months of solitude outside my work in the hospital, I read Dorothy Day's autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*. Its title seemed to fit the moment. I was already familiar with Day's radical nonviolence. What arrested me completely was the way she applied it to her entire life. In 1940, she wrote:

> We are urging what is a seeming impossibility—a training to the use of non-violent means of opposing injustice, servitude and a deprivation of the means of holding fast to the Faith. It is again the Folly of the Cross. But how else is the Word of God to be kept alive in the world. That Word is Love, and we are bidden to love God and to love one another. It is the whole law, it is all of life. Nothing else matters.

These words, in one sense about the war raging in Europe, applied equally to Day's work providing food and shelter to those without. For Day, to be nonviolent as Christ is—that is, not controlling but generous and responsive to the needs of others—was a call made to every person. Although I did not yet know how, I understood that this call was one I had to find a way to answer in my professional life.

In Search of Loving Community

When the public health restrictions abated more than a year later, I visited my local Catholic Worker house, Maryhouse in New York. It was founded in 1975 as a haven for women asylum patients abandoned during the psychiatric deinstitutionalization process. To this day, the house welcomes women, many living with serious mental illness, to live in community, and, for those who are able and willing, to share in the work that keeps the community running. This is an expression of Day's nonviolent ethic—and a way of caring for the people I encounter as patients that is radically different from my experiences in institutional medicine.

It is far from the only project of its kind. A few months ago, I made a visit to the Catholic Worker community in the North Philadelphia neighborhood of Kensington, an area marked by extremes of poverty, homelessness and opioid use. There, for almost 30 years, two friends— Mary Beth Appel, a nurse practitioner, and Johanna Berrigan, a physician assistant—have run a small, all-volunteer free clinic. Their patients are mostly unsheltered or very tenuously housed; the majority are opioid users.

The clinic has no security staff and no red tape. The volunteers had warm relationships with almost everyone I saw them meet: relationships of equals, built over many years through mutual understanding and demonstrated trustworthiness. Some of the regular patients, who, Mary Beth would tell me, habitually did disturbing things—robbery, violence, aggression—behaved completely differently in these rooms, or on the street when the clinic workers were around.

The free clinic models what both Dorothy Day and David Graeber wanted: a world in which the hard work of living together, with all the messiness of disagreement, misunderstanding and conflicting aims, can be accomplished. This is a society where everyone (not only the patients) has no choice but to engage in interpretive labor because there is no recourse to systematic, violent control. This is what the commandment of love looks like in daily life. Day described that new society as one "in which it will be easier to be good."

I think you could also describe that vision as a society where it is easier to be well. That vision doesn't ensure that the Gospel's commandment of love is always followed—no more than it was always followed in the houses of hospitality Day founded—nor that it is ever easy to follow. It is, as she said, the "folly of the cross." But if we do not attempt to follow—worse, if we use violence to excuse ourselves from the commandment itself—love becomes impossible.

I spent my final year of residency trying to find a future place of work that might reflect that vision of a better world: communities building, as Day often said, "a new society within the shell of the old." I found one, called Fountain House, very close to home. It is a "clubhouse" in Hell's Kitchen on the West Side of New York, founded by and for people with serious mental illness to support its mem-

I saw some of the same people I knew as suffering patients brought into relationships that led them to flourish.

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bers in living a satisfying life through social belonging and shared work. In each of the units, members work alongside staff as partners, working out differences together and sharing the community's work: orienting new members, maintaining the physical space, planning menus, preparing meals, even publishing a weekly newspaper.

In the process, though mental illness does not go away, the most destructive parts—despair, disconnectedness, stagnation—improve. At Fountain House, I saw some of the same people I knew as suffering patients brought into relationships that led them to flourish. I saw firsthand how lacking my formal education was. Treating symptoms—even treating illnesses—is not the same as treating a person. Real healing does not require control. It requires love.

Rejecting violence allows us to build a better world, but not a perfect or easy one. My work at Fountain House includes outreach to homeless people with serious mental illness. The basic survival needs of such people are often so precarious that the shared responsibilities of the community's life seem closed to them; they may use facilities but not maintain them, or they may draw on resources they cannot contribute to. But we have to be open to relationship with the vulnerable, even though that involves vulnerability ourselves, even if it risks being taken advantage of. To systematically exclude some potential members from our lives would require the control and violence we reject, to numb our imaginations—to re-enter the dead zone.

Love is far harder than control. It takes constant work to be open to another as *an other*, with interests, needs and desires radically foreign to my own. Love asks, in a way, to cede them a part in how I should live. Building relationships and community means we have to leave behind security. Choosing not to do violence can mean suffering the violence of another, often in the risk of being exploited, but sometimes in the flesh.

The Sermon on the Mount points directly to the Cross. It gives the possibility of offering real help to my advisor's psychotic patient, not his death at the hands of police. And real relationship with my suicidal patient, not the solitude of incommunicable anguish. To have any hope at all, doctors must give up their power over patients. They must commit to advising, caring, persuading and loving, but not to coerce. To heal the sick, we doctors will first have to be healed not only in ourselves, but in our relationships, our communities, our society.

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Collezione Franco Maria Ricci, Labirinto della Masone, Fontanellato (Italy)

A 'Woman Problem' or a History Problem?

Catholics should be more familiar with the history of female and lay ecclesial leadership

By Bronwen McShea

This past January, Pope Francis appointed Simona Brambilla, a member of the Consolata Missionary Sisters, to co-lead the Vatican's Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life alongside Cardinal Pro-Prefect Ángel Fernández Artime. This first-ever appointment of a woman as a Vatican prefect raised eyebrows, as did Francis' earlier inclusion of women as voting participants in the Synod on Synodality.

Secular news outlets underscored its unprecedented nature. Within the Catholic Church, traditionalists and some canon lawyers raised objections about any non-ordained person, male or female, being authorized to govern institutes of consecrated life. Progressives, by contrast, while lamenting that Sister Brambilla has to share her

post with a cardinal, welcomed the move as a historic step toward more inclusion of women in positions of ecclesial decision-making at high levels—again underscoring its unprecedented nature.

That it is newsworthy at all, 60 years after the Second Vatican Council, when women are given leadership positions by Catholic churchmen seems sufficient evidence to some observers that some feminist critics of Roman Catholicism have been right all along: that our religious tradition in general has a "woman problem" rooted in centuries of misogyny and patriarchal structures, especially our all-male clergy.

This is far from my own view. I accept the consistent teaching of the magisterium—which our newly elected Pope Leo XIV appears poised to uphold—that only men can be ordained to sacramental ministry. I also have a conservative reverence for papal authority and for clerical authority broadly where sacramental matters are concerned. Yet I agree that contemporary Catholicism has a woman problem.

To my view, though, the problem is not that the church is too beholden to its historical character in this area, but rather that Catholics suffer from widespread ignorance of important, historical precedents of both female and lay ecclesial leadership.

In fact, from the earliest centuries of Christianity to well after the post-Tridentine period, many women participated in ecclesial *governance*, and not just in advisory, subordinate roles under episcopal authority. Acknowledging that the examples I highlight below were minority cases within a patriarchal framework, I nevertheless propose that further considerations of women's leadership in our church today, which are already proceeding with new energy at the start of a new pontificate, ought not proceed without awareness of them.

Decision-Making Women in Early Christianity

Beginning early in the first century, women served as leaders within the first Christian communities, including in Rome. There are references to such women in the letters of St. Paul and other Apostolic Era writings. Likewise, patristic sources contain many references to women who exercised various forms of ecclesial leadership.

Although we cannot establish much definitively about certain aspects of their leadership, given the limitations of the sources, we can say confidently that networks of pious Roman noblewomen sometimes played the important role of helping to select who should be the bishop of Rome—even in the fourth century, when those bishops began to be called popes. Liberius, for example, largely owed his election in 352 A.D. to Rome's pious patrician ladies. These women helped ensure, further, that Liberius remained bishop of Rome when Emperor Constantius II attempted to replace him with the antipope Felix.

In the early medieval period, monastic abbesses came to prominence in parts of the growing Christian world, exercising governance not only over their own communities but also at times over affiliated men's communities. In the British Isles, they also participated in local ecclesial synods alongside bishops, other clergymen and leading laymen.

Anglo-Saxon writers, including St. Bede and Stephen of Ripon, treated the presence of abbesses at local ecclesial councils as a matter of course. St. Mildred, the abbess at Minster-in-Thanet in Kent, participated in the Synod of Baccaneld of 694 along with four other abbesses. St. Hilda, the foundress of Whitby Abbey, was not only present at the first synod in Northumbria but hosted it inside her convent. This was the synod that adopted the method of calculating when Easter Sunday falls that was preferred in papal Rome, famously causing a rift with monks in Iona and Ireland.

It is even better documented that the Second Council of Nicaea, which settled the Iconoclastic Controversy, was called together and presided over by a woman: Irene of Athens, the regent and then ruler in her own right of the Byzantine Empire, who lived from around 750 to 803. According to the historian Judith Herrin, Empress Irene chose Tarasios, a layman she trusted, to be ordained and serve as the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople. With Tarasios at her side, Irene presided over the final session of the council in 787—not Pope Adrian I, with whom she was in cordial correspondence, and who stayed home in Italy.

That session pronounced definitively on the matter of how images of Christ, his mother, saints and angels could be employed in Christian worship, something that had been violently dividing Christians for decades.

Female Rulers and Territorial Abbesses

Irene is also known for having deposed and blinded her own son, who was a bit too friendly with some Iconoclasts. But since there have been plenty of popes and bishops over the centuries who were guilty of peccadilloes, Machiavellian ruthlessness and worse, but whose authority Catholics do not question, a well-rounded history of women's participation in ecclesial governance has room for some women whose moral records are similarly questionable.

Notable in this vein was Marozia, a Roman noblewoman and the mother of Pope John XI. In the early 10th century, Pope John X made Marozia, in an unprecedented ceremony, *senatrix* of Rome. She was the de facto ruler of the

> Women served as leaders within the first Christian communities, including in Rome.

young, newly sovereign Papal States for several decades, working to protect them from domination by the Holy Roman Empire to the north—in one instance by deposing and murdering the same John X and replacing him with Leo VI.

Going on to have several more of her preferred candidates take the papal throne, including her son John XI, Marozia was accused by pro-imperial chroniclers, decades after the facts in question, of having had an affair with an earlier pope, Sergius III. She has in consequence been characterized as a villain in traditional historical accounts of this period. Yet, ironically, none of the popes connected to her are regarded as antipopes.

A medieval woman more beloved in traditional Catholic histories is St. Adelaide of Italy, the consort, mother and grandmother, respectively, of the first three Holy Roman emperors named Otto. Her participation in high-level ecclesial governance was celebrated by churchmen of her era. Just an infant at the end of Marozia's rule, she became in succession the Queen of Italy and Queen of the Germans, and in 962 she was crowned and consecrated by Pope John XII—in an unprecedented way—as Holy Roman empress and co-ruler of her husband Otto I's empire.

Indeed, John XII developed a new rite for her consecration that linked her to a tradition of sacred queenship going back to the biblical Esther.

Adelaide went on to use her papally sanctioned powers to found and protect various ecclesiastical institutions. She also helped to reform lax and corrupt monasteries as an indispensable friend of two saintly Benedictine abbots, Majolus and Odilo of Cluny, favoring their great Cluniac Reform—the most famous international monastic reform effort of the medieval period. Later in life, while governing the Holy Roman Empire as regent for her grandson, her ecclesial interventions included founding Seltz Abbey in Alsace, giving the male Benedictines who joined it the right to elect their own abbot. She secured papal protection for this male community as well.

The historian Penelope Nash has further shown that Adelaide's effective mode of ecclesial leadership was imitated by ruling women who came after her. Matilda of Canossa, the Margravine of Tuscany who militarily and materially made possible Pope Gregory VII's famous Investiture Controversy slap-down of the future Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, was supported by the papacy in her exercise of some forms of governance over ecclesiastics. Pope Urban II even authorized her to summon the bishop of Mantua, who was trying to usurp her rights over a monastery tied to her patronage, and to order him—in her own name, and in the presence of another bishop and other prominent men—to peacefully restore to her and the monastery all that belonged to them.

Also in this era, some abbesses came to exercise a great deal of authority not only over their own local religious communities, but also over others across great distances. The abbesses at Fontevraud in France, for example, had authority by the late Middle Ages over at least 78 priories—all of them mixed male-and-female communities, with women having the more senior leadership positions within them. Some abbesses governed entire ecclesiastical territories called abbatial domains, which were similar in some respects to bishops' dioceses. Such women (and the same was true of even more abbots) were considered to be prelates, because they exercised quasi-episcopal jurisdiction in territories not geographically part of an existing diocese.

Among such women were the princess-abbesses of Quedlinburg in Saxony and the imperial abbesses in Zurich. They governed their local churches, not just their own orders' communities, in a range of ways except in sacramental matters. They did so with the recognition of popes, emperors, kings and neighboring bishops. The first princess-abbess of Quedlinburg, Matilda, was even in the 10th century called a metropolitan, or overseer of bishops, including in her ceremony of consecration as an abbess. At one point, she not only attended but called together an ecclesial synod at Dornberg.

Collective Catholic memory of such abbesses, their male counterparts and their participation in a variety of areas of ecclesial governance gradually faded after various abbatial domains were dissolved and otherwise transformed amid the tumult of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation and the European revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Leading Women of the Early Modern Church

The same is true of our collective memory of many late medieval and early modern queens who enforced ecclesial law and led the Catholic Church on the ground throughout Christendom. Isabella of Castile is a clear example. Much better remembered for sending Christopher Columbus across the Atlantic and for establishing the dreaded Spanish Inquisition throughout her domains, she also was given the power by three successive popes to appoint numerous

Portrait of Maria Theresa of Austria, attributed to Martin van Meytens

bishops and other ecclesiastical officials throughout her domains. This enabled her, and her husband Ferdinand alongside her, to oversee a much-needed reform of corrupt religious houses and episcopal sees suffering from chronic episcopal absenteeism.

Further along in the 16th century, Queen Marguerite of Navarre tried to keep reform-minded Catholics and followers of Martin Luther and John Calvin from irrevocably splitting. To this end, she appointed as bishop of Oloron in her kingdom the reform-minded priest Gérard Roussel, who instituted vernacular preaching and instructions on the Creed and ecclesial laws in his diocese.

To the north, Queen Mary I of England, Isabella of Castile's granddaughter, did her best to restore the Roman Catholic clerical hierarchy, liturgy, and religious and educational institutions in her realm after not a few consecrated Catholic bishops and pastors (it is often forgotten) had chosen to break with the papacy and help her father King Henry VIII and her brother King Edward VII appropriate and suppress these things in prior years.

In the meantime, Juana of Austria, Mary's sister-in-law and the regent of Spain in the mid-16th century, employed her power to protect and help build up a new religious order, the Jesuits, during a period when they faced great opposition from ecclesiastical officials in Spain. Eventually, with Juana's support, the Jesuits became officially favored by the Crown of Spain and were authorized—by the Spanish monarchy, as bishops and popes largely did not decide such appointments then—to serve as missionaries in the Americas and parts of Asia. Where Juana is remembered today, however, it is typically in connection to her being permitted to take vows secretly as a Jesuit scholastic, despite the order's general exclusion of women.

By the late 16th century, the enforcement of various norms of the reforming Council of Trent depended upon ruling Catholic laywomen as well as laymen. In the Spanish Netherlands, for example, the implementation of Trent and the establishment of reformed Catholic religious orders that confidently embodied and advanced the council's aims—including the Discalced Carmelites, Capuchins and Jesuits—owed much to the equally sovereign Isabella Clara Eugenia of the House of Habsburg and her husband Albert of Austria. Bishops in their domains regularly had to negotiate with—and defer to—Isabella and Albert, as well as the papal curia, to make fervently post-Tridentine Catholicism a reality on the ground in northwestern Europe, not just the dream of document-writing Vatican bureaucrats.

Female Catholic rulers' ecclesial interventions

> **Anglo-Saxon writers treated the presence of abbesses at local ecclesial councils as a matter of course.**

reached their zenith in the 18th century with those wielded by the at-times militantly Catholic Habsburg empress, Maria Theresa of Austria. Pope Clement XIII accepted her bold request to be recognized by the Holy See as *Regina Apostolica* ("Apostolic Queen").

Clement XIII's successor, Clement XIV, barely raised an eyebrow after Maria Theresa changed which Catholic feast days would be publicly celebrated in her domains; after she imposed taxes on clergymen previously exempt from them; after she established seminaries and regulated what would be taught in them; after she imposed new entrance requirements for postulants and novices of various religious orders within her domains; and even after she suppressed certain religious congregations and asserted a right to determine the future not only of their properties, but also of the ordained and vowed persons attached to them.

She did much of this against the wishes of some high-ranking churchmen within and beyond her empire, but with the enthusiastic compliance of many others.

Prominent abbesses and female rulers were not the only women involved in high-level ecclesiastical decision-making in the early modern period. St. Teresa of Ávila, for instance, went forward with her historic reform and leadership of the new Discalced Carmelite communities that she founded—including monasteries for men as well as convents for women—against the wishes of some local bishops, Inquisition officials and Carmelite superiors in Spain, thanks to direct authorizations to do so by both Pope Gregory XIII and King Philip II. Similarly, St. Louise de Marillac, who founded the Daughters of Charity, led and developed her innovative institute for years across multiple diocesan borders, doing so before receiving official sanction from individual local bishops and even from the pope.

Where early modern, non-royal and non-consecrated Catholic laywomen are concerned, historical records abound with evidence that they sometimes exercised major forms of ecclesial leadership. This, indeed, is the area of historical research that first interested me in the subject and led me to write a book on a French noblewoman of the 17th century, Marie de Vignerot, the duchess of Aiguillon, who was the niece and heiress of Cardinal Richelieu, the first minister of state to King Louis XIII.

During and long after her uncle's lifetime, Vignerot was involved in the selection of French bishops, including for new missionary dioceses in Asia and North America that were erected by Pope Alexander VII, largely because she convinced him to do so after several prominent clergymen had failed to accomplish this. She succeeded in part because of her enticing offer to bankroll them and to help supply them with good bishops and priests affiliated with the new Séminaire des Missions Étrangères in Paris—a seminary she was also involved in founding.

Furthermore, Vignerot exercised control over Vincentian missions in North Africa and Madagascar, as well as some domestic French Vincentian missions, as one of her friend St. Vincent de Paul's most powerful patrons. She was responsible, too, for the foundation of Catholic hospitals, seminaries, schools, convents, new institutes of consecrated life and an array of other ministries in France, in papal Rome and in mission contexts across the globe. And she was praised as one of the leading Catholics in all of Europe by Pope Alexander VII and other prominent churchmen of her day. St. Vincent de Paul's first biographer, Bishop Louis Abelly, believed her name and reputation as a pillar of the Catholic Church would be remembered for ages to come.

The Situation Today

Vignerot is largely forgotten today, however. While this has proved to be a boon for my labors as a historian, the degree to which her story as I have written it seems so surprising to modern people, especially to Catholics with some background in ecclesiastical history and French history, seems indicative of that "woman problem" to which I referred at the outset. In presuming that it is a radical, unprecedented thing for Catholic women to exercise ecclesial leadership at high levels, we are demonstrating how cut off we are from our own Catholic past, not how constrained we are by its no-doubt patriarchal norms.

I wonder how reactions to Pope Francis' high-level appointments of women would have differed—across the entire traditionalist-progressive spectrum—if every Catholic commentator had learned somewhere along the way even half of the aforementioned history, either from better informed Catholic educators or from historically rigorous and well-rounded resources promoted by Catholic leaders. I suspect they would not have universally characterized what the late pope was up to in this area as so "unprece-

A mosaic of Emperor John II Comnenus, the Virgin Mary and Empress Irene in Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, created in 1118

dented," let alone raised their eyebrows in such predictable unison.

