

# America

JANUARY 22, 2018

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE



U.S.  
CATHOLIC  
WOMEN  
WHAT  
A NEW  
SURVEY  
REVEALS

**Mary L. Gautier,  
Mark M. Gray, Megan Sweas,  
Kerry Weber**

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# THE JESUIT RETREAT CENTER OF LOS ALTOS, CALIFORNIA

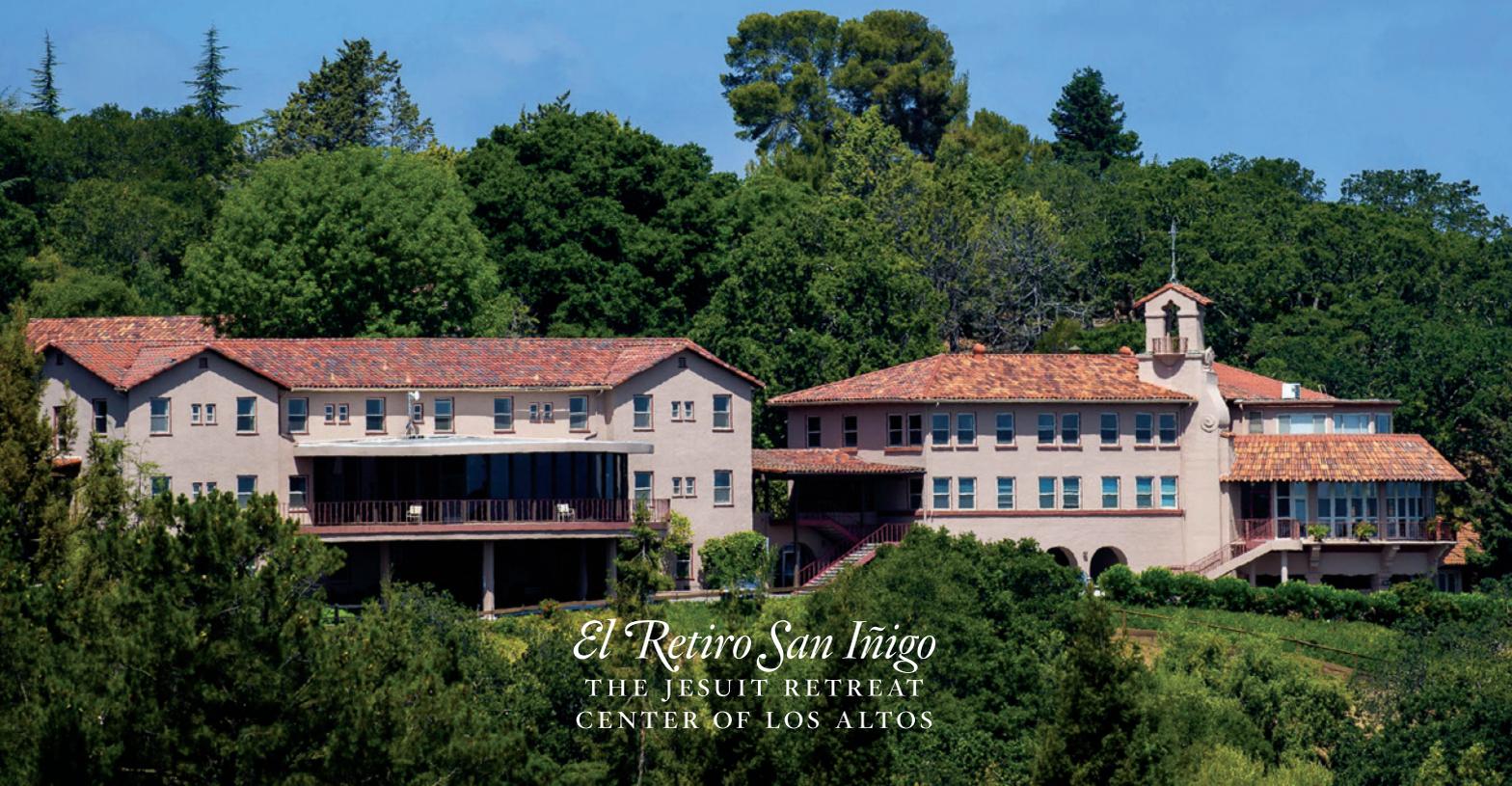
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# Women in the Life of the Church