Instead, I think that, at this start of Leo XIV's pontificate, we already would be having a more mature discussion about how Francis' appointments were in some ways consistent with, and in others different from, various precedents in Catholicism's deep and rich past. We might also be less focused, in what seems to me a modern, clericalist mode, on the question of a female diaconate.

We might be debating the question, related to *lay* involvement in non-sacramental areas of ecclesial governance, that the papal canonist Cardinal Gianfranco Ghirlanda, S.J., has posed. How definitively rooted, truly, in developing Catholic thought and practice over the centuries, is the often-repeated dictum of modern churchmen that holy orders and ecclesial governance *per se*—in areas beyond the sacramental, such as the disciplining of clergy and religious—are inseparably bound together?

I am hopeful that our new Holy Father, who as Cardinal Robert Prevost worked closely with several women Francis had also controversially appointed to the Dicastery of Bishops, will foster a debate over this that is simultaneously historically informed, responsive to present-day attitudes and reverent toward longer-term, not just recent, Catholic tradition.

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What to Expect From an Augustinian Pope

In Pope Leo's first words, there are abiding themes from the Doctor of Grace

By James K. A. Smith

When Pope Leo XIV emerged onto the balcony overlooking St. Peter's Square, I was moved by what I can only describe as his receptivity. His was a smiling, open-hearted face. He seemed humbled by the scene and grateful to receive the warmth and love of the people.

Then my phone started blowing up. A fellow Villanova Wildcat had just been elected pope!

Excited by an Augustinian bishop of Rome, friends began texting. An email thread of St. Augustine scholars chimed in on the news, musing about the shape of an Augustinian papacy.

And that is the question I have been thinking about ever since: What might we expect from an Augustinian pope? I listened to Pope Leo's first messages with Augustinian ears. In his first words from the balcony, and then in his homily at his first Mass, I indeed heard abiding themes from the Doctor of Grace.

Already in his first "Urbi et Orbi" address, for example, one could hear Pope Leo's vision for faith on the move. "So let us move forward, without fear," he encouraged the flock, "together, hand in hand with God and with one another." When Pope Leo described himself as "a son of St. Augustine," he pictured faith as a pilgrimage: "So may we all walk together towards that homeland that God has prepared for us." Faith as "walking," discipleship as a journey, the Christian life as a long pilgrimage—these are deeply Augustinian metaphors.

For St. Augustine, baptism is not an arrival, and conversion is not the end of the road; both are just the beginning of a journey with and into God's very life. Elsewhere I have described this as Augustine's "refugee spirituality." Every human heart, Augustine suggests, is both running from something and running toward something. We experience alienation and unsettledness in this world, but we also have a hunger that compels us to look, as Pope Leo put it, for a "homeland" that we have never been to before.

Christ is "the Way," and to be in Christ is to be on the way. This is also why, like Pope Francis, Leo is deeply concerned with the plight of migrants and refugees, decrying "the neglect of mercy" and "appalling violations of human dignity" in his first homily.


CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV arrives at the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican for a meeting on May 12 with representatives of the media who covered his election.

Echoing his father, Augustine, Pope Leo emphasizes that we never undertake this journey alone. The church is a ragtag community journeying together, like Chaucer's rowdy pilgrims. So we walk together, he emphasizes over and over, "hand in hand with God and one another."

St. Augustine is such a towering intellect in the history of the church that we might miss how important friendship was for him. His *Confessions* is animated by crucial friendships, some of which endured his entire life. Augustine could not imagine faith apart from community. "I couldn't be happy without friends," he writes. Later in his life, when he was cajoled into becoming a bishop, he had one stipulation: that he be permitted to found a monastic community within the bishop's residence so he wouldn't have to live there alone.

The fruit of Augustine's thinking about communal living is expressed in the Rule of St. Augustine, the oldest monastic rule in the Western church, later influencing St. Benedict. Augustine's Rule includes a piece of wisdom that I hear echoed in the vision of Pope Leo XIV: "Whenever you go out, walk together, and when you reach your destination, stay together."

And where are we going? Again, in his first words as pope, Leo spoke of a "homeland that God has prepared for us." This is the language of Augustine's *City of God*. Like the prodigal son, we are on a journey home to a father who welcomes us with unconditional love. But unlike that prodigal son, our journey home is not a simple return. In some sense, we were made for this country we have never visited. Our citizenship is in the city of God for which we long and for which we labor.

St. Augustine distinguished between the "earthly city" and the "city of God," not as two planes of existence—a distinction between heaven and earth—but rather as two different ways of being a *civitas*, a "people" or a "republic." What distinguishes the earthly city from the city of God is not mundane, material earth vs. ethereal, eternal heaven, but rather, Augustine emphasizes, two different ways of loving. The earthly city is a way of being human animated by the *libido dominandi*—a lust for power and domination. The "republic" that is the city of God is characterized by a love of God and neighbor that expresses itself in a willingness to sacrifice for others.

Much has been made of Pope Leo XIV as the first American pope. I suspect that for him, as an Augustinian, this identifier means almost nothing. Whatever its gifts and transgressions, the republic that is the United States of America is, from an Augustinian perspective, yet one more outpost of the earthly city. I also suspect that he sees a foretaste of the city of God not in the power-mongering and domination of the U.S. government, but in the quiet, sacrificial community of his longtime diocese in Peru.

The Cuban-American theologian Justo González wrote an evocative book called *The Mestizo Augustine* to describe the way St. Augustine lived a kind of "hybrid" life from the time of his birth as the child of a Roman father and a Berber, North African mother. Augustine's theology reflected a similar *mestizo* sensibility: To live "on the way" with Jesus was to also live between two worlds. Pope Leo's own Creole heritage reflects this sort of legacy, but I expect it has been his pastoral and missionary work in South America that has reinforced this Augustinian sense of a citizenship that transcends national borders. (But I am sure he still roots for the White Sox. You can take the boy out of south Chicago but...you know.)

A final Augustinian theme I hear in Pope Leo's first words: a passionate missionary concern to meet the world where it is, coupled with a deep conviction that the Gospel promises what the world craves—peace. I confess that I teared up at the pope's very first words: "Peace be with you all." As he noted, these were the first words spoken by the risen Christ to his puzzled and despairing disciples. The peace Jesus promises is not just the absence of conflict or the cessation of hostilities; peace, rather, is the end of anxiety. It is Jesus' promise to be, finally, what we have been frantically chasing in a million inchoate ways: satisfaction of a hunger we cannot explain.

Everybody's got a hungry heart, as the Augustinian bard of New Jersey put it, and when Jesus offers us peace, what he really offers is *rest*. "Come to me, you who are weary and carrying a heavy burden," Jesus says, "and you no longer have to keep proving yourself." You can rest, because Jesus' love is not predicated on your performance. Your restless heart can find a home here.

I heard this Augustinian passion in Pope Leo's first homily when he spoke to "the world in which we live, with its limitations and its potential, its questions and its convictions." Pope Leo's missionary impulse is informed by an Augustinian diagnosis of the modern condition. This

In his first 'Urbi et Orbi' address one could hear Pope Leo's vision for faith on the move.

attunes him to the world's hungers and hopes, but it also gives him insight into the world's misguided attempts to satisfy this hunger with paltry substitutes.

For St. Augustine, our idolatries are not so much false beliefs as misdirected loves. We keep looking for love in all the wrong places, as Johnny Lee twanged in the soundtrack to "Urban Cowboy." This is why, in his first homily, Pope Leo noted our tendency to seek security in things like "technology, money, success, power or pleasure." Christians are not immune to these temptations, he cautions, which is why we end up living in what he calls "a state of practical atheism."

But it is not just the diagnosis that is Augustinian; it is also the prescription. *Get more rest*, the ancient doctor tells us, by which he means: Find yourself in the One you were made for. As Augustine famously phrased it at the opening of his *Confessions*, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

I think this animates Pope Leo's vision for evangelism. The Gospel is not just the answer to a question; Christ is food for hungry hearts. We must be attuned to the restless desires of the world, even sympathetic to all of the misguided ways we try to satisfy this hunger, if we are going to offer Christ as the bread of life.

In the 1879 encyclical "Aeterni Patris," Pope Leo XIII extolled and enshrined St. Thomas Aquinas as a privileged doctor of the church, launching a revival of scholasticism into the 20th century. I am not sure our world needs us to parse arcane metaphysics at this moment. I think the world needs to hear that God is near to the broken-hearted and offers his own body to satisfy our longings.

Perhaps what Leo XIII did for Aquinas, Pope Leo XIV can do for St. Augustine, that proto-existentialist whose insights into the hungers of the human heart are especially germane to our secular age—which, despite everything, can't seem to shake the sense that we are made for something more.

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Pope Leo can bring 'Rerum Novarum' into the age of artificial intelligence

In 1891, Pope Leo XIII began the church's tradition of social encyclicals with his "Rerum Novarum" ("Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor"). Leo XIII wrote in the context of a world whose economy and politics had been upended by an industrial revolution that began in Europe and North America and would continue to sweep across the world. Large numbers of people had already relocated from small farming communities to swelling industrial cities, and many crossed countries and oceans out of economic necessity. The new industrial economy created wealth unseen in previous epochs, but those in factory, mine or field saw little of the fruit of their labors.

Industrialization held great promise for prosperity and health but also great risks of exploitation and the destruction of communities. In words that could also be applied to our own technological and economic moment, Leo XIII wrote: "The momentous gravity of the state of things now obtaining fills every mind with painful apprehension; wise men are discussing it; practical men are proposing schemes...." There is no topic, he wrote, "which has taken deeper hold on the public mind."

With the benefit of hindsight, we can recognize both the benefits of that first industrialization, such as higher standards of living, and the costs, such as uneven wealth distribution and environmental destruction.

Today we bear witness to an industrial revolution that may be as momentous as the first, if not more so. In his first address to the College of Cardinals after his election, Pope Leo XIV echoed the previous Pope Leo to describe "another industrial revolution" and to note "developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defense of human dignity, justice and labor."

Like the factories of the 19th century, the artificial intelligence revolution holds both promise and peril. The first industrial revolution upended the lives of manual laborers and craft workers. The A.I. revolution seems headed most directly for knowledge workers and creatives (as screenwriters and actors argued in their 2023 strikes). The precise impact is impossible to foresee.

The written word, once the exclusive domain of the human mind, is now increasingly the domain of machines. Video and audio, too, are more and more fre-

Engineering students at The Catholic University of America in Washington, which has launched bachelor's and master's degree programs in artificial intelligence for the fall of 2025

quently A.I.-generated. Professions that long commanded social esteem as learned or creative vocations now seem vulnerable in the face of the machine. In his recent message to representatives of the media, Pope Leo lamented the "Tower of Babel" of modern, technology-driven communications. He went on to observe that A.I. holds the potential to either exacerbate or ameliorate the breakdown of true dialogue in social communications.

In the face of new challenges, Pope Leo asks the cardinals and the whole church to call upon the "treasury of her social teaching." The church's social tradition, at its heart, is a reflection on the principles required to build a just society so that all might flourish. Calling upon the tradition of the church in novel circumstances requires great scholarship and reflection over time. But even in these early days of the A.I. revolution, a lesson from the first industrial revolution holds firm. Catholic social teaching instructs us to look beyond machinery to people.

The course of technological development is notoriously difficult to predict. More important, technology and its deployment are neither a law of nature nor destiny. The future technological economy will be built on human ingenuity and human choices, much like the economy of the Industrial Revolution.

In the first Industrial Revolution, human beings could figuratively and literally disappear into the mechanism of industry. There was more attention paid to the great steam-powered machines and their wealthy owners than to the people required to make them run. A single worker had negligible power to negotiate for decent conditions in an enormous factory. The dignity and voice of these workers, many of whom only recently changed city or even country and language, were lost.

"Rerum Novarum" affirmed the right to a collective voice through organized labor. The voice of one worker can be ignored; the voices of many cannot. Natural justice is prior to the laws of economics. Workers have the right to be paid decently and to be asked to consent to their working conditions even when the market logic would allow for minimal wages in exploitative social contexts. The market economy and machinery of industry exists for human beings, not human beings for the market economy and machinery of industry.

The A.I. revolution risks making workers disappear into vast caches of data rather than into the factories of old.

A.I. is a blanket term covering a variety of technologies; the most talked about are Large Language Models, or L.L.M.s, which drive programs like Claude, ChatGPT and Gemini. These models are extraordinary achievements of human ingenuity that bring together centuries of scientific and engineering knowledge. L.L.M.s are "trained" on vast amounts of human data and then fine-tuned by teams of human beings; they encode within themselves billions of human voices, texts and images. Yet the voice of the machine can obscure rather than amplify these many voices. To borrow from the philosopher of technology Shannon Vallor, these systems "mirror" human knowledge and creativity back to us, often distorted, while erasing individuals and communities.

The first Industrial Revolution supplanted many professions and provided many new forms of gainful employment, though not without a long struggle for recognition of the dignity of many new forms of work. Through all this, the treasure of the church's teaching is that the human being is made in the image and likeness of God. No machine, however impressive, is greater than this divine image.

The realignment of work of the A.I. revolution is in its early days. Like Leo XIII in 1891, we are in the midst of a revolution, not only technical but also social and political, and its outcome is uncertain. Like Leo XIII then, Leo XIV now calls on Catholics and all people of good will to focus on the human being made in the divine image, the foundation of Catholic social teaching.

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CNS photo/Pablo Esparza

Crowds cheer in St. Peter's Square as white smoke billows from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican on May 8, 2025, indicating the election of a new pope.

I Heard the Holy Spirit in Rome

It was coming from St. Peter's Square

By James Martin

A few weeks ago, I was on the rooftop of the Augustinianum, the series of buildings in Rome that house the general headquarters of the Augustinian order, as well as the Augustinian university in Rome and a residence for its friars. I had been invited by ABC News to help cover the funeral Mass of Pope Francis, the general congregations leading up to the conclave, the conclave itself and, eventually, the election of a new pope. The rooftop of the Augustinianum, with its commanding view of St. Peter's Basilica, was our vantage point.

A few days before, I had snapped a photo of a simple table laden with snacks set out for the various media teams camped out on the roof. On the wall above the snacks hung framed images of two Augustinian cardinals, one of them Robert Prevost. The juxtaposition of some Italian cookies, a few juice boxes and several bottles of water with the portrait of the former (two-time) Augustinian prior general, whom many believed could be pope, was charming. It reminded me of the images that used to proliferate in Jesuit communities in the United States of Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., the esteemed theologian who was the first American Jesuit named a cardinal, way back in 2001, by Pope John Paul II. Both men—Robert Prevost and Avery Dulles—were humble men who evoked great pride from their religious communities.

I enjoyed helping ABC News. The anchors, reporters and staff were, to a person, kind, efficient, knowledgeable, hard-working and helpful. (For the record, they were also paying me—that is, my Jesuit community—for my work.) I consider working with the media a way of evangelizing, "explaining the church to the world," as the theologian John Courtney Murray, S.J., once said. (Jesuits, said Father Murray, are also supposed to explain the "world to the church.")

Covering the first event, however—Pope Francis' fu-

neral Mass—was challenging. I was honored to know Pope Francis and had met with him one-on-one several times. At one point I mentioned that a particular part of the funeral Mass—when the casket is taken out of the church after the Mass—was for many people the saddest part of the rite. As soon as I said that I felt myself on the verge of tears, but I made a quick calculation and decided not to sob on television.

The next few days, during the general congregations, were a seemingly endless series of lunches, coffees, dinners, meetings, public interviews and off-the-record conversations with journalists from around the world, cardinal-electors, Vatican experts and scholars of the papacy, along with time spent with Jesuit friends and my **America** colleagues also there to cover the conclave. The mood had changed from sorrow over Pope Francis' death to excitement (as well as some trepidation and concern) about the next pope.

Rumors were bandied about, many of them completely at odds with one another. There were claims one cardinal had fallen ill during one of the general congregations ("Fake news!" said the Holy See Press Office); another cardinal supposedly had made a pact with a *papabile* (possible pope) offering his vote in exchange for the right to name the next bishops of two open dioceses. Another cardinal (as in the movie "Conclave") was accused of having an illegitimate child.

What made these rumors ridiculous was not only that the sources could never be corroborated but that within minutes someone would rebut it squarely. So I learned not to pay too much attention to them or let them greatly disturb me. And the people who knew something—the cardinal electors—may have spoken in generalities to the media during the general congregations but were not mentioning names. I thought of the screenwriter William Goldman's evergreen line about Hollywood: "Nobody knows anything."

It was a tense time. No matter how often all of us (usually at a meal on the Borgo Pio, a kind of outdoor "Restaurant Row" near St. Peter's Square) listed our top five most likely candidates (mine were Cardinals Parolin, Tagle, David, Zuppi and Prevost), it was clear that almost anyone could emerge onto the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica. And for me as a Jesuit priest, editor at large at **America** and someone who ministers with the L.G.B.T.Q. community, the next pope would have profound implications for multiple aspects of my life and work.

Even in the midst of such uncertainty, tension and jet lag, being in Rome at the time was both exciting and fun. At almost every outdoor table on the Borgo Pio (and even farther afield) you would run into a friend, and even before

I knew that the sound meant we would soon hear those famous words: *Habemus papam.*

the *frizzante* (sparkling water) was placed on your table, the two big questions would be asked: Who do you *think* it will be? And, who do you *want* it to be?

On May 8, the second day of balloting, I was back atop the Augustinianum. One of my **America** colleagues, calculating when the cardinal-electors would be casting their votes, predicted smoke at around 6:30 p.m. Rome time. When I relayed that to my ABC friends, they suggested I get a bite to eat on a patio on the far end of the roof. For my part, I didn't think we would see white smoke until the next day, Friday.

Under a cloudless blue sky, I wolfed down a slice of pizza alongside a few cameramen. "Don't forget the tiramisu!" they said, and I took a spoonful of the omnipresent Roman dessert.

Suddenly I heard the most beautiful noise I have ever heard in my life: the sound of tens of thousands of people cheering as they saw the white smoke pouring from the chimney atop the Sistine Chapel. It is hard for me to describe how joyful it sounded. And what distinguishes the sound of a crowd shouting for joy versus one of simple enthusiasm or even anger? I don't know, exactly, but I knew it was joy.

What came to mind were the beautiful words from the Book of Revelation, describing the multitudes worshiping the Lord Almighty: "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder peals" (19:6). That may not be exactly what it sounded like (though "the sound of many waters" comes close), but that's what it felt like.

Of course, I knew that the sound meant we would soon hear those famous words: *Habemus papam*. The crowd knew it too. Our constant prayers that week to the Holy Spirit had been answered.

A week later, on the "AMDG" podcast with Michael Jordan Laskey of the Jesuit Conference, I mentioned this feeling and he noted something beautiful. The cheers were different, he said, from when a home team wins a game. At this point, no one knew who the pope was. So the cheer wasn't "Hooray, Cardinal Parolin, or Tagle or Prevost, was elected!" It wasn't about one group "winning." Rather, it

James Martin, S.J., left, with ABC News anchors David Muir and Linsey Davis on the rooftop of the Augustinianum in Rome

was the sound of collective joy over the fact that the Holy Spirit had helped to guide an election and Catholics were no longer without a spiritual father. All of us, together, had "won." That sound was both the result of the Spirit and, like the Spirit, akin to the way it was described during Pentecost, as a "strong, driving wind" (Acts 2:2).

Instantly, an ABC staffer appeared on the back patio and said, "Father Jim, hurry up!" and I dashed back to the set. An hour later, when Cardinal Prevost came onto the balcony, I was deeply moved. I had been at his table at the Synod on Synodality for two weeks last year and knew him to be an open, humble and smart man: He would make a great pope.

At one of the earlier press conferences at the Sala Stampa (the Holy See Press office), the papal spokesperson, Matteo Bruni, was asked by one reporter if the media would get advance notice about the pope's election, a kind of embargoed copy. No, he said patiently, you'll just have to wait and see like everyone else. And, he said, it will help to know a little Latin.

My Latin is pretty poor, but it still proved helpful. When Cardinal Dominique Mamberti pronounced the new pope's new name, Leonem Decimum Quartum, I wasn't sure what he said. But I thought it was the Latin for "Leo XIV." So on a note of paper, I wrote "LEO 14th" and passed it to David Muir, the lead anchor. I had no time to qualify what I wrote before he instantly read out in his deep voice: "Leo XIV!" For the next few moments, I was terrified I had gotten it wrong and would be contradicted! (A few days later a friend of mine said, "It could have been Linus IV, for all the Latin you know!")

Finally, at the end of ABC's broadcast, around 9 p.m. Rome time, the cameras were turned off. Then, in that quiet moment sitting at a table in front of the television anchors, I wept. I wept out of gratitude for the conclave's choice, out of sadness for the late Pope Francis, out of simple exhaustion. But I also wept at the thought of the crowd, at knowing that on that day, on that rooftop, I had heard the sound of the Holy Spirit.

James Martin, S.J., *is a Jesuit priest, author, editor at large at* ***America*** *and founder of Outreach.*

THE HALF-LIFE OF LONGING

By Egard Orode

There should be a measurement for this—
The rate at which wanting decays
Does it halve like uranium? Every 4.5 billion years
A little less desperate to be touched?
Or is it more like carbon? 5,730 years
And I'll only want you half as much as I do now?

Scientists haven't studied the isotopes of heartache
Haven't carbon-dated the residue of longing
Haven't mapped the geological layers
Of all the words I've swallowed instead of saying

So I'm left to measure it myself
In cups of coffee gone cold
In songs I can no longer listen to
In the phantom weight of your head on my shoulder
In how many blocks I'm willing to walk
To avoid places you might be

I want to believe in exponential decay
That tomorrow I will want you
Only half as much as today
And the next day, half again
Until wanting you is so small
It could balance on the head of a pin
Alongside all those dancing angels
We used to argue about

But the truth is
Some elements never fully disappear
They just become trace amounts
Background radiation
The kind you learn to live with
The kind that changes your cells
So slowly you don't notice
Until one day you realize
You've become an entirely different person
Composed of all the things
You couldn't let go of

Egard Orode *is a first-year computer science undergraduate student from Nigeria.*

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Being a #Boymom

Parenting sons in an era of flailing masculinity

By Elizabeth Grace Matthew

When my youngest son was about four weeks old, I sat on a bench on the pool deck at the Y.M.C.A., the baby in the crook of my left arm while he sucked hungrily at the bottle I held in my left hand. With my right hand and my teeth, I adjusted goggles for my 3-year-old, who was embarking upon his fourth or fifth swim lesson.

I heard a voice nearby with a familiar greeting: "You've got your hands full!" Immediately, my son was explaining to a woman who appeared to be in her 60s that this was his new baby brother, that he also had two older brothers, and that they had all been to visit the baby in the hospital before they saw him at home.

"Four boys?" she asked me. I nodded. "Wow, you *really* have your hands full."

My new companion went on to tell me that she, too, had four boys. They were in their 30s, all married, with children of their own. She told me what each did for a living, where each lived and how many children each had. She talked about her boys, now men, with zest and enthusiasm, clearly delighted with the lives they had built.

Pool Lady has what I so fervently hope, work and pray to have in 30 years: four independent, married, productive, good fathers who, it makes me tear up to remember, used to be my four babies—unfathomably adorable and earnestly winsome and proudly blowing bubbles in the pool as they held the wall and kicked. Once, barring a tragedy or a war, a mom like me would have simply expected this outcome. Three or four kids were the norm, most boys grew up into men, and mothers of several became grandmothers of many as a matter of course.

But today, as almost everyone across the political and cultural spectrum is now aware, boys in the United States are flailing and failing at much higher rates than both American girls and past generations of American boys. Those of us concerned about the nation's sons, and our own, have a plethora of problems to preoccupy us: academic under-

performance, chronic underemployment, porn-brained cyborg-sexuality, and profound loneliness and isolation. Moreover, in my experience, when we talk about the problem of "failure to launch"—that is, the inability or unwillingness to achieve adult independence from one's parents, habitationally, financially, emotionally or otherwise—it is tacitly understood that we are talking predominantly, if not exclusively, about sons.

So it's probably rational for me to be flooded with anxious questions about the endless tomorrows I cannot see, none of which have accessible answers but all of which have practical, urgent implications for how I parent my boys today.

This essay is not a prescription for how to raise boys or a panacea for the societal problems that ail them. Those are well above my pay grade. It is merely an attempt to be honest about the questions that preoccupy this #boymom, as well as about how my incomplete answers to those questions are shaped not just by having four sons—now ages 10, 8, 4 and 1—but also by having no daughters.

Are We Doing Anything Right?

In observing the wider world in which my sons are coming of age and reflecting on my husband's and my strengths and limitations, I think we might be getting three things mostly right for our family of boys.

First, we eschew gentle parenting and embody presumptive parental authority. Our predisposition toward order and respect and our unapologetic clarity about who is in charge has served our boys well. Not just because they are generally well behaved, though they are, but because the early and unyielding expectation of obedience has, in more recent years, opened up space to converse and connect with our kids in ways that we could not with less well-behaved children.

Second, we approach intellectual and spiritual formation through a low-tech household with limited screen time. We try to prioritize lots of reading, regular chores, a balance of organized sports and outdoor free play, and open conversation. When our kids have nothing else to do, they go outside or reach for books. At the same time, unlike some parents who share our tendency to avoid technology in the home, we have not banned screens. Plenty of our family time centers on movies and sporting events, and we are about to allow a video game console. We do not hide anything from our kids about current events or how we believe they should be interpreted. Many films, news stories and even baseball games have provided conversation starters for weighty topics, from mercy and justice to death, as well as political and interpersonal dynamics.

Third and finally, we send our kids to Catholic school.

> **Maternal success and maternal obsolescence seem to walk hand in hand.**

In this way, we retain far more control over the "inputs" our kids are getting than would be possible if they spent 30 hours a week at a public (or nonsectarian private) school. At the same time, we provide them with more varied and more potentially deleterious opportunities for interaction with peers, with non-family adults and with technology than would be possible if they were homeschooled. Our sons are consistently in the company of many other people—experiencing wins and losses, coping with frustration or boredom, avoiding or giving in to temptation—in an environment shaped by neither amoral chaos nor parental control. We can see the foundational formation of that habituated wiring beginning to bear fruit. So each month my husband and I spend many hours as parent volunteers for clubs, communications and events, pouring ourselves into our boys' parochial school and its community, which we see as an indivisible part of pouring ourselves into our boys.

What Can We Do Better?

Among the mantras my husband and I have been repeating to our boys since our older ones were little is this one: "We *speak* our feelings and *live* our virtues." In other words, we're allowed to feel angry or frustrated and to express it, but we're not allowed to be rude or dismissive to others because we are angry or frustrated.

At school, sports practice and the grocery store, our boys do a pretty good job embodying this mantra. At home, not so much.

Of course, tantrums come with the toddler territory. And of course, if you have strong-willed sons 20 months apart and about the same size, tackle-induced injuries, basement walls with head-shaped dents, and endless arguments over whether or not that was a foul ball are the price of doing business.

Yet my husband and I are acutely aware of the need to be intentional in helping our sons learn, as they approach adolescence, that home is not an emotional free-for-all. In this endeavor, we do not find today's iteration of social-emotional learning helpful. It seems to focus on the elimination of feelings like frustration rather than stress-

With the gift of four healthy boys, I am learning some humility.

ing the value of strength to act virtuously no matter how frustrated one feels. Thus, it can inculcate fragility.

Still, we also believe that a more demanding kind of social-emotional learning is crucial, especially today and especially for boys; and we struggle with the nuanced application of this aspect of our sons' formation. We both come from demonstrative, ethnic families (I, Italian and Jewish; he, Liberian) in which, when we were young children, the intergenerational, extended family model was on its last legs. In that world, parental authority was diluted among many adults who interacted mostly spontaneously. Hence, each individual's operatic volatility could be taken in stride because there were often so many other people around.

But our sons do not live in that kind of a world, and neither will their own future children. So it is imperative that our boys' management of their emotions within the home and the family mature over time into a much closer approximation of their current behavior outside the home. Right now, the hardest part for them is "living our virtues." Tempers run hot, after all, among those who share a bedroom. Soon, though, they will be adolescents, when "speaking our feelings" may become the difficult part. And just like thoughtless volatility, overdetermined serenity can lead to loneliness by way of failure to connect with others.

So I often need to take some deep breaths myself. Clearly, we have our work cut out for us.

What Is God's Vision for Me?

When Pool Lady told me about her grown sons, she mentioned that two lived nearby and two lived far away, where their wives are from. "It's wonderful," she glowed, "grandchildren. The ones who are here, I see, usually, twice a week. The truth is, though...when you have boys...you're always the *other* grandmother." She paused. "But that's a good thing; it means my boys are blessed. They all have wonderful marriages."

I pretended to find this reflection revelatory. But really, this gendered reality had hit me the moment I learned our fourth child was another boy.

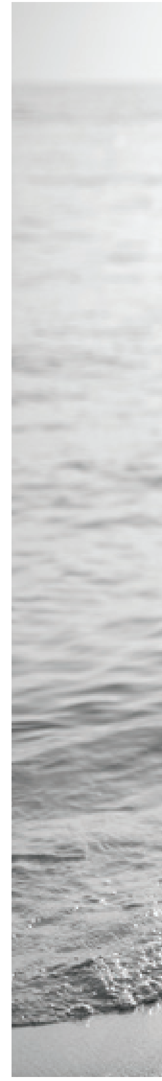
I am not the kind of woman who backed into marriage or motherhood, because I am not the kind of woman who backs into anything. Always a Martha, never a Mary, I am, as I have always been, burdened by the multiplying cares of carrying out my own expanding vision. From the time I was in high school, I knew that I was called to have a family—a *household*—along with, if I could figure out a way to make it happen, a meaningful career.

Today, at 37, that 20-plus-year-old vision—a big old house with a full slow cooker on the counter and several boisterous, healthy kids chasing each other with neighboring children in the twilight until I call them in for dinner—is my daily life. No, it is not always so picture-perfect, not by a long shot. I'm not one for crafts, my cooking is basic, and I'm terrible at getting the laundry folded and put away. I've had to zig and zag professionally in ways I never intended, and I work into the wee hours much more than I'd like. Still, I am blessed to be living what I once prayed for.

Since we brought that fourth boy home from the hospital, I have felt the brutal ephemerality of every moment.

Of course, I know that many parents of girls as well as of boys, especially those who have several children, harbor pre-emptive nostalgia with what is likely to be the last baby. And I'm sure that if I had a girl or two among my children, I would have, too. But it would not be quite the same.

Sure, I might discipline a daughter with greater leniency, and possibly consider a broader range of options for educational and other decisions. But more importantly, if I had a daughter, I would probably persist indefinitely in the comforting idea that motherhood changes in form but never in substance. I would feel as though our home would have a central role to play, and an implicit sense of place from which to play it, long after the kids grow up. As it is, I feel the fundamental transience of our household.



Yes, I know that binary contrasts between daughters and sons seem traditionalist and essentialist and, therefore, perhaps to some, unenlightened. All I can say is that I'm telling the truth as I observe it to be, not as I wish it were. In circumstances where safety is scarce, we save women and children first. On sinking ships, for example, women with grown daughters have traditionally climbed into lifeboats alongside at least one of the people they love most. Meanwhile, women with only grown sons lose them. While this sobering thought may be of little consequence for most of us in today's world, it is premised on primal realities with more prosaic—and more universal—ramifications. When it comes to sons, maternal success and maternal obsolescence seem to walk hand in hand. For a healthy woman my age to rely on her mom as a primary source of

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support and connection, as an individual independent of her father or her husband, can be fruitful and sweet. But for a healthy man my age to do the same, as an individual independent of his father or his wife, is an indication that something is going less than successfully. So, for a mother of sons, success means growth but also dilution. To be there for grown sons in a healthy, functional way, a mother must recognize her role as a circumscribed one, both dependent upon and defined in large part by others.

Mary by the manger—full of grace—is the central figure in the Nativity story, putting herself at risk that her son might live. Mary at the foot of the cross—full of anguished, helpless love as Jesus endures torture to fulfill the destiny that takes him away from her—is her son's most loyal follower unto the death that he endures so that all humankind might live. The model mother starts by giving over her body. She ends by getting her human self, body and soul, out of her son's way, to serve and be served by others, so that he can give the love in which she raised him to the world.

Maybe, with the gift of four healthy boys, I am learning some humility: It was always God's vision, not mine, that I was building toward anyway. Maybe he really does have a plan for me that stretches beyond my own for myself. I can't begin to envision it, though.

And maybe that's a start.

Elizabeth Grace Matthew *writes about books, education and culture, including on Substack. Her work has appeared in many publications, including USA Today, The Hill, Law and Liberty, Public Discourse and FemCatholic.*

Our Bodies, Our Souls

Perimenopause and the paschal mystery

By LuElla D'Amico

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." I would like to tell you that when the priest spoke these words and spread ashes on my forehead on Ash Wednesday, my heart was moved to some "right" place. It wasn't. Instead, when I went back to my pew and prayed, I felt seen—but not in a way that I wanted.

That morning, I was sick to my stomach. I had a headache. I had been having periods that lasted far too long, cycles that arrived unpredictably, sometimes not at all. This was not an anomaly; it had been happening for months now. My body, meant to be a source of joy, now felt as if it was betraying me.

Perimenopause. This word had been creeping into my conversations, dropped in group texts, joked about in passing with friends. I hadn't wanted to acknowledge it. But there I was, sitting in a pew with ashes on my forehead, reminding me of my body's temporal reality, which I would prefer to conveniently ignore: Fertility, once a defining part of my womanhood, was slipping away from me.

For years as a younger woman, I had longed for a child, prayed to God for my body to work for me in one particular way—toward childbearing. Yet pregnancy did not come easily to me. In Catholic circles, it often seems that childbearing is unfairly pitched as the best and singular way of embodying womanhood. But it was more than social expectations that drove my yearning for motherhood. I felt a deep, deep biological and spiritual yearning to be a parent in those years, and still do today.

After years of waiting and wondering in my 20s and into my 30s what this body of mine would do, I had a child: a boy! And then, praise the Lord, another, a girl! And since then, for years, I've been waiting, hoping—though mostly giving up now—for another child. I have Matthew 19:26 memorized, and I believe it: With God, anything is possible.

And yet—and yet—I am 42. I believe this as well. I am aware my window to have another child is closing. With God, anything is possible, but the children I already have are likely the fruit of that possibility. Now, I am entering another life stage.

OK, Lord, I prayed on Ash Wednesday, my gaze resting on the statue of Jesus, suffering on the cross for me. *I don't need a reminder that I'm turning to dust!* I lamented, a little bitterly. *My body is already revealing to me this truth, daily. O Lord, I feel it in every random pain up my leg, every heart palpitation, every headache, every random anxious moment that's interrupting my life. O, Lord!* I wrapped my arms around my stomach as I prayed, placed my hands on my heart, felt it racing.

The parade of male celebrities, politicians and influencers who frequently fill my social media feeds often make me feel, at least momentarily, as if the pace and feeling of aging for men is going differently. They seem to be perceived as stronger, gaining austerity and dignity; no one is describing me as becoming more stately. Proverbs 20:29 reads, "The splendor of old men is their gray hair."

Perhaps there is a proverb about women's graying hair, but I don't know it. And most days I do not feel the "splendor" of growing older. Instead, the verses that offer some solace come from Fleetwood Mac's "Landslide," which I had on repeat in my car: "Time makes you bolder," I prayed, nodding a little to the music in my head, as I thought of recent life changes, some I'd been trying to make, some that I couldn't control, "children get older, and I'm getting older, too."

And what am I to do with this aging body of mine? I wondered, this body that, every day, has skin that was once soft but is now dry. The question of what changes to my body mean has been a lifelong one. When I discovered I had my period as a pre-teen, I began bawling in the bathroom, convinced I was dying because no one had ever talked with me about anything regarding puberty. Even then, my mother didn't explain what was happening to me: She simply gave me a pad, said this was part of "turning into a woman" and sent me about my day. It wasn't until watching a video at school later that I found out what was happening, and even

then, the overly careful scientific explanations didn't make much sense.

So, when I considered that I might be entering perimenopause, even at 42, my first instinct was to dismiss it. Nothing to see here, just crying over the dishes, the weather or the laundry—or nothing at all.

But as Catholic women, we are called to embrace our bodies, with all their changes—hormonal or otherwise—and not to hide from what they reveal at different stages. We should not become hyper-focused on one life stage or another, but rather acknowledge and, yes, celebrate and embrace each new pattern. The liturgical calendar teaches us that each season holds a different promise of growth for us. It is one of the reasons I have come, as a convert, to love the church with all her rhythms.

Catholic teaching on embodiment tells us that our transforming bodies are not inconveniences to be hidden but are integral to our spiritual lives. St. John Paul II in his vast corpus on the theology of the body suggests our bodies are inherently theological: In seeking to better understand them, we better understand God.

In one of his famous weekly audiences on this topic, he shared that the body is "a witness to creation as a fundamental gift." All of our bodies are created by God as a gift, and like earth itself, they ebb and flow in different ways. We as humans change, grow and have much to offer to those in communion and in relationship with us if we embrace rather than dismiss our changes. Thus, even in discomfort and uncertainty, our bodies witness to the truth of our journeys toward God—and those who journey alongside us, too.

Further, as Catholics, we have a special calling to recognize the different stages of womanhood because we recognize that each path in the church is not a single journey to grow closer to Christ but a journey of believers together, that of a whole church and a whole body of Christ, trying to better understand one another in relationship. Pope Francis affirms this concept in "Laudato Si'," writing: "The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others." As Catholic women, we must not hide in these moments, or feel shame, but use them as moments of building relationship and as a chance to talk to others about the beauty of women's bodies and their rhythms.