This issue of **America** presents the findings of the most comprehensive survey of U.S. Catholic women ever conducted. The survey was commissioned by the editors of **America** and was conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, in partnership with The GfK Group. The results provide an unprecedented snapshot of the opinions of Catholic women in the United States on a wide variety of ecclesial and political issues.

You may be interested to know how it came about. Longtime readers will recall that in 2013, **America** published the first issue of a Jesuit journal written and edited entirely by women (10/13/13). In that groundbreaking issue, the editors announced that **America** would continue to make the role of women in the life of the church a top editorial priority. “As increasing numbers of women lead Catholic institutions and serve in parish leadership and theology departments,” the editors wrote, “we invite these women to share with us their thoughts and ideas on all topics, and we pledge to seek out their perspectives.” While acknowledging our own historical failures to represent fully the lives and voices of women in our pages, the editors also made a commitment to expand its roster of female contributors.

I am pleased to report that we have kept our promise. **America** has recruited more female staff members in the last five years than in the previous century. And a growing cadre of female contributors continues to explore the opportunities and challenges that women face in every corner of the church and the world.

But soon after making that commitment in 2013, we encountered a

big problem. When our editors started to look for data about what Catholic women think about various issues, we could not find any. No such survey had ever been done. While both men and women would routinely say something like “Catholic women think this about X or Y,” no one had ever actually asked them, at least not in any comprehensive way.

So we decided to do it ourselves. Thus, what started as a search for basic information on Catholic women by one of **America**’s executive editors turned into a first-of-its-kind national research project. Over 1,500 women participated in the online study and shared their beliefs, practices, experiences and attitudes about being Catholic. Along with detailed data points comes a revealing and at times surprising portrait of a powerful segment of the population.

When it comes to politics, Catholic women are a force to be reckoned with. Politicians should note that they fully intend to cast their votes in the 2018 elections. And, by and large, these women are independent thinkers who care deeply about the environment and about people who live in poverty.

The results also show that while the majority of Catholic women believe in God, the number who attend Mass and participate in the other sacraments is much lower at the younger end of the age spectrum. That is a wake-up call. The church in the United States must focus more intently on outreach to millennial Catholics and engage them in new and creative ways. And while there is good news in these results, the research also points to a clear lack of vision and mentorship for women in the church at both the national and parish levels. Accordingly, a

majority of women would welcome the ordination of women to the permanent diaconate, a possibility currently being considered by a commission appointed by Pope Francis.

It is our hope that this survey will spark a new conversation about the role of women in the church in the United States. There is much here to reflect and act on. For our part, **America** will continue to pursue this topic in future issues and across all of its platforms. Many of the survey responses, in fact, warrant their own feature-length treatments. In pursuing this work, we will continue to benefit from the leadership of Kerry Weber, the executive editor who has shepherded this initiative. Many talented and committed people brought this survey to your mailbox, but it was Ms. Weber’s vision and leadership that ultimately made the difference. I am also deeply grateful to the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities, which provided the funding to support this work.

More than 20 years ago, the Society of Jesus called for a conversion of all its members, asking every Jesuit “to listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women” and to address the systemic injustices that women experience in all areas of life (34th General Congregation, 1995). This special issue is but one response to that call. But as the saying goes, the journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step. With this issue we invite you to take a step with us toward a future in which the voices, talents and experiences of women are valued everywhere in the life of the church.