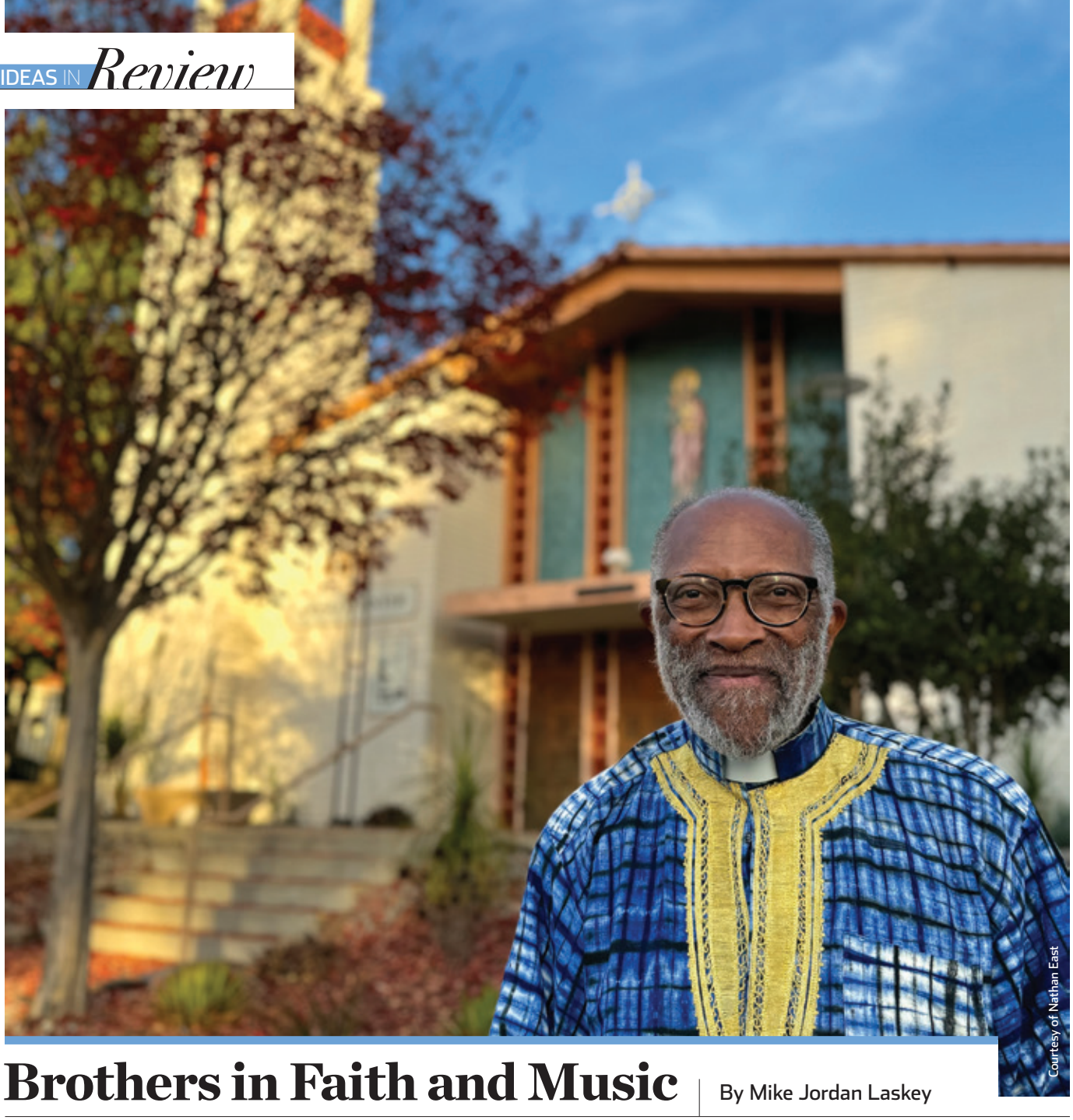
There's a meme about perimenopause that says, "Being a woman is fun because no matter what symptom you search, you're either dying or in perimenopause." For Catholics, it may ring even funnier because it's absolutely both at the same time. We're a *Memento Mori* lot after all. Each reminder of our death points us toward Easter, toward the promise that, even when our own bodies are in flux, we as humans—bodies and souls—will not remain in stasis but are created in God's image. We are meant to be seasonal creatures, creatures of change, and all changes in this world point to resurrection in the next.

Our bodies witness to the truth of our journeys toward God.

Whether my body bore children was out of my control, just as this temporal stage of my life is. All of it is in God's hands. I am left, waiting, wondering what he has in store for me. But no matter the changes, I am no less a woman; my body is no less a body.

Despite my hesitancy, I find it helpful to talk about such changes these days. I make a point to talk to my husband more freely about how I feel. We wait in communion for whatever comes next, for us, for both our changing bodies (that man has aching knees now), for our lives in more general ways, for the church. We do our best to prepare our bodies, minds and souls in communion with each other and all of God's holy people for "the life of the world to come."

LuElla D'Amico *is an associate professor of English and coordinator of women's and gender studies at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Tex.*



Courtesy of Nathan East

Brothers in Faith and Music

By Mike Jordan Laskey

If you have listened to popular music anytime in the last 50 years, you have heard Nathan East play the bass guitar, probably hundreds of times. Flip on the radio or Spotify shuffle, play some Top 40 hits or country or jazz or R&B or classic rock, and you'll eventually hear Nathan East grooving at the bottom of the mix, laying down a sonic foundation and driving the song forward.

Dolly Parton, Beyoncé, Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Ringo Starr, Herbie Hancock, Whitney Houston, Andrea Bocelli, Celine Dion and Barbra Streisand have all recorded with Nathan. Kenny Loggins's "Footloose," Daft Punk's "Get Lucky" and Eric Clapton's "Tears in Heaven" feature him on bass. The list keeps going, and clocks in at more than 2,000 records—including about 15 with the smooth jazz group Fourplay, which he cofounded in 1991. All told, Nathan East is one of the most widely recorded bassists in the history of music.

Nathan is based on the West Coast, but he tours the world with different bands. Usually, when he stops in Washington, D.C., perhaps at the Capital One Arena for a gig with Phil Collins, Nathan calls up his older brother Ray to see if he can make it over to the venue before the show. Ray is Msgr. Raymond East, the longtime pastor of St. Teresa of Avila Church in the city's Anacostia neigh-

Monsignor Ray East in front of St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Church in Washington, D.C.

borhood. The monsignor is a popular national speaker on the Catholic circuit and a gifted musician in his own right. Father Ray—as he is most widely known—is also one of the only 250 or so Black American priests in the United States.

His job when Nathan is in town is to lead the musicians in prayer backstage before they start the show. Aware of the range of faith practices represented in any group, Father Ray gathers with the players in a circle and tries to make sure he prays "in a way that everybody can say amen," he told me. He will often use the Psalms as a starting point, especially Psalm 150, which exhorts its hearers to praise God with trumpet, lute, harp, dancing and clanging cymbals. Then, as he described in our interview, Father Ray might say something like this: "We ask the blessings of the one whose melodies inspire us and encourage us, and whose word fills us. We ask our good and gracious creator to be with us and to be with everyone who gathers to hear and enjoy and celebrate music this night. Amen—now let's go bring the house down."

Imagining this scene reminds me of my favorite quote about the intersection of art and the spiritual life. "You say grace before meals. All right," G. K. Chesterton wrote. "But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink."

I thought of this quote often as I got to know more about the Easts. You could put it on an East family crest. The story of Nathan and Father Ray—which can't be told without including their parents, five additional artistic siblings and a Black Catholic parish in San Diego, Calif.—is a story of "saying grace" and sharing the gift of music in countless church halls and concert halls. Their faith feeds their music and their music feeds their faith. And in their own distinctive but related vocations, both brothers have used music to help others connect to something bigger than themselves.

The East Family Players

Father Ray and Nathan grew up in the 1950s and '60s in San Diego, Calif., as the first and third children of Thomas and Gwendolyn East. Seven East kids plus their parents shared a small three-bedroom home where music was a constant presence. Thomas, an aerospace engineer, played piano by ear, and Gwendolyn, an early childhood educator, sang hymns. A family pastime was listening to vinyl albums

Nathan East performs with Toto in Amsterdam on June 8, 2013.

WENN Rights Ltd/Alamy

Both brothers have used music to help others connect to something bigger than themselves.

on a record player housed in a huge credenza. The children were encouraged to pursue music, and before long they had a sort of family band, with singers, guitar, trombone, trumpet, French horn, flute and piccolo among their ranks. All seven siblings are engaged in the arts either professionally or as a hobby to this day. In junior high school, Nathan started playing the cello—a four-stringed, lower-register instrument that foreshadowed his future. He impressed classmates with his perfect pitch, able to identify or sing any note on demand.

Gwendolyn was Catholic and Thomas was a Baptist who attended a Methodist church—they had what Nathan told me was a "Catho-Bapto-Metho" family. In the years following the Second Vatican Council, as new styles of music were being introduced into the Catholic liturgy, Ray and David East—brother number two—got involved in the music ministry at their parish, Christ the King Catholic Church in the Logan Heights area of San Diego. Ray sang and David played the guitar. There wasn't much published folk Mass music yet, so they wrote their own. Each week they would compose an original folk-style arrangement of the responsorial psalm to be used at the upcoming Sunday Mass. It's hard to fathom, but it happened: Teenage Catholics wrote their own church music every week and taught it to the congregation Sunday morning.

Nathan would tag along with his older brothers; and one Sunday when he was 14 years old, he noticed a bass guitar sitting near the altar. Another parish musician must have left it there; no one in the family knows for sure. "I picked it up, had a go, and immediately felt, 'This feels good in my hands,'" Nathan said. It was a spiritual experience. "To this day, all these years later, half a century plus, I'm still feeling the blessings of picking up that instrument purely by chance," he said.

Immediately, Nathan joined the church band with his brothers and some friends. Word spread about the group and soon they were also playing Masses at the 32nd Street Naval Base for families who had a family member serving in Vietnam. They would play Masses at a Navy hospital and at the military prison in San Diego, where 30 or 40 inmates in chains would be crammed into a small room for the services.

"It's great that I learned the bass in the church because it's a very forgiving place," Nathan said in a 2014 documentary about his career called "For the Record." "If you make a mistake, they forgive you a lot easier than if you're in a regular gig."

And it wasn't just the church's patient listeners who helped Nathan grow as a musician. Nathan thinks the fact he started playing publicly in the church group right away—as opposed to teaching himself to play fast and showy alone in his bedroom, say—helped form him as a collaborative artist with whom so many of the world's top professional musicians love to work. He learned how to be a great listener, when to play and when to leave space in the music.

"I just realized my role or responsibility as a bass player was to provide some choice notes to go underneath," Nathan remembers of those early church days. He says his job as a bassist is to "be of service" and to honor the music—not to honor himself with "fast, flashy licks." While he is an extremely talented and dexterous bassist with a great ear and enormous stylistic range, what fellow musicians emphasize about Nathan repeatedly is his team player attitude, his generous spirit and his personal warmth.

Barry White University

During high school, Nathan played in a local San Diego band called the Power. The legendary R&B singer Barry White heard them at a gig and hired them all as backup players, just like that. So Nathan graduated from high school a few months early and went out on his first tour at age 16, playing at venues like Madison Square Garden and the Kennedy Center, earning an informal education through what he calls B.W.U.—Barry White University. He then attended college near home, earning a bachelor's in music from the University of California at San Diego, before throwing himself into a career as a touring and session musician.

Meanwhile, Ray moved to Washington, D.C., for a job with the National Association of Minority Contractors, after earning his own degree in business administration at the University of San Diego. While the priesthood had long felt like a strong possibility for Ray, he had assumed that if he did go down that path, he would serve as a missionary in Africa, just like his grandparents and an aunt on his father's side of the family had done. Ray's local pastor and spiritual mentor in the District encouraged him to stay in the Archdiocese of Washington in pursuit of his vocation, and that's what Ray did.

Nathan and the rest of the family were not surprised Ray entered the seminary. "I think he always had the qualities of a saint," Nathan said. During their childhood, the

CNS photo/Bob Roller

Monsignor Ray East speaks during a protest outside the White House on June 8, 2020, following the death of George Floyd.

East kids' walk home from school included some uphill stretches that were tough going after a long day. Nathan remembers Ray walking behind him and David, a hand on each of their backs, urging them up the biggest hill. "I'm thinking, 'Who does that?!'" Nathan recalled, struck by the sort of selfless affection that you don't often see among young siblings. It's no wonder to Nathan that Ray pursued a life of service.

As a priest, Father Ray has served in pastoral ministry with Black Catholics at the parish and archdiocesan level, and he has been an active leader in the national pastoral music community. I first encountered him as the emcee of the U.S. bishops' annual social justice ministry conference. He was not content at that meeting merely to introduce speakers and update the agenda—Father Ray had all of us singing and praying aloud in a huge, drab hotel ballroom. (It was at this conference where he first met the political writer David Brooks, who became one of Father Ray's biggest fans.) Genuine joy just pours out of him no matter the context.

"I've never seen him have a bad day," said a longtime parishioner and friend, Ralph McCloud. "He can be doing a funeral and make it one of the most joyous occasions."

Since his ordination in 1981, Father Ray has spent two separate stints as pastor of the historic St. Teresa of Avila parish, from 1988 to 1997 and from 2009 to the present. But if you head to the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington for a Sunday Mass at St. Teresa, the first thing you should know, according to McCloud, is that the Mass isn't going to start on time. Father Ray is often running behind because if he meets someone who needs something, he is going to help.

Anacostia is historically one of the most economically challenged areas of Washington, and Father Ray is famous in the community for his compassion. If you're out to dinner with him at a restaurant, he will probably ask to take everyone's leftovers in doggy bags in case someone stops him on the street. Often, the food has been given away before you've made it to your car. If you give Father Ray a new pair of shoes to replace the old ones he wore down to almost nothing, don't be surprised if he's passed them to someone in need within a week. If your loved one is sick in the hospital, Father Ray will be at the bedside. (This was the reason he missed the first phone interview we had scheduled.)

Once the Mass starts on a typical Sunday, it will not be a transactional, 55-minutes-and-out-the-door experience. You can expect to be there for about two hours. "As I tell first-time visitors, when you leave home, make sure that your rice is on low," McCloud said. There is more music and movement at a St. Teresa Mass than at most Catholic parishes. It's a fully embodied liturgical experience.

Genevieve Mougey was a parishioner for eight years

Both brothers have used music to help others connect to something bigger than themselves.

until she moved out of the area in 2022. She remembers how Father Ray would start singing in the middle of a homily if a point he was making reminded him of a song. "Chances are most people in the congregation would know the song, and so they'll start singing, and then we're two verses into a song in the middle of a homily," Ms. Mougey said.

'A Singing Church Is a Praying Church'

Whether Father Ray is presiding at St. Teresa's or marching in one of Washington, D.C.'s many social justice protests, music is going to be part of the mix. He remembers that during a demonstration marking the 10th anniversary of the fall of Saigon, the largely secular crowd of military veterans and peace activists didn't have any music to bring them together or give voice to their experiences—so Father Ray and the church brought the music to the streets. He has done this at more recent Black Lives Matter and pro-immigrant protests, too.

"I would say a singing church is a praying church, a praying church is a growing church, and a growing church is a church that goes out with the Good News," Father Ray told me. "Music is something that really brings people together in faith and inspires action. And faith that's put into action accomplishes the work that Jesus would have us to do."

The settings where Father Ray usually finds himself singing aren't the same as where Nathan plays, but the bassist often calls 50,000-person crowds "congregations" and thinks music is "the language of God"—wherever it is being played.

"I don't know what makes people drive for hours or fly to another part of the country or the world just to go be in a room to hear music," Nathan said. "The thing that's so magical and mysterious to me is that it's just like faith. We can't touch [music], we can't see it, smell it, but it's in our hearts. It's something that we believe." Passing the gifts of music and faith on to the next generation of Easts, Nathan often performs with his son Noah, a pianist, with whom he has just released a duo album. Noah usually leads the pre-show band prayers on the road these days, always ending them with the line, "In your name we play."

I wanted to know if the East brothers felt like their vocations were similar: In their own ways, they are both performers, collaborators, creators, men who invite others into an experience of the divine. For his part, Father Ray sees parallels between pastoral work and playing music. "You've got to drop the ego when it comes to music," Father Ray said. "You have to learn how to step back and let somebody else take a solo. You have to be very open to the gifts of others, encouraging them and supporting them. You have to forgive one another. Those are all talents that are very much needed in music and church life. It's all about using our gifts, not abusing the gifts—not letting ego get in the way of a common mission, and really doing it with a joy and an enthusiasm that's contagious."

Nathan thinks music can help heal a wounded, polarized world—a belief that has deep roots in the Easts' ecumenical, music-loving family. "If we like a Stevie Wonder song, it doesn't matter who you voted for, what church you go to, what you believe in. This song resonates with you," Nathan said. "I always hope that people of all sizes, shapes, colors and beliefs can be in the room and exist on this planet together, and try to make heaven here on Earth."

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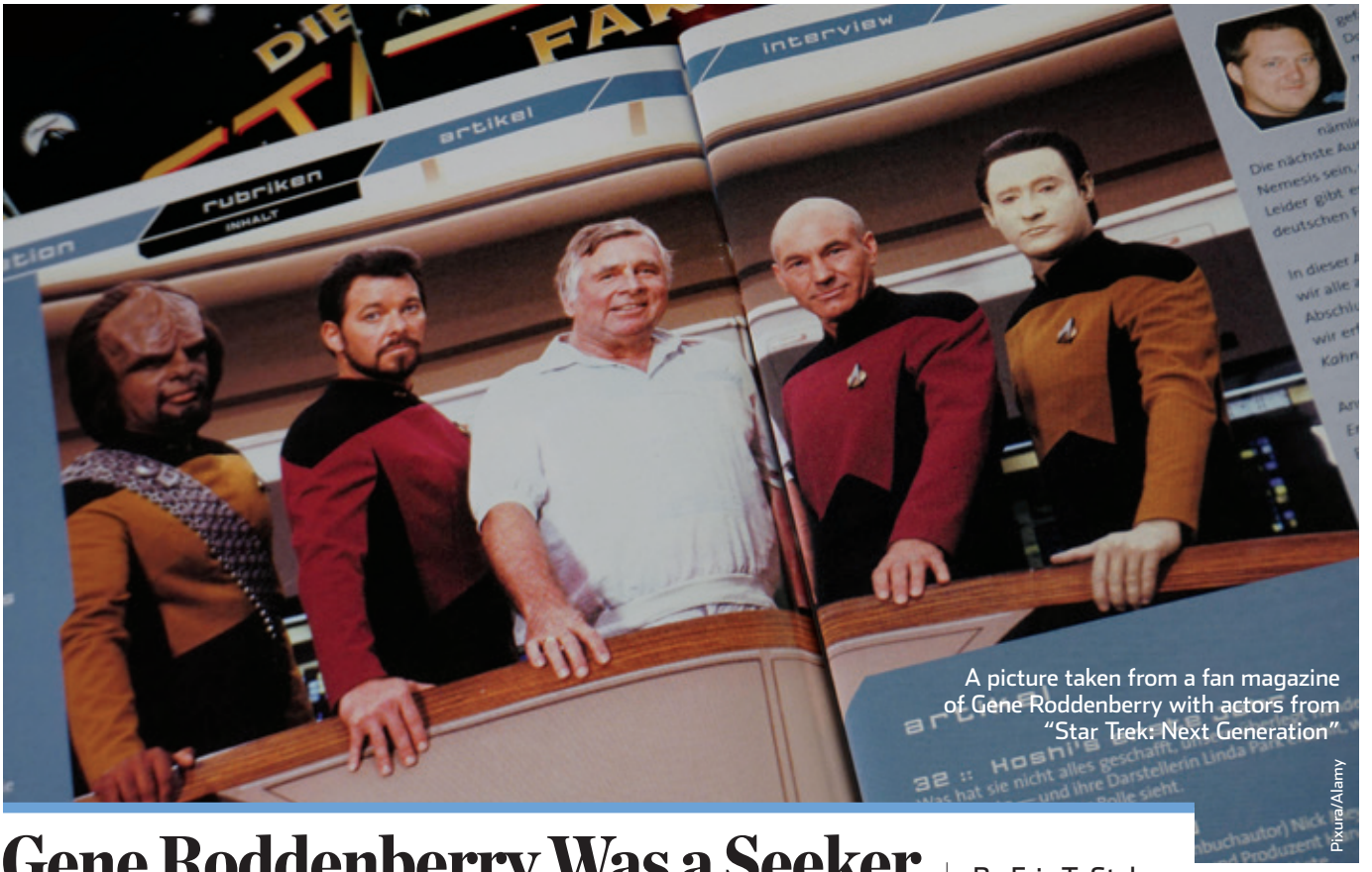

A picture taken from a fan magazine of Gene Roddenberry with actors from "Star Trek: Next Generation"

Pixura/Alamy

Gene Roddenberry Was a Seeker

By Eric T. Styles

In 2017, Gene Roddenberry's son Rod, chief executive officer of Roddenberry Entertainment, wrote on Facebook, "I can tell you for certain that my father was as close to a true atheist towards the end of his life as could be considered."

Yet documented evidence tells a different, more nuanced story about the creator of "Star Trek." Gene Roddenberry, as it turns out, was what you might call an "anti-religious secular pantheist." He rejected structured religion and espoused a utopic, humanist vision of the future, while actually believing that we, and the whole universe, are God. Given the ongoing impact of "Star Trek" as an almost mythic framework for our culture, Roddenberry's theological vision is worth exploring.

Born in El Paso, Texas, in 1921, Eugene Wesley Roddenberry grew up in Los Angeles with a devout Baptist mother and a skeptic father who did not practice any religion. He often recounted that when, at the age of 14, he paid close attention to the sermon preached in his mother's church, he concluded that the talk of eating Jesus' flesh and blood was crazy: "I guess from that time it was clear to me that religion was largely nonsense—largely magical superstitious things." He noted he "was more interested in the deacon's daughter and what we might be doing between the services." Roddenberry until his death was an unrepentant philanderer, well known in Hollywood for his extramarital affairs.

The Optimism of Star Trek

Young Gene made a quiet retreat from church life as soon as he had the autonomy to do so and learned not to speak openly about his opinions of religion in most circles, even when writing "Star Trek" in the mid-to-late 1960s. One of the best known and culturally embedded television shows of the 20th century, "Star Trek" lives in a fictional future inhabited by Captain James T. Kirk (played by William Shatner), his half-human-half-Vulcan science officer, Mr. Spock (Leonard Nimoy), and their multicultural, co-ed crew exploring the galaxy in the model of a non-satiric *Gulliver's Travels*.

The speech that opens every episode sums up the premise well: Kirk and crew "explore strange new worlds...seek out new life and new civilizations...[and] boldly go where no man has gone before." Alien races, space phenomena, interstellar conflict, time-travel antics—all designed to explore the human mind.

The show lasted for three years (1966-69), with 79 episodes. After the series' 1969 cancellation, Roddenberry found himself speaking at newly germinated "Star Trek"

> **Star Trek proclaims: Humanity has a positive future to look forward to.**

conventions organized by like-minded fans, as well as to students on college campuses. His interest in science, philosophy and speculative fiction well prepared him to publicly reflect on his secular humanist ideas. They were right there in the DNA of "Star Trek."

The show essentially proclaims: Humanity has a positive future to look forward to. We can and will learn to fix our most intransigent social problems. And if there is life outside our solar system, we will learn to coexist with it, being enriched by even greater diversity. All this will be accomplished *without* religion. We don't need religion to help us transcend the limits of our existence.

Roddenberry described having to resist the interest among colleagues in his fictional starship, the U.S.S. Enterprise, having a chaplain. He flatly declined, stating there would be so much diversity of belief among humans—as well as aliens—that everyone would have to be their own chaplain.

Roddenberry's Contradiction?

Within the body of those 79 original episodes, there are some instances that conflict with the persona of Gene the Atheist. In the early second-season episode "Who Mourns for Adonais?", an alien antagonist who may have been the Apollo of ancient Greece captures the Enterprise crew and wants them to worship and adore him. Kirk rebuffs Apollo's demands: "Mankind has no need for gods. We find the one quite adequate." The "one" who is quite adequate, we assume, is the Judeo-Christian God. Perhaps this was just a rhetorical anachronism, allowed to remain in the script to appease the masses of American viewers who practice Christianity.

The most pronounced example of this surprising interaction with faith in a show created by an atheist appears later in the same season. The episode "Bread and Circuses" even included Roddenberry himself, listed as a co-writer. (As executive producer he would have approved every script; in this case he was intimately involved in its creation.)

In this episode, the Enterprise crew happens upon another planet of an identical humanoid species that exists in a parallel Roman Empire, but within mid-20th-century technological advancement. They even have a pacifist, rebelling slave class that worships what the Enterprise landing party assumes to be the "sun," only to find out at the end, after escaping capture and returning to the Enterprise, that (spoiler alert!) the rebels worship the Son of God. Kirk explicitly makes the comparison to the Romans having not only a Caesar, but, per the rebels, also a Christ.

The writers imply that monotheism in general and Christianity in particular represent a natural evolution. A parallel pacifist and messianic religion was needed as a counteragent to imperial (polytheistic) Roman rule, a religion that could help lead to the utopia that has already been attained on Kirk's Earth.

The fact that historical cultures were used to explore far-flung alien civilizations had to do more with budgetary needs than anything else. (Making aliens look "alien" is very expensive!) The show writers even developed an in-universe, science-y explanation that "Star Trek" characters called the Hodgkin's Law of Parallel Planetary Development.

Yet Roddenberry the Philosopher's goal was always to use his science fiction television show to comment on the current state of the world. War, racism, poverty, intolerance, and freedom of thought and speech were the bread and butter of the morality plays that undergirded each episode. But Earth itself, after many conflicts and the threat of extinction, would have evolved into a perfect society.

Humanity's desire to grow would turn toward the vast galaxy with science and exploration becoming its hallmark tools. The adventures of the Enterprise allowed viewers to contemplate relevant human problems playfully hidden in fanciful tales of alien species. This was a powerful respite for a society at the time embroiled in the tumultuous years of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and a presidential assassination. "Star Trek" presented Americans with a hopeful future.

The Existential Journey of Spock

Nothing seems to have preoccupied Roddenberry's imagination more than the question, "What does it mean to be human?" His most enduring personal proxy has been Mr. Spock. Over almost 60 years of new and complex characters, spanning almost one thousand "canonical" scripts for (still counting) 12 television series and 14 films, no one better embodies Roddenberry's own inner story than Captain Kirk's best friend.

When asked with which person in his life he was "most intimate," Roddenberry responded unironically, "Spock." Spock was a real person to Roddenberry, having sprung up from his imagination. He was the insider-outsider,

AP Photo/Wally Fong

Gene Roddenberry at the unveiling of Leonard Nimoy's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Jan. 16, 1985

conflicted by his dual heritage and wrestling to reconcile his almost gnostic Vulcan training to prize detached logic above all things with the ever-subtle suppressed emotional drive that had to remain submerged in the depths of his being.

Spock's journey was Roddenberry's journey. Roddenberry believed that he too was searching for life's meaning. "Star Trek" producers were given the unusual opportunity to produce a second pilot episode, and Roddenberry was explicitly encouraged by the network executives to eliminate the "alien" and the "woman." But Roddenberry defied the network and kept the alien. Spock was the only core character to survive. Roddenberry fought to keep him even when the female first officer, then simply known as "Number One" and played by his real-life mistress and later second wife, Majel Barrett, was cut. Jim Kirk may have been the classic and charming leading man, but Spock's introspective, tortured personality turned out to be unexpectedly popular.

The character reached new heights in the franchise's first feature film, "Star Trek: The Motion Picture," in 1978. Spock, having left Starfleet years before, is on his home planet. He has almost completed "kolinahr," the Vulcan rite of passage of a final purging of all emotion. In the depths of his consciousness, Spock senses the impending approach of a seeker of a new kind. He returns to the Enterprise and offers his assistance. This foreboding and menacing machine, V'Ger, has traveled light-years and threatens Earth. Spock's insatiable curiosity leads him to reach out to the entity. Driven to better understand it, he leaves the Enterprise in a spacesuit to attempt a "mind meld." Understanding demands a connection and connection requires risk. Spock wants to understand V'Ger.

Eventually rescued by Kirk from open space and now lying in sickbay with an uncharacteristic tear rolling down his face and a smile fueled by wonder, the ever-stoic Spock grabs Kirk's hand: "This simple feeling...is beyond V'Ger's comprehension. No meaning, no hope, and, Jim, no answers. It's asking questions. 'Is this all I am? Is there nothing more?'"

Later Spock is even more explicit: "V'Ger must evolve. Its knowledge has reached the limits of this universe and

> ‘God, to me, is intrinsic to humanity. To the whole cause of humanity.’

it must evolve. What it requires of its God…is the answer to its question, ‘Is there nothing more?’” V’Ger travels the galaxy all the way to Earth to find its Creator.

Regardless of how deep a connection Roddenberry felt to Spock, the character’s identity was shaped just as much or more by the Jewish identity of his actor, Leonard Nimoy. He reached into his ancestral experience and brought us the “Vulcan salute,” based on the priestly benediction blessing on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Spock’s quest for knowledge had a religious undertone to it. You can find decently written icons of St. Spock, with only the mildest of irony, on the internet.

Roddenberry the Pantheist

Though the script of “Star Trek: The Motion Picture” was not written by Roddenberry, it was developed from another script by him called “The God Thing.” This theme would show up often in Roddenberry’s works. When asked to describe his thoughts about God in an interview with (former Jesuit) Terrance A. Sweeney in 1985, Roddenberry responded,

> As nearly as I can concentrate on the question today, I believe I am God; certainly you are; I think we intelligent beings on this planet are all a piece of God, are becoming God. In some sort of cyclical non-time thing we have to become God, so that we can end up creating ourselves, so that we can be in the first place.

Roddenberry went on to say that in every other regard, he “insists on hard facts,” knowing that he cannot prove his pantheistic belief. “But I am almost as sure about this as if I did have facts, although the only test I have is my own consciousness.”

Roddenberry’s ideas about God are only ratified by a book-length dialogue between him and the writer Yvonne Fern, *Gene Roddenberry: The Last Conversation*. It was first published in 1994, but the conversations were recorded in the months leading up to Roddenberry’s death in 1991. Fern was married to the longtime “Star Trek” collaborator Herb Solow. Roddenberry invited her into a partnership to record his thoughts and reflections; only during subsequent interactions did he discover that she had for three years been a Franciscan nun and studied many religious traditions. He was shocked by this revelation, since he thought her too intelligent a person to have made a choice for devotion to religious life. But this fact eventually fascinated him, since he found her theological competency stimulating.

Fern clarifies for the reader that *The Last Conversation* is a portrait and not a photograph. It reveals perhaps as much about her as it does about Roddenberry. Two things become clear: He is not an atheist, but he is anti-religious.

“You’re pretty well known for not believing in God. Do you claim him now?” asks Fern.

“Oh—well, people are often pretty well known for things that are not true,” replies Roddenberry.

“Well, is it?” she responded.

“No, it is not,” Roddenberry said. “I believe in a kind of god. It’s just not other people’s god. I reject religion. I accept the notion of God.”

What does that mean? She presses him further on God and they dance; she asks him direct questions and he sidesteps. Finally, sounding hounded, he gives in.

“All right, God, to me, is intrinsic to humanity. To the whole cause of humanity. To the imaginative principle. To what we create, and think. He—or I should say It—is a source, yes, but more an involvement with the unknown. God is like the leap outside oneself, something that has no discernable source, but is a source.”

So how do we square this Gene Roddenberry, the one who acknowledges that there is a God who is “intrinsic to humanity,” with the one his son, Rod, later describes?

Rod said his father was “as close to a true atheist …as could be considered.” Maybe Gene made a final confession of pure atheism on his deathbed, so Rod could say with confidence that his father was an atheist. The evidence from the Fern interview, however, does not support that claim.

The Son’s View

In my own life I have found that some families want to maintain a more static image of a deceased loved one. Death offers the opportunity to do a complete assessment of a person’s life; it is, after all, *the final frontier*. Yet competing, perhaps unfavorable narratives can sometimes emerge, especially of a famous person like Gene Roddenberry, whose career was as tumultuous as it was prophetic.

Perhaps we could say Roddenberry, on a practical level, lived like an atheist. Yet it seems to me only right we take

a person's self definitions seriously. He said he was not.

The author Kevin C. Neece published *The Gospel According to Star Trek: The Original Crew* in 2016, doing the heavy-lift research that helped me see that pantheism is the appropriate descriptor of Roddenberry's theological outlook. Was he an anti-religious pantheistic humanist? Or maybe he was a humanistic pantheist? I am not sure. Trying to define this now-historic figure too exactly runs the risk of creating a fiction that cannot be supported with facts.

Gene Roddenberry was throughout his life interested in theological questions. His method might be described as *via negativa,* the negative way. He was far more comfortable with clarifying what God is not than he was in systematically understanding what God is. And his stance against organized religion is well documented.

The third season of "Star Trek: Strange New Worlds" premieres in July. More than any other show, "Strange New Worlds" is a nostalgic callback to the original "Star Trek" not only in its setting as a prequel to Kirk's crew, but also in its return to episodic, anthologized storytelling with smart, 48-minute solutions. It also bears the tongue-in-cheek cheer and good humor of the 1960s show. My hope is that "Strange New Worlds" does not shy away from some theologically rich storytelling. It would give secular society another safe and measured space to think about God, ultimate meaning and our place in the universe, as the original series did. In so doing it would certainly be fulfilling the vision of its creator.

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A model of the U.S.S. Enterprise, as seen in the original Star Trek series

iStock/BrendanHunter

The Star Trek video canon

TELEVISION SERIES

Star Trek (NBC), 1966-69, 79 episodes

The Animated Series (NBC), 1973-74, 22 episodes

The Next Generation (syndicated), 1987-94, 178 episodes

Deep Space Nine (syndicated), 1993-99, 176 episodes

Voyager (UPN), 1995-2001, 172 episodes

Enterprise (UPN), 2001-05, 98 episodes

Discovery (CBS All Access/Paramount+), 2017-24, 65 episodes

Short Treks (CBS All Access/Paramount+), 2018-20, 10 episodes

Picard (CBS All Access/Paramount+), 2020-23, 30 episodes

Lower Decks (CBS All Access/Paramount+), 2020-24, 50 episodes

Prodigy (Paramount+/Netflix), 2021-24, 40 episodes

Strange New Worlds (Paramount+), 2022- , 20 episodes so far

Starfleet Academy (Paramount+), scheduled to debut in late 2025

FILMS

Star Trek: The Motion Picture, 1979

Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan, 1982

Star Trek III: The Search for Spock, 1984

Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home, 1986

Star Trek V: The Final Frontier, 1989

Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country, 1991

Star Trek: Generations, 1994

Star Trek: First Contact, 1996

Star Trek: Insurrection, 1998

Star Trek: Nemesis, 2002

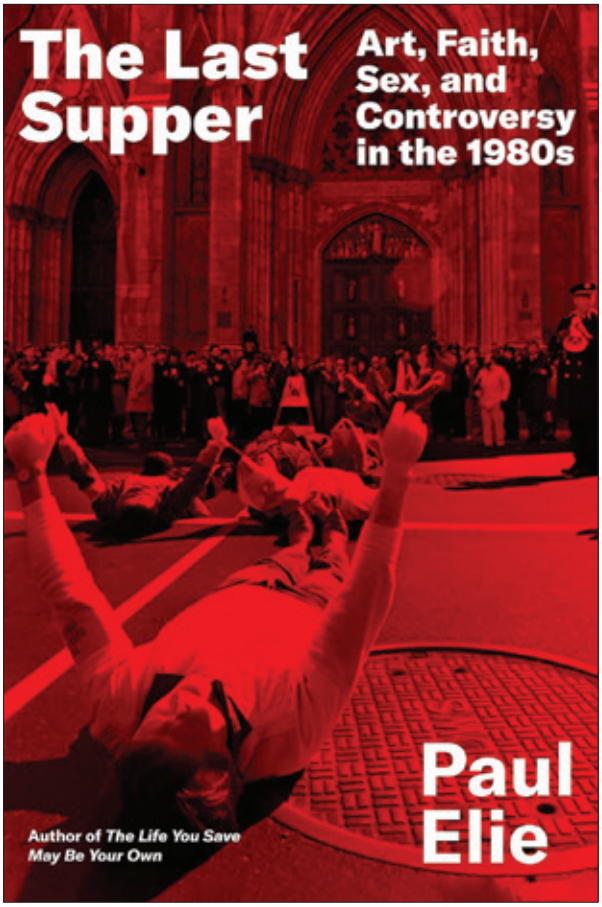
Star Trek, 2009

Star Trek Into Darkness, 2013

Star Trek Beyond, 2016

Star Trek: Section 31, 2025

CULTURAL FRAGMENTS



Farrar, Straus & Giroux / 496p $33

Not to judge a book by its cover, but Paul Elie's new one serves as a sterling representative for the story within. A photograph depicts a group of protesters in the ACT UP movement staging a "die-in" on Fifth Avenue in New York City in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral, "America's parish church," during Advent 1989, in protest of Cardinal John O'Connor's statements on condoms, homosexuality and sex education.

The protestors occupy the foreground; the church looms in the background. The cathedral is not immediately identifiable as such: While not the focus of the photograph, it is the center of the demonstrators' attention—their antagonist. Washed in red—the color of blood and passion, war and martyrdom—the photograph could be a Warhol print: a reproduction of documentary footage transformed into a strange icon of a strained moment.

Between its covers, *The Last Supper: Art, Faith, Sex and Controversy* investigates pop culture's crypto-religious, uncanny symbols of immanence and transcendence. In some ways, it reads like a sequel to Elie's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*, in which he stitched together the lives of four great American Catholics—Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Walker Percy and Flannery O'Connor—into a portrait of a common pilgrimage through American mid-century religious letters and culture.

The Last Supper is a less cohesive, more fragmented book than Elie's 2003 classic. It opens in New York City, the melting pot of the various fragments of global culture, and it closes in New York City. In the 400-odd pages in between, the roving narrator takes us around the Northern Hemisphere from Manchester's homegrown Morrissey and the Smiths to Leonard Cohen in Montreal.

Fragmentation, however, is Elie's theme. His montage of the 1980s examines variations on an icon, orphaned jigsaw puzzle pieces of symbology lingering in the cultural junk drawer from a discarded religious cosmos: Jean-Michel Basquiat's crown of thorns, Bono's white flag from U2's "War" tour and the titular image, Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper," which Andy Warhol rendered into more than 100 silk-screen prints and collages for a gallery in Milan.

A more active fragmenting serves as one of the narrative's bookends—the one where the chart-topping Irish pop singer Sinead O'Connor rips a portrait of Pope John Paul II in half on a "Saturday Night Live" broadcast on Oct. 3, 1992. Pop culture—like, perhaps religious belief—entails embracing icons that need no definition. But pop culture's icons have an expiration date, one-hit wonders their *memento mori*.

Some may argue that religion has a shelf life as well. But Elie's book seeks to demonstrate just how consistently slanted toward the "crypto-religious" and mystic the American public imaginary has been, even throughout "secular" postmodernity, even by the most rebellious of its rebels for artistic causes. Despite our rational, scientific progress, we are drawn to the uncanny, that which lacks explanation. Such phenomena are frequently explored in art, particularly art that refuses to smooth the jagged edges of experience or force the broken fragments into an artificial shape, art that embraces uncertainty, discomfort—controversy.

Frequently, as Elie writes, Catholic and Christian clerics condemned "controversial" pieces of art, sight unseen. "Don't look at that," religious leaders said of Madonna's music videos, Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ," Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, blindly leading the blinded. Where our gaze rests is a moral question.

"What exactly am I supposed to be looking at?" I wondered this at points during *The Last Supper*'s associative acid trip across genre, country and controversy after controversy. But that question might be a result of a good literary trip. What exactly *are* we all looking at in post-modernity?

In the proliferation of images on the internet, the fragmentation of thought on Twitter-now-X, what are we

supposed to be looking at? Are we in Dublin or Los Angeles or New York City? In a world of one wide web, what's the difference anymore? What comes of a culture when we're all looking in different directions, the ideological and social compasses no longer pointing to a common true north? Is there a "we" looking anywhere or just a gaggle of individual voyeurs?

The 1980s serve as Elie's excavation site of choice because they are the origin point, he argues, of the controversies fracturing into "the culture wars." He identifies the shift from actual war to war over sex in the years between the condemnation of nuclear weapons by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in its 1983 pastoral letter "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response" and the 1986 instruction from the Vatican declaring homosexuality objectively disordered.

Elie's subtitle promises "Art, Faith, Sex and Controversy," and so it is in keeping with his vision to focus on the controversies surrounding sex and religion. At points, however, I yearned for the author to look under the hood at some of the other vectors of violence within which art was made and culture was constructed during the "outrageous eighties"—including the runaway incarceration and suburbanization of the country.

The prison population of the United States doubled between 1970 and 1980, then continued to grow at an average of 8 percent each year between 1985 and 1995. Incarceration can be a fragmenting of the human person. Multiple medical studies have shown that incarceration causes anxiety, panic attacks and a breakdown of the social contract. A recent report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 82 percent of previously incarcerated individuals were imprisoned again within 10 years after release. The previously incarcerated also have significantly higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder after their incarceration is over. P.T.S.D. was formally added to the D.S.M., the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, in 1980.

As the American psyche was fracturing, the lived communities of American society were also fragmenting. Between 1950 and 1970, the suburban population in the United States nearly doubled, to 74 million, with 83 percent of all population growth occurring in suburban places. The 1970 census recorded more Americans living in the suburbs than anywhere else for the first time in the nation's history.

The suburbs offer neither the dense urban resource-sharing of the cities nor the expansive resource-creation of farms. Suburbs are predicated on the sundering of natural ties with creation (seen in the Stepfordian uniformity of grass-filled yards) and with one's neighbors (in the proverbial picket fence), and in the suburbs' tarnished history as an innovation of white flight from cities flooded with Black Americans traveling north in the Great Migration.

> **The 1980s serve as Elie's excavation site because they are the origin point of the 'culture wars.'**

Neighbor and creation are two of the key loci not only for finding God in the world, but for making art to begin with. Since the psalmist first strummed his lyre, the lion's share of poetic reflection is on the creaturely world and the mystery of our own identity within it.

Could the gaps that the suburbs create between neighbors foster room for violence to thrive? Could the estrangement from the natural world, from the natural rhythms of abundance, work, want and need that have marked human society since Homo sapiens began cultivating the land 12,000 years ago create a lacuna in our vision of human nature, setting the stage for endless arguments over anthropology—from debates over gay marriage to gender ideology?

Elie gestures to rapid technological changes in his epilogue: "subway tokens and pay phones and smoky cash-only bars" that have all gone the way of the dodo, hunted to extinction by the machines of our new "frictionless" digital age. Perhaps this technological acceleration, and the economic conditions that contribute to it and are manufactured by it, also contribute to an increasingly violent rhetoric and our collective cultural religiosity, or lack thereof.

In his epilogue, Elie revisits Sinead O'Connor ripping up the pope's portrait. To many younger Americans, part of a generation whose experience of religion has been so completely defined by the abuse scandals of 2002, 2018 and 2019, O'Connor's gesture does not seem in the least bit shocking. Ripping up an image of a pope seems like a justified response to the rage and anger that many Catholics feel toward the hierarchy, who have, in one measure or another, broken the body of Christ and betrayed their calling to be shepherds of Christ's sheep. There are some symbols that have become tainted, their ability to transmit the grace they claim more compromised.

Artists are the antennae for their race, said Ezra Pound, and perhaps by catching their disparate signals, one can make a portrait of the moment, as Elie tries to do. Look-

ing at what the artists are painting, the filmmakers filming and the musicians playing is perhaps as good a place as any to answer the question of what we *are* looking at.

If the American pilgrimage is a journey away from the cohesive religious cultural vision of the interwar and postwar years that Elie chronicles in *The Life You Save May Be Your Own,* the 1980s perhaps was a rebellion against a religious *Weltanschauung* that provided no healing for the physical violence and psychic pain that many artists Elie names experienced in their religious upbringing—O'Connor not least of them.

To return to Elie's cover: The pathos of the scene may be in the ACT UP protestors fighting for visibility for their many fellow New Yorkers dying of H.I.V. But Elie's book focuses the camera lens on where they are lying and who they are addressing: the seemingly impenetrable white marble of the cathedral. Their protest, in which at least one protestor received the Eucharistic host and crumbled it into pieces in an act of desecration, earned them extreme notoriety. Elie presents their 1989 demonstration as the climax of an increasingly violent decade, in which political religious rhetoric opened the church door to a response of political protest.

Yet in a culture defined by the "rise of the nones," having a common religious tradition to rebel against—a cathedral that means something, against which to protest, from which you expect something—seems like a rich cultural legacy indeed.

The closing words of Elie's epilogue offer an apologia for art that delves into the depth of religious experience, that takes up the symbols of religion for cultural consideration—a sort of *From Union Square to Rome* for the Dimes Square set. If everyone from Bono to the Doors can reference the "Gloria," even profanely, perhaps the common ties that bind us become just that much thicker, richer, wider. Perhaps, then, acts of popular culture can become truly more like a liturgy—the work of a people, not just individuals.

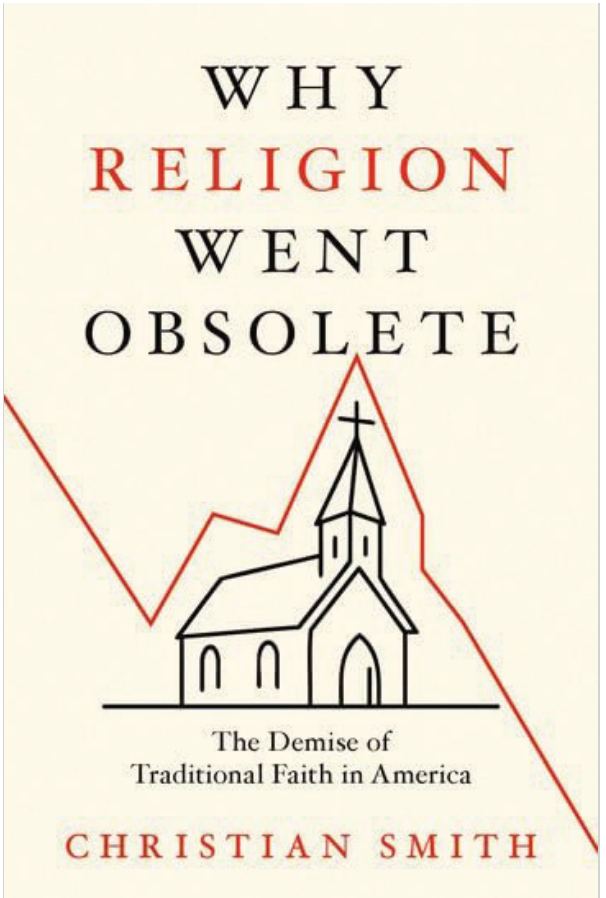
Renée Roden *is the author of Tantur: Seeking Christian Unity in a Divided City, being released this summer. She lives at St. Martin de Porres Catholic Worker in Harrisburg, Pa.*

DESIGNER DEATH

By Deborah DeNicola

It's the one certainty—And so elicits
imagination. At that moment
does the mind shrink to a marble?
Or does all hard-won knowledge
compress into stew—a smorgasbord
of mashed memories with excess cortisol?
What we knew until the jilt in the brain
turned its gears, churning, inflamed
your cells' final grind to a *Stop*—
Like a wheel with a stuck rod
in its spoke? A minute-long stroke
overthrowing binaural beats?
Time to turn off the whole
discombobulation of you—
who you were, what you loved....
Oh, chalice of raindrops, organic
compounds, smudge of frankincense,
tinseled dominions—here's the one altar
you'd take a knee for—your lyrical
hymn written to *Him,* his glittering
saints and winged Seraphim....
Maybe then—in their song
you'll recall after all
this hard-earthen-living—
you were one of them all along.

Deborah DeNicola's *most recent book is the poetry collection* The Impossible. *She compiled and edited the anthology* Orpheus & Company: Contemporary Poems on Greek Mythology. *Previous poetry books include* Original Human *and* Where Divinity Begins.



Oxford University Press / 440p, $35

The fact that Christian Smith has written an extremely important sociological study of American religion with *Why Religion Went Obsolete: The Demise of Traditional Faith in America* is hardly news. He has already produced a succession of insightful and carefully nuanced studies of religion in the United States over the course of three decades. What is news is that he believes that he has documented the demise of traditional faith in the United States: "The evidence offers multiple empirical indicators of a larger latent fact about traditional American religion: that it has not only suffered weakening and decline, but also has become obsolete—at least among Americans under the age of 50, which is to say nearly all of America in the not-distant future."

Smith also wants to be clear about what he means by "obsolescence." *Obsolete* doesn't mean useless or destroyed; rather, as Smith applies the term, traditional religion (by which he means institutional or "organized" religion) is obsolete because increasing numbers of people feel it is no longer useful or needed—precisely because something else has superseded it in terms of function, efficiency, value or interest.

But what might have been yet another tired narrative about "religious decline" is anything but tired. There are a number of features of Smith's book that make it extremely important, not the least of which is that he offers an alternative narrative to the "secularization thesis" about the disappearance of religion in modern societies.

As Smith recounts the story, something more interesting and complicated has transpired that requires a more creative conceptual explanation: Traditional religion's losses do not automatically translate into secular gains, as the older (ham-fisted) advocates of the secularization thesis argued, as though the narrative was based on a zero-sum scale. And Smith seeks to offer just such a creative conceptual explanation by moving beyond (and behind) statistics to explore the cultural environment (the "zeitgeist") that has both contributed to and been affected by that decline.

Smith explores a number of important cultural and economic factors over the course of four decades that abetted traditional religion's cultural decline: the end of the Cold War, during which American political leaders had utilized traditional Christian images and symbols to mark off how U.S. religiosity offered the antidote to Soviet godlessness; the triumph of neoliberal capitalism by the end of the 20th century, whose hyper-competitiveness demanded a new, intensified work ethic that included the "triaging" of endeavors that did not lead to immediate economic advantages; the digital revolution, which became a "time and attention suck" and provided alternative, flexible and immediate ways of finding community without having to leave your house; and the emphasis on multicultural values at all levels of education, which—implicitly, anyway—emphasized the belief that no belief or community was better than another and that everything on offer was acceptable (except intolerance).

And by no means least in the list of factors explaining traditional religion's obsolescence was the widespread cultural acceptance of being "not religious" as an acceptable identity option, a cultural stance that had been professed by 5 percent of all Americans in 1972 but by 30 percent of Americans in 2020.

Smith documents his thesis by pressing a number of "big data" arguments that track significant cultural changes over time: that each successive generation born across the 20th century was noticeably less affiliated with traditional religion than the previous generation; that the previous expectation that young adults would become more religious as they grew older and started having families stopped and was reversed by the baby boomers; and that the 20 years from 1990 to 2010 represented the "convergence of perfect storms."

Indeed, he dates the eye of those storms to the year 1991, which launched a new zeitgeist in which the "cultural

tide turned on American [institutional] religion's fortunes."

To name just one example from that fateful year of 1991, he offers data on the "not religious" respondents reported in national polls. The number of those who described themselves as "not religious" remained relatively low and stable from 1972 to 1991: 7 percent of all American adults and 12 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds during those 20 years. But the number of American adults describing themselves as not religious increased from 7 percent in 1991 to 29 percent in 2021; and the growth was even more dramatic among 18- to-29-year-olds, up to 43 percent.

As Smith observes, these numbers are staggering, for few important social phenomena show such steady change over such a long time. And the years since have shown no reduction in the growth of the number of self-identified not-religious Americans, especially among younger adults.

For Smith, an even more difficult group to measure is those who describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious." National surveys began asking that question only in 2005, and no survey has asked that question consistently (or in the same form) over time, but data from the first two decades of the 21st century show that between 20 percent and 35 percent of all Americans claimed that identity. Based on that admittedly rough data, Smith concludes that one in four American adults have come to consider themselves "spiritual but not religious."

One of the more interesting sections of *Why Religion Went Obsolete* is Smith's exploration of a new publishing genre he calls Good Without God. In Chapter Seven, he shares some of the surprisingly numerous titles available in that genre, including: *God Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Believe; Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values;* and *Living the Secular Life: New Answers to Old Questions*. To say the least, this makes for interesting reading.

Smith's larger point is nuanced but extremely important: Traditional religion's concerns—with nurturing a vibrant spiritual life of inner peace and openness to transcendence; with finding a community of like-minded souls committed to living the good life and working to effect ethical change; with finding lasting values that can be passed on to the next generation; with finding answers to life's most important questions—have not disappeared. It's just that increasing numbers of Americans, especially younger Americans, no longer seek for answers to them in the teaching and structures of institutional religion.

There are, moreover, a number of surprising intellectual insights along the way as well. For instance: "far from representing failure, the decline of Liberal Protestantism may actually stem from its success. Liberal Protestants have lost structurally at the micro level precisely because they won culturally at the macro level."

As Smith applies the term, traditional religion is obsolete because increasing numbers of people feel it is no longer useful or needed.

Or, on the relation of religion to politics in the United States: "American politics itself became increasingly invested with quasi-religious importance. Politics became sacralized on both the right and the left. Political struggle took on a quasi-religious fervor and, for those participating, a quasi-religious identity. The more this sacralization of politics occurred, the more American identities migrated from spaces of traditional sacredness, such as religion, to this other realm."

On the importance of evangelical values in American culture itself, Smith writes: "The ironic migration of 'personal relationship with God' from evangelicalism to individualistic spirituality is emblematic of a larger unintended evangelical influence on American culture that also contributed to traditional religion's obsolescence—namely, the valorization of individual subjectivity as the seat of authenticity and authority."

Smith's book is a new and important way of understanding the fate of institutional religion in the United States.

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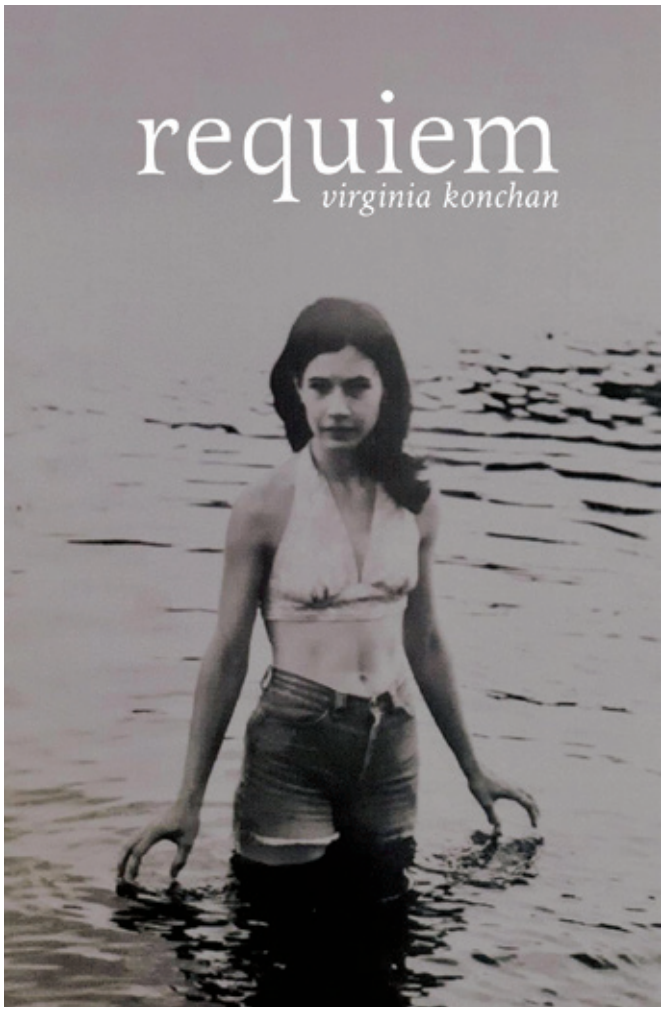
POET OF MIRACLES



Carnegie Mellon University Press / 96p $20

In 2008, the poets Mary Karr and Franz Wright were in conversation at Calvin College for a writing festival. Their banter was natural, not staid; after all, they had been friends "for almost 30 years," and, as Karr quipped, they "used to drink and, you know, do cocaine together in another lifetime." Both sober, and both "trying to be Catholic," they spoke of being "snatched out of the fire."

Halfway through their conversation, Wright mentioned Walt Whitman as a poet of miracles. "I know nothing but miracles," Wright said. "Every single moment is this terrifying, awe-inspiring unbelievable"—and then, both capturing himself and clarifying, he added: "when you're awake to it."

Poets vary widely in their styles and sensibilities, but I have noticed that most share two inclinations: association and attention. Poets notice patterns and connections across dissimilar elements of life, and they pay attention. They are awake to the world.

Virginia Konchan is a poet of association and attention, and in *Requiem*, her fifth book, she takes the sacred seriously. She's jocular with her subjects, including God, yet in doing so she demonstrates sustained attention toward the divine. God is among her natural poetic vocabulary.

Her collection begins with an epigraph from the Jewish theologian and rabbi Abraham Heschel. The line "God is of no importance unless He is of supreme importance" comes from his 1951 book *Man Is Not Alone* and follows a rumination. "God is not an explanation of the world's enigmas or a guarantee for our salvation," he writes. "He is an eternal challenge, an urgent demand," and not "a problem to be solved but a question addressed to us."

Konchan described herself in Tupelo Quarterly as a poet of faith, but said that she often "exercise[s] it through poetry, in conversation with power structures and law." Like Heschel, she is drawn to impossible questions, ones that are meant to be "(un)resolved."

Her first poem in *Requiem*, "Matins," is comfortable with a lack of resolution, and associates Jewish and Christian traditions. In lines that recall Heschel, she writes: "The philosopher sat shiva with his shadow,/ knowing the truth was without and within."

The contemplative Christian practice of matins is placed with a broader lineage: "Abraham waited, as did David and Joseph,/ Moses, Hannah, Isaiah, Ruth, Jacob, Paul./ Each hour an unmet hunger, an ardent plea."

Konchan's narrator seeks to join this tradition; "will practice awe, bending at the knee." The narrators in *Requiem* are open to the mysterious, for "With God, all things are possible, such as God." In "Apostrophe," Konchan writes "Truth requires a suspension of belief,/ I said. Science is only half the story."

The presence of God teems throughout this book, as in these lines from "Ecce Homo":

> *Promise Keeper, Miracle Worker, Son*
> *of Man with nowhere to lay your head:*
> *outside the grinding maw of capital is*
> *your voice, recoiling through centuries:*
> *quiet and insistent as needle and thread.*

In "Parousiamania," the narrator is blunt. "Have I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord / and Savior? Amen. But enough about me." Although the shape of the divine is a mystery, God's existence is accepted. It is time for more prosaic concerns: "When bored, I make a list of things I want,/ like a car that runs or jeans that actually fit."

That poem takes a fascinating turn. The narrator pleads for "Divine Unction in aisle 29, beside/ a pyramid of alabaster toilet paper." But once resurrected, she will "[commandeer] this/ shopping cart the way people/ are

raptured: up, up, and away."

There is a significant difference between the profane and the penetrating. Konchan demonstrates the latter in her poem "Gloria Patri," one of the finest in the collection. Catholics will recognize the syntax: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

In Konchan's able hands, the doxology remains sacred. "Glory be to god for septic tanks, drainage pipes:/ for conversions thermodynamic and of the soul," she writes. "Glory be to god for this quiet, cheap hotel room:/ only music the mini-fridge's vibratory drone,/ creaky plumbing groaning through the walls." The narrator contemplates how "the perfect peace of objects" is juxtaposed with the transient nature of hotel stays. "Before me was another traveler," the narrator ponders, and "after I leave,/ hundreds of others will arrive." They will drink water "from disposable plastic cups," lie back on the bed, and "stare into the void/ of a generic landscape painting across the bed/ while contemplating the disaster of their lives."

The grime of this room is perhaps as venial as the sins of its main character, and in many ways "Gloria Patri" is a confession: "I acknowledge my poverty of being and my need."

Mary Karr's iconic book title *Sinners Welcome* feels like an apt point of comparison for Konchan's collection, and her greater project as a poet. In the poem "Wheel of Fortune," from a previous book, Konchan writes: "Am I a citizen-consumer or a child of God?" An interviewer once questioned the juxtaposition in that line, to which Konchan responded that both are not merely powerless: "a child of God, while externalizing the locus of power to a Godhead, can be empowered through the Holy Spirit or another form of divine inspiration." The role of the lyric speaker or narrator is to "give voice to anyone or anything, from inanimate matter to the very person of 'God.'"

In that vein, perhaps the ultimate subject of Konchan's attention in *Requiem* is an extended elegy for her mother. In "Valediction," she writes of seeing her mother in hospice:

> *I touched her skull, raised in parts by a shunt—*
> *implanted to drain excess cerebrospinal fluid*
> *from her brain—feeling her form like Braille.*

The lines, however jarring, are a force of attention. The comedic touches of *Requiem* clear the poetic air for the later, more solemn poems. In "Prelude," she writes: "Most of my life has been a spectacular failure." She thinks how mistakes are, collectively, "a lesson in epistemic humility." After a life of pain, she is changed but not doomed: "I'm not paralyzed, I'm praying." She ends the poem with a bittersweet couplet: "I need another life to get it right,/ to inaugurate the impossible again."

Konchan is a poet of association and attention, and in *Requiem*, she takes the sacred seriously.

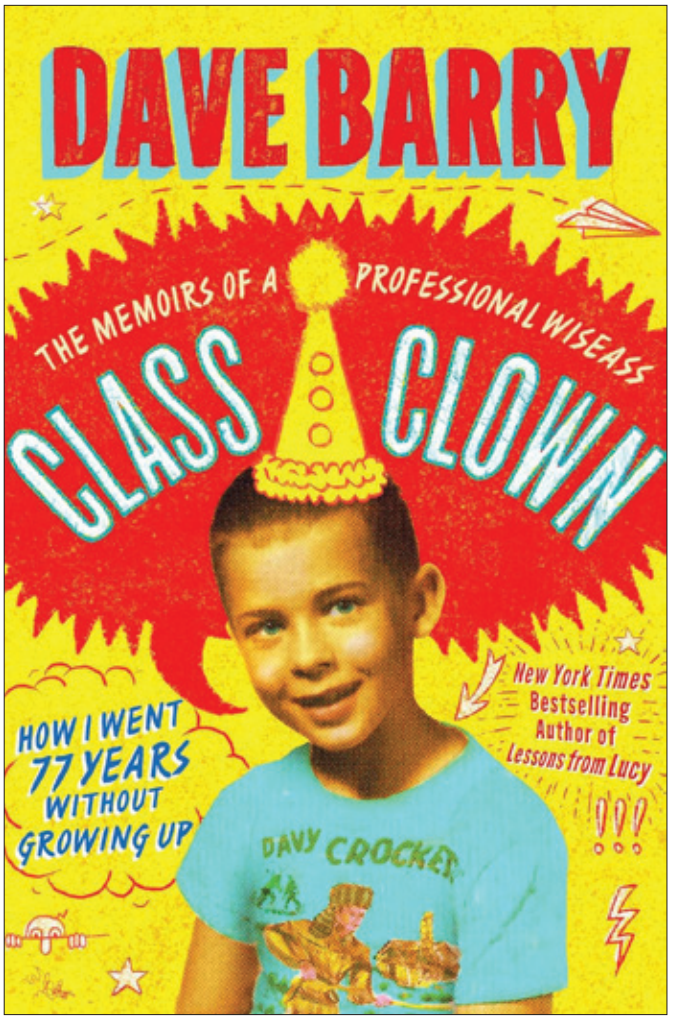
Yet Konchan the poet, and Konchan the lyric narrator, recognizes that we only get this one, earthly, corporeal life, and that makes poems like "Breviary" all the more meaningful. The penultimate poem of the book, it begins with the narrator learning of her mother's death while "driving to see her." Upon reaching the room, she splays across her mother's "barely sallow" body, weeping, while her brother has "opened the window to let her spirit fly away free."

The narrator reads Corinthians, Dickinson and Langston Hughes to her mother at the wake. At the funeral, she contemplates the inadequacy of language to calm grief, the pain: "the consoler and the inconsolable rudderless at sea,/ watching unforeseen tragedies congeal into history."

Konchan, and her narrator, know poetry can also be a hymn of resurrection. She begins each day by "saying her name, Theresa,/ asking her what were her dreams, how she slept." Konchan creates a stay against despair at the end of the poem, a move that captures *Requiem*'s emotional range. It recalls my favorite poem by Franz Wright, "Rosary," about Mary, which concludes: "See them flying to see you/ be near you,/ / when you/ are everywhere."

Speaking to her mother, the narrator says words of consolation—for both of them: "They don't know you are alive in every goodness,/ every wink, every cell and atom dissolving in air."

Nick Ripatrazone has written for Rolling Stone, The Atlantic, The Paris Review and Esquire. His books include Ember Days, *a collection of stories, and* Longing for an Absent God: Faith and Doubt in Great American Fiction.



Simon & Schuster / 256p $29

Seventeen-year-old me could think of no better life outcome than to be paid to read Dave Barry and then write about it. I first read Barry's work in May of 1999 when a friend gave me a copy of Barry's syndicated humor column. This particular article was in the form of a graduation speech that involved jokes about encyclopedia research, tattoo removal and wearing ducks as hats.

I was hooked.

I began reading Barry's Miami Herald column weekly and then devoured his books, like *Dave Barry's Greatest Hits, Dave Barry Slept Here* and *Dave Barry Turns 40*, for which I suspected I was not the target audience but loved anyway. I often cut out his columns from the newspaper and underlined the parts I found funniest, analyzing them in a profoundly unfunny way. Reading Barry's work was one of the first times I recall laughing out loud at someone's writing.

On the verge of adulthood, in the midst of applying to colleges and worrying about leaving my friends and family behind, it was a relief to simply read for fun and for that fun to come from stories of exploding whales. As I contemplated my future, Dave Barry gave me a strange sort of hope: You could get older and still get away with mind-boggling amounts of wackiness.

Barry's latest, *Class Clown: The Memoirs of a Professional Wiseass: How I Went 77 Years Without Growing Up*, is a funny book with dueling subtitles that is a testament to the fact that Barry agrees with that sentiment. He thanks his loyal readers in the book, saying "they've enabled me to go for decades without having anything close to a real job."

I am one of these loyal readers. I have always loved Barry's appreciation of the absurd, from exploding toilets to the incendiary nature of Rollerblade Barbie to the hallucinogenic properties of certain toads. I recall eagerly awaiting his first novel, *Big Trouble*, which I described in a high school essay as "one of the most entertaining books I have read for a while although the characters did tend to swear a bit."

I am able to quote this essay because, 25 years ago, as a senior in high school, I was required to turn in quarterly AP English "portfolios," and my mother has not thrown a single one away. Each portfolio included a decorated manila file folder filled with printed samples of my best work, along with explanatory essays and introductions to offer context and reflection (or in my case, smart-aleck comments) about each piece.

From a structural perspective, *Class Clown* is not unlike my AP English portfolio. Readers of Barry's latest will find enjoyable excerpts from many of his most notable columns, surrounded by additional memories, commentary and, occasionally, the perspective of hindsight. The book serves as both a victory lap and primer for Barry's illustrious comedic career. Longtime readers will find many of the facts and events familiar. Readers who are new to Barry may benefit the most, as the book offers a number of guideposts for delving more deeply into his best work.

Admittedly, I may be more likely than most to find Barry's stories familiar. One of the assignments included in my final portfolio was something our teacher called a "saturation paper," which required us to immerse ourselves in the life of a famous person and write an essay from that person's perspective. After considering Bruce Springsteen, Mankind (a professional wrestler in what was then the W.W.F.) and Kermit the Frog, I settled on my favorite syndicated humor columnist.

I titled my essay "Dave Barry: Books, Beer and Boogerbrains" and wrote it from the imagined perspective of Barry looking back on his life while waiting to be awarded his Pulitzer Prize for Commentary in 1988. I am sure Barry appreciated receiving the award, but I also loved the

convenience of pointing to it whenever anyone questioned my literary taste. If Barry's humor was good enough for the Pulitzer judges, who was I to second-guess them?

Barry's tone in *Class Clown* is consistent and, at times, sophomoric, but as he has often said: "Sophomoric is often used as a pejorative term, but I myself remember laughing pretty hard as a sophomore." He covers flaming Pop-Tarts, his early work teaching writing to businesspeople, and getting assignments from Gene Weingarten of Tropic, the Sunday magazine of the Miami Herald, where Barry's humor career took off (all of which I can proudly say I also covered in my saturation paper).

In my introduction, I wrote that "the research does not really seem like work," because it mostly involved reading books I was already excited to read. Although it also included driving to the public library and poring over the periodical index in order to track down a Playboy interview with Barry on the library's microfilm (text only). But even as I worked for hours and wrote pages of text, I felt I was getting away with something.

This is a sentiment Barry often echoes in *Class Clown* with regard to his own career. He can barely believe that he has been allowed to do what he does for as long as he has. His lack of self-seriousness about his work has always been part of his charm. Barry's writing is smart and incisive, but often simply silly for the sake of it. He writes in the book that readers have told him his work makes the world a better place, because, they claim, "in troubled times humor is vital." But Barry admits that "I'd probably be doing this even if it made the world a worse place. It's pretty much the only thing I know how to do."

Barry's relationship with his readers, those he infuriated and those he enchanted, provides some of the most delightful memories in *Class Clown*. (His supporters included—and I am not making this up—Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens.) Readers often sent him crazy news stories for possible column fodder, and for years Barry responded with a postcard that read, "This certifies that [name] is an Alert Reader and should seek some kind of treatment immediately." Barry writes about this in the book, but I also know this because I once received such a postcard.

After I became a fan of the Florida-based Barry, I learned that a Massachusetts man by the name of Dave Barry was running for selectman in a small town near my hometown. I hoped to share this news with the Florida Barry, who had launched his own satirical campaign for president. Knowing this, some of my friends obtained (definitely *not* by stealing it) a yard sign for Selectman Barry's campaign and proudly presented it to me. Not wanting to mail a giant sign to Florida, I instead did what any self-respecting teenager of the 90s would do and took a careful photograph of it with my film camera, had the film developed at CVS and sent the glossy picture of the campaign sign to the Florida Barry via the U.S. Postal Service.

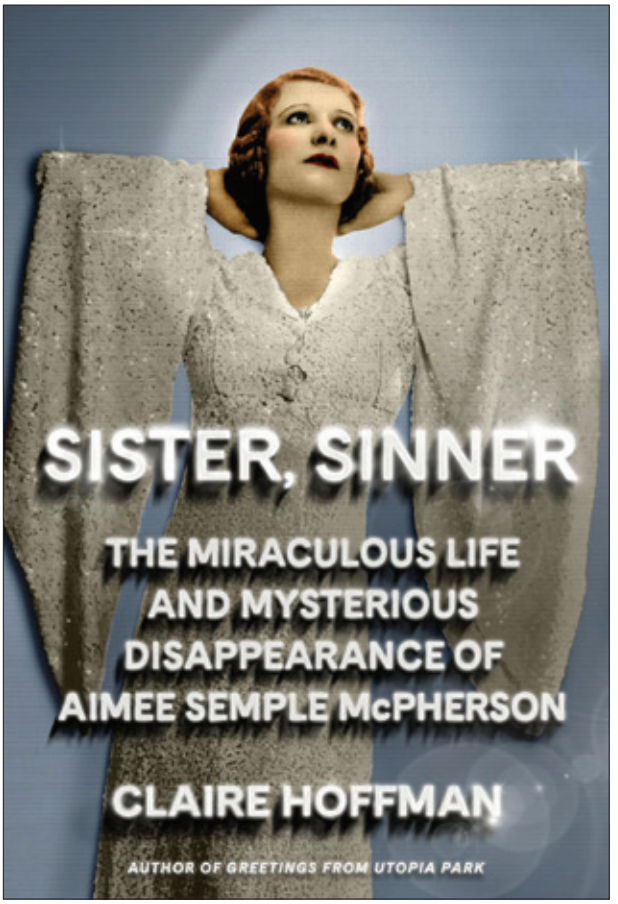
Barry can barely believe that he has been allowed to do what he does for as long as he has.

In response, I received Barry's standard reply, with one meaningful modification. Below Barry's signature, he had written: "Select Man." I was delighted by this small, personal touch. Many months (years?) later, I stumbled upon an online photo tour of Barry's office at the Miami Herald. In my memory, the postcard was taped to the front of his office door. After all the laughs he'd provided me, the little sign felt like an inside joke with a friend. This is what good humor does: It keeps you company, makes you feel a little less alone.

At the end of my senior year, in the folder containing my final English portfolio (25 years ago!), I tucked a printed copy of Barry's graduation-themed column behind my own work. I also included a grainy, black-and-white photo of Dave Barry playing an electric guitar in pajamas and a robe. The handwritten caption read, in part: "He will *always* make me laugh." Seventeen-year-old me would be happy to know this is still true.

Kerry Weber *is an executive editor at* ***America.***

SPELLBINDING, HYPNOTIC, POWERFUL



Farrar, Straus and Giroux / 384p $32

The title of Claire Hoffman's new book, *Sister, Sinner: The Miraculous Life and Mysterious Disappearance of Aimee Semple McPherson*, promises miracles and scandals. Hoffman delivers with a fast-paced page turner for the reader. Attentive to descriptive details and candid about the contradictions in the life of her subject, Hoffman breathlessly follows the life of Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944). This biography brings into print another review of the achievements and personal failures of this major pioneer of media evangelism.

Contemporary readers may not recognize McPherson's name, but many are acquainted with modern media evangelism. McPherson was an early figure in religious broadcasting with her own radio station in Los Angeles, as one of the first women to obtain a license to broadcast in the 1920s. A mesmerizing speaker, she was a prodigious author of sermons, books, articles, pamphlets, hymns and plays to spread the message of Pentecostalism. She was ever alert to opportunities for publicity, and her church services drew crowds by the thousands, week after week, for many years. McPherson relentlessly pursued public attention throughout her life, and the publication of another biography would probably have pleased her.

McPherson was the daughter of a small-town Canadian farmer aged 50 and his 15-year-old bride who was active in the Salvation Army. Drawn to her mother's church activities, McPherson married the evangelist Robert Semple at an early age in 1910, and the two set off for China as missionaries. After his death and the birth of her daughter, Roberta, she returned to Canada and soon continued her calling as a messenger of Pentecostal faith. She quickly remarried, to Howard McPherson, and she and her new husband hit the revival circuit along the East Coast, where she preached in tent meetings. After the birth of a son, she separated from her husband and set off across the country, driving her "Gospel Car" to Los Angeles in 1918 with her mother and her two children.

McPherson's arrival in Los Angeles coincided with a period of dramatic growth in the city's population. Residents increased from 576,000 in 1920 to 1.2 million in 1930. Newcomers to the city thronged to McPherson's preaching, and within four years, she had built a 4,500-seat church, Angelus Temple. Followers of her Foursquare Gospel church spread throughout Southern California and radiated across the continent. Soon she was sending missionaries overseas, engaged in publishing and then broadcasting by radio. It was at the height of her popularity that she was reputedly kidnapped in 1926.

Hoffman explores this episode in detail, a moment when everyone's beloved "sister" appeared as a sorry "sinner." Emerging from the Sonoran Desert, McPherson walked into Douglas, Ariz., unscratched and without sunburn or thirst. She told a tale that enemies of her church had captured her while at the beach in Venice, Calif., and transported her across the border for nefarious purposes. While her return to Los Angeles brought her a triumphant welcome by thousands, investigators were increasingly dubious of her account.

Her subsequent trials for obstructing justice coincided with increasing evidence of a love nest up the California coast in Carmel. Revelations by witnesses and reporters identified Kenneth G. Ormiston, radio man of her church's station, as her paramour. McPherson challenged all accusations with dramatic accounts of the devil's intent to stop her ministry by any means possible.

These developments brought her national publicity, as well as increasing ridicule. Undeterred, McPherson continued her ministry of preaching the true Gospel and attacking skeptics in government and the district attorney's office as well as civic and religious leaders.

McPherson further complicated her life when she rejected even those closest to her. She alienated both her mother and her daughter, Roberta, by her changed lifestyle, stylish clothes, international trips and financial ex-

travagances. Hoffman interprets this familial alienation as the effect of fame and McPherson's passionate pursuit of attention and publicity. Greater psychological analysis would have enhanced this biography of a farmer's daughter transported into a glamorous life worthy of the stars in nearby Hollywood.

Hoffman correctly assesses McPherson as an astute entrepreneur. Starting out with religious tracts, McPherson expanded her print outreach into a magazine that reached thousands across the nation. When she introduced theater into her church services, she attracted churchgoers who otherwise avoided vaudeville and the movies. She hired costumers, set designers and lighting technicians from Hollywood and recruited musicians and choirs to enhance religious services. In one of her more notable dramatizations of her preaching, she donned a police uniform, rode a motorcycle into the sanctuary and exhorted the congregation to "Halt!" on their way to perdition.

A spellbinding speaker, McPherson was both an insightful religious leader and a poor manager of money. It was her mother, "Ma" Kennedy, who counted collections, paid employees and handled finances. The increasingly tense mother-daughter dynamic and eventual animosity is another topic that warranted further attention in this biography. In her efforts to provide greater credit to McPherson as a successful leader in a male-dominated world, Hoffman slights her subject's evolving erratic behavior. McPherson's flexible approach to truth-telling repeatedly masked her deviation from Christian values and the behavior she preached to her followers. While seeking attention, McPherson provided critics with ample material to conclude that she hypocritically exploited her followers for her own gain.

Much to her credit, Hoffman read extensively in the enormous coverage that her subject garnered. McPherson's church theatrics, the reputed kidnapping and her defense, spats with her mother, her third marriage and divorce, and numerous lawsuits provided newspaper coverage for many years. Nor did journalists ignore McPherson's death from an accidental overdose of sleeping pills in 1944. Assessing this vast array of articles, along with McPherson's two autobiographies, four previous biographies and the hitherto unavailable material in the Foursquare Gospel Church archives must have been a herculean task.

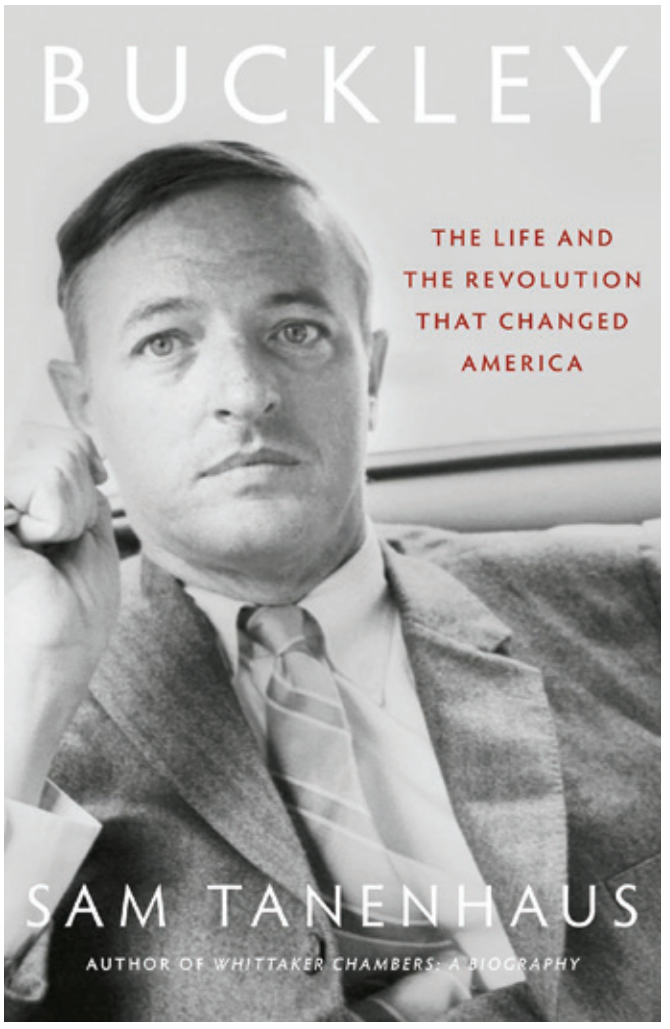
Given the mountain of documentation, along with the brilliance of "Sister Aimee" herself, Hoffman's enthusiasm for her subject is understandable. The book includes numerous instances of the author's intent to emphasize the accomplishments of McPherson. Fair enough. Such an overall interpretation is understandable but not entirely convincing. I began to wonder if the heights McPherson ascended were that much higher than those scaled by other preachers. Were the goals she achieved more significant than the achievements of other people in similar situations, such as in radio broadcasting?

One fact remains, despite possible exaggeration in Hoffman's interpretation: Aimee Semple McPherson pioneered media evangelism. As a speaker, she was "spellbinding, hypnotic, powerful." She preached an appealing image of Jesus as the forgiving bridegroom who beckoned born-again believers (she named her magazine The Bridal Call). She portrayed herself as a larger-than-life character called to spread God's message, yet she acknowledged her faults so that her followers could easily identify with her. She was undaunted in taking risks, such as investing early in radio and pioneering in mass media to spread the message of Christ.

Not easily categorized, McPherson was also deeply committed to aiding the poor while she excelled as a prolific fundraiser. In Depression-era Los Angeles, her church developed one of the city's largest service agencies that fed hungry people (2,100 meals daily), offered medical and dental care, and operated a nursery school, a laundry and an employment office. During World War II, McPherson proved to be a champion at selling war bonds while promoting a vigorous patriotism. And she did all this as a woman who was not afraid to lead, to speak out and to share her fundamentalist faith.

Claire Hoffman has provided a new generation with an introduction to the multi-faceted career of Aimee Semple McPherson. She has done so in a stirring narrative that shares the highs and lows of her complex subject's life. While other authors have placed McPherson in a larger and more sophisticated historical context, Hoffman's fast-paced account allows contemporary readers to recognize the entrepreneurial spirit of this pioneering female leader in fundamentalism and religious media.

Michael Engh, S.J., *is chancellor of Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.*



Random House / 1,040p $40

An issue of National Review that went online in December 2024—marking the 100th birthday of its founder, William F. Buckley Jr.—celebrated his "greatest achievement": the "absolute exclusion of anything antisemitic or kooky" from the conservative movement. Weeks later, Jacob Chansley, better known as the "QAnon Shaman," was among 1,500 Jan. 6 defendants pardoned by President Donald Trump, whose staunch defense of Israel stands in marked contrast to the attitudes of the "Great Replacement" Holocaust deniers whose support the president actively cultivates.

So, for now, let's characterize Buckley's "achievement" as a work in progress.

Which doesn't change the fact that—17 years after his death—it is impossible to understand American politics and culture without grasping Buckley's immense influence, as Sam Tanenhaus makes clear in *Buckley: The Life and the Revolution That Changed America*, a mammoth, long-awaited biography.

Timely and readable, incomplete and overly sympathetic, Tanenhaus's book is sure to evoke comments about history repeating itself. Buckley, too, ranted about the media and universities, race and policing, elites and populists.

But of all the lessons we might take from these echoes of the past in the present, the most urgent may be this: Buckley's ideological adversaries often made his job a lot easier. This is something Trump's many frustrated critics should consider between now and 2028.

"In [Buckley's] time, as in our own, no one could really say what American conservatism was or ought to be," writes Tanenhaus, the former New York Times Book Review editor, whose previous works include *Whittaker Chambers: A Life*. "But for more than half a century, millions of Americans could confidently say who has been the country's greatest conservative."

Everything Buckley did professionally—defending the red-baiter Joe McCarthy, creating National Review, writing a national newspaper column, power-brokering in the Republican Party, running for New York City mayor, hosting the TV show "Firing Line"—was meant to enhance the power and influence of American conservatism. Tanenhaus tracks Buckley's rise and evolution from pre-World War II isolationism and Cold War anti-communism to the anarchic 1960s and the rise of Ronald Reagan. Along the way there are tantalizing details at the intersection of the personal and political: family tragedies, bitter political squabbles, financial woes, even bizarre speculation about Buckley's "gay"-seeming persona, fueled by a notorious public fight with Gore Vidal.

Tanenhaus is sharply critical, at times, though not quite enough to pose this question explicitly: Did American conservatism thrive because of Buckley? Or in spite of his many shortcomings?

William Francis Buckley Jr. was born on Nov. 24, 1925, the sixth of 10 children. His father seems a character plucked from a Mark Twain frontier story: a Texas "lawyer, real estate investor, and oil speculator," who went bankrupt at 40, only to reinvent himself as a Roaring Twenties Manhattan businessman.

A devout Catholic, Buckley *père* saw himself as a charitable Christian, even during the Great Depression. "But the Gospel of Wealth was one thing," Tanenhaus writes. "Government intervention was quite another."

Thus two powerful pillars of Buckley Jr.'s life were erected: Catholicism and capitalism.

The 1930s—Buckley's formative years—were eventful ones for American Catholics. Yet Tanenhaus never mentions the Rev. Charles Coughlin or the "New Deal priest" John Ryan. Or Dorothy Day, or Pius XII, or even Al Smith, the Catholic presidential candidate who soured mightily on F.D.R. and the New Deal.

We are told simply that the Buckleys preferred a "Catholic atmosphere [that] was fervent but also rarefied," and wanted "no hint...of Ireland or the 'immigrant church.'" A friend describes Buckley as "a Catholic aristocrat of the Spanish persuasion." Yet not even the Spanish Civil War is mentioned in a book more than 1,000 pages long.

Buckley became one of the nation's most prominent Catholics—a pivotal figure in a political party that, for complex reasons, had been hostile to Northeastern Catholics since the days of Lincoln. How this came about deserves at least as much attention as, say, the 1960s Cold War crisis in the Congolese state of Katanga.

Buckley's first book, *God and Man at Yale* (1951), did pose important questions about education, as well as the awkward dance between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in both politics and faith. But how exactly did Buckley position himself as a defender of "tradition" at a 1940s Ivy League university when, as Tanenhaus himself notes, Yale was still adhering to strict quotas for Catholic and Jewish students?

To be fair, Buckley himself evaded such questions, even in his slapdash "autobiography of faith," *Nearer My God* (1997), which consists mainly of friends' musings and platitudes like "the [Catholic] church is unique [because] it is governed by a vision that has not changed in two thousand years." In the end, though, it is important—in U.S. history in general—to be careful about who does and does not represent a dominant, established order. Buckley's beliefs may have been (as the historian George H. Nash has put it) "traditionalist," but they were also a "fundamental challenge to official secular-liberal America."

By 1955 Buckley had not only created National Review; he had also found his great calling: chronicling the "unacknowledged biases of liberals" and other proud freethinkers who never noticed that "all the freethinking seemed to go in the same direction," Tanenhaus writes. Another of Buckley's callings, unfortunately, was exposing flaws in others that he deftly ignored in himself. He liked to repeat a line about anti-Catholicism being the antisemitism of intellectuals, yet he said little about the antisemitism of wealthy Connecticut Catholics named Buckley. And fellow conservatives worried about Jewish "divided loyalty" (between the United States and Israel), even when the same charge was hurled repeatedly at U.S. Catholics, with their pope far off in Rome.

National Review preached the gospel of free-market capitalism, even as the magazine lost millions and was kept afloat only by "family money" and years of volunteer labor from friends and siblings. To be sure, Buckley admirably evolved on a number of issues and nimbly detached himself from the ugly likes of the John Birch Society. Still, this proud Cold Warrior often recklessly "equated Communist ideas with liberal ones," Tanenhaus notes, and railed against an expansive, expensive federal government even as he supported lavish defense budgets and international military actions.

> **Tanenhaus's book is sure to evoke comments about history repeating itself.**

Buckley later called Nixon's China policy "collusion with a totalitarian regime" linked to "aggression [and] torture." The same could have been said about state and local governments south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Yet even after Jim Crow was finally challenged, Buckley's response was meager, to say the least.

There were, of course, legitimate questions to be asked in the 1950s and 1960s about federal and judicial power, and just how much historical damage each could actually repair. Barry Goldwater and others on the right at least attempted to make such a case. But that was not what National Review was suggesting in 1958 when, on the question of civil rights, it offered this "sobering" insight: that whites were "the advanced race." The editorial "Why the South Must Prevail," Tanenhaus writes, "haunts [Buckley's] legacy and the conservative movement he led."

It does nothing of the kind, of course, at least not among the MAGA crowds at the barricades of 21st-century conservatism.

Which provokes a crucial question: With so many shortcomings, how can we explain Buckley's profound influence?

He was undeniably entertaining and funny. Buckley also had a tremendous work ethic, and made a point of venturing far beyond the Manhattan and Beltway bubbles. He was also open-minded—about emerging technologies like TV, as well as third-party movements, helping his brother Jim become a U.S. senator not as a Republican but as a member of New York State's Conservative Party.

But Buckley was also blessed to live in chaotic times. The post-World War II left was rife with its own contradictions, hypocrisies and wildly unrealistic expectations for what the federal government could—effectively—accomplish. Radical groups like the Birchers were a menace, but they were also a clear and present warning, as was Barry Goldwater's easily dismissed 1964 presidential campaign.

Buckley presciently sensed that new coalitions were forming, especially during his fascinating 1965 run for New

York City mayor. It clearly wasn't just paranoid farmers in the square states who believed something was profoundly wrong in the United States. It was also nurses, cops and other "hardhat" types in the Ellis Island enclaves of big Northeastern and Midwestern cities.

It bothered Buckley when conservatives could not "say what they are for—only what they are against." But following one of the most stunning and surreal presidential terms in American history (L.B.J. from 1965 to 1969), there was so very much for Buckley—and Goldwater, and Nixon and California governor Ronald Reagan—to simply oppose, to "stand athwart history, yelling 'stop'," as Buckley put it in National Review's first issue, in 1955.

Reagan's 1980 election likely represented the high point of Buckley's influence. It was decades in the making, and rife with tension and conflict, but overall the message and messenger were largely in sync. Which is also what makes 21st-century debates about Buckley and a very different kind of messenger—Donald Trump—so provocative.

Yes, Buckley voiced grave concerns about Trump back in 2000. The same can be said, at this point, about a big chunk of Trump's cabinet and inner circle. The main reason Trump is no Reagan is because the current president's operational style is much closer to that of another 1960s governor and White House aspirant: George Wallace, who, for all of his vile race-baiting, also won millions of blue-collar votes far away from the Jim Crow Confederacy. Which means that the hardest question facing Democrats and progressives right now is this: After decades of merely flirting with fiery, toxic populists, why have so many American voters committed—for over a decade now—to the most divisive and destructive of them all?

Perhaps Buckley himself couldn't answer that question. But would he at least stand up and yell "stop"?

Tom Deignan *has written about books for The Washington Post, The New York Times and Commonweal. He is working on a book about the 1920s.*

QUESTION

By Deirdre Lockwood

It's an old family story, how at five
I asked, and they turned
the question back on me. *Well,*
where do you think you came from?
I replied, they say, as cool as milk,
From earth and from God.
I find it hard to believe now. But then, I was
still close enough to both
to know, I guess.

Deirdre Lockwood's *first book of poetry,* An Introduction to Error, *is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press in September. Her work has appeared in Threepenny Review, Yale Review, Poetry Northwest and elsewhere.*

To All Who Follow This Rule

For the month of July, the second readings grapple with the core of Paul's theology to neophytes. The missionary is in competition to gain the hearts of new Christians, who recently converted from traditional Roman-Greco religions. In Paul's theology, the idea of becoming a "new creation" becomes central to his writing and thinking with an almost compulsory urgency. Should I stay single? Should I partner with this person? If I do, is it with someone of the same faith or do I enter into a mixed-marriage? Should I adopt the Jewish culture or continue on with my own Gentile manners of social expression?

For Paul, all these questions rank second to something more fundamental. What leads you closer to the mystery of Christ in your newly adopted faith? If it helps you, go for it. If it hinders you, move away from it. So on the first Sunday of July, the second reading highlights this central Pauline rule: "The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation" (Gal 6:14-15). Growing deeper into this mystery was the way Paul oriented his spirituality and he reminds others to get onboard, "Peace and mercy be to all who follow this rule" (Gal 6:16).

In Paul's Letter to the Colossians, a section of which we read on the second Sunday of July, we are treated to an early liturgical hymn. The central theme is placing Christ as the center of divine creation with phrases like "the firstborn of all creation." But also "the firstborn from the dead," which is itself an expression used today in the rite at the grave during funerals. This great hymn has locutions that would have been at home in the pre-Christian environment, but Paul has adapted all philosophical-spiritual axioms into a Christocentric urgency. At Mass, when the priest concludes the eucharistic prayer before the great *amen*, he uses an adaptation of the Colossian hymn: "All things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17). The priest will sing at Mass: *Through him, with him, and in him...all glory and honor is yours.*

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JULY 6, 2025
An introduction to Pauline Christocentric urgency

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JULY 13, 2025
The source and summit of our faith

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JULY 20, 2025
How can the "afflictions of Christ" be lacking?

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JULY 27, 2025
You too were raised from the dead

A Word to the Wise: Humble Yourself

On the last Sunday of August, the first reading from Sirach offers a practical lens through which to view this month's set of readings. "The mind of a sage appreciates proverbs," writes the author, "and an attentive ear is the joy of the wise" (Sir 3:29). Throughout August, sayings from wisdom literature and the Gospel of Luke invite the faithful to think about our daily actions in light of the daily bread given from above. Some interpretive caution is needed, however.

Take, for example, the famous aphorism from this month's first reading, "Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!" (Eccl 1:2). This ancient writer from the tradition of biblical wisdom believed that human beings could only grasp so much about the purpose of life, work and especially spiritual things. According to Qoheleth, the best one could do was to appreciate the good times when they arrived and to be happy when you could. The wisdom here is actually a gem of advice: joy can be a choice to embrace, says Qoheleth, especially when the circumstances present themselves.

The following Sunday, Jesus brings forth a question. "Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his servants to distribute the food allowance at the proper time?" (Lk 12:42). Jesus was thinking of the good disciple or steward who remained vigilant amid the circumstances of daily life, someone awake at all times and not just when he or she felt the master was watching. All of this involves a willingness to be trained by discipline, which itself becomes the heart of the penultimate Sunday's message. On the last Sunday of August, the lens that helps to fashion discipline into joy for the person of faith derives from the virtue of humility alone. "My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts" (Sir 3:17).

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), AUG. 3, 2025
Is everything just chaff in the wind?

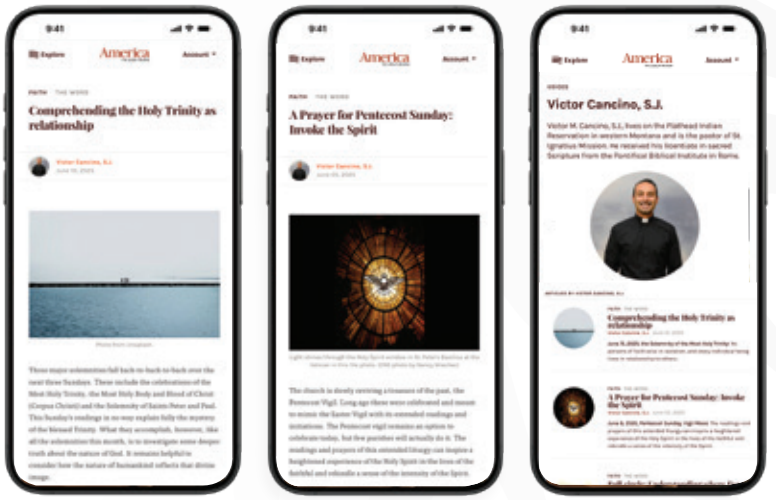
NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), AUG. 10, 2025
Faith as evidence of things not seen

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), AUG. 17, 2025
The persecution of Jeremiah and the need for fire in the belly

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), AUG. 24, 2025
Trained by discipline as the path of discipleship

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), AUG. 31, 2025
Humility as a cognitive lens to understand God

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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Onward With Leo XIV

Valuing the work of women in the church

By Emilce Cuda

I could never have imagined, when submitting my sacred theology degree thesis to the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina in 2010, that I would one day be appointed to the Roman Curia as secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. Nor did it occur to me that the rector who signed my diploma would later serve as the current prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, and even less that the grand chancellor who signed it would ascend as the 265th successor of St. Peter, taking the name of Francis.

I also had no inkling, when choosing the United States church as the focus of my doctoral research, that I would later work alongside the first pontiff from that very country.

My thesis argued that the Catholic social doctrine originated in the United States and was brought to Rome through the efforts of 19th-century Americanist bishops who played a pivotal role in encouraging Leo XIII to advocate for workers. Now, history has come full circle with an American pope who has taken the name Leo XIV. This moment is obviously of special significance to a magazine called **America**.

Collaborating with the Vicar of Christ transcends the duties of a mere job. It is a mission. Yet work it is. Dignified work is being creative; in this work, we share as *imago Dei* the creative power of our Father. When we see work in this way, we can fulfill our historical responsibility, just as the church inspires us to always forge new paths.

Pope Francis honored me by calling me to serve in his pontificate. He did so from this perspective of creative work, which allowed me to listen to the particular churches in different nations and seek together with him creative forms of communion, participation and mission.

The "Building Bridges" initiative at Loyola University Chicago was born through dialogue with universities, labor unions, business leaders and bishops. Without a predetermined strategy or a clear vision of the outcome, we chose to unite and walk forward together, empowered by Francis' challenge to face risks without fear of mistakes.

Being entrusted by Pope Francis with such a significant responsibility was a deeply meaningful affirmation of my role as a woman in decision-making. This trust brought a sense of dignity that women do not always feel. This recognition of women in the Roman Curia by bishops and cardinals is a sign of these times, and I hope it will be replicated in the local churches where many other professional women are more than qualified for management and coordination tasks.

When Bishop Robert Prevost was named president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (which falls under the purview of the Dicastery for Bishops) in early 2023, he entrusted me with the same confidence as did Pope Francis, supporting the bridge-building mission. Working for nearly four years alongside the pope, two of these together with his eventual successor, was an extraordinary honor.

While I cannot yet fully anticipate what it will be like to work with Pope Leo XIV, I dare to say that women serving in the Curia will find their decisions respected and their creative contributions valued. I believe the new pontiff will treat them as true apostles, empowering them to move forward with confidence and without fear.

While questions of continuity between Francis and Leo may hold relevance from a secular point of view, the church—from an ecclesiastical viewpoint—is continuity always. Each pope, along with the Roman Curia, faces the call to be creative and responsive to the challenges of their time—distinct but not different.

Personally, I do not anticipate that Leo will be in perfect continuity with Francis, as such a repetition would risk trapping the church in nostalgia. Catholic Christianity, however, is dynamic: a people journeying in newness, continuously breaking free from the atavisms that impede the unfolding of a true economy of salvation. Women are part of that dynamic. They always have been, and they always will be.

Emilce Cuda *has been the secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America since February 2022. She was also appointed by Pope Francis to the Pontifical Academy of Social Science and the Pontifical Academy for Life.*

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