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**Matt Malone, S.J.**  
 Twitter: @Americaeditor



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Women and children after they were evacuated following Typhoon Ockhi in the coastal village of Chellanam in the southern state of Kerala, India, Dec. 2. The storm claimed the lives of at least 32 poor Catholic fishermen and many more were missing. CNS/Sivaram V, Reuters

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## What unique contributions do women religious offer the church?

For this special “Women in the Life of the Church” issue, **America** spoke to a number of young women religious about the vital contributions they and their fellow sisters make to the Catholic Church. We have excerpted a number of responses below about the role of women religious and the misconceptions they face from Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

### ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

●● Women religious offer many things to the church, especially our witness as spiritual mothers. Because families today are so broken and young people face so many challenges, they need to have women who are receptive, life-giving and rooted in Christ. We can be channels of Christ’s healing love. Our apostolates and ministries of prayer are invaluable to the life of the church, too. ●●

**Anonymous, 37**  
Missionary Benedictine Sisters  
Sioux City, Iowa

●● Women religious offer the gift of spiritual empowerment. In our own ways, we try to promote the fact that God wants a relationship with each and every person. Women religious promote the Vatican II model whereby the people of God are recognized as the church. We offer the gift of radical inclusion because far too often today many people are wrongly excluded. ●●

**Clare Bass, 34**  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet-St. Louis  
Saint Louis, Mo.

●● Women religious offer a witness of community, nonviolent living and living simply, as well as of care and concern for the vulnerable in society. Our community life is our strongest witness. In times of increasing division, to see women of different ages, beliefs, cultures and experiences working hard to understand each other at a deep level is a great service to the world. Religious life can also be a space for women to grow and recognize their gifts in a society that undervalues women. ●●

**Anonymous, 28**  
The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
Cincinnati, Ohio

●● Women religious are bridge builders. We go and are present where no one else wants to be and in doing so are modeling unconditional love and fanning the flame of hope even in the midst of great despair. By living in community in an increasingly individualistic world, we show what it means to exist for the common good. ●●

**Anonymous, 38**  
Sisters of the Precious Blood of Dayton  
Chicago, Ill.



### Age distribution of sisters in the U.S.

70-79	32%
60-69	22%
50-59	6%
40-49	2%
Under 40	1%
90 and over	11%

Source: 2009 NRVC/CARA Study of Recent Vocations to Religious Life

## MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT WOMEN RELIGIOUS

“Women religious are the feminine face of the institutional church in places and contexts where most priests are unable to be present and in some cases are unwelcome. There is something distinctly feminine about the resilience, approachability and tender but tough love of the women religious who have inspired me.”

**Sister Theresa Aletheia Noble, 36**  
The Daughters of St. Paul  
Boston, Mass.

“Women religious are able to freely reach out to people living on the margins of our society. My vows and this life free me to meet the most pressing needs of today, to welcome the stranger and, more concretely in my life, walk alongside newly arrived refugees and advocate for compassionate and comprehensive immigration reform.”

**Elis McCulloh, 31**  
Sisters of the Humility of Mary  
Cleveland, Ohio

“Some Catholics believe that since I do not wear a habit, I am not a “real” sister. Others believe that I should only work in Catholic institutions or that my order is not faithful to the church. Both Catholics and non-Catholics have questions about my lifestyle. I sometimes find non-Catholics are more accepting and less critical. Some Catholics question why I would not choose a more “acceptable” order, i.e., one that wears a habit.”

**Anonymous, 28**  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
Cincinnati, Ohio

“The most common misconception is that being a religious sister is a career choice. But religious life is not about what you do but how you are in the world. Our life is about total dedication to God... In the same way a mother and wife’s decisions are influenced by cherishing her children and husband, so are my decisions influenced by cherishing God and God-within-neighbor.”

**Nicole Varnerin, 27**  
Sisters of Notre Dame  
Cleveland, Ohio

“The biggest misconception I face from Catholics and non-Catholics alike is that they believe they know what my life is like in community. Their models of religious life are often somewhere between “The Sound of Music” and “Sister Act.”

**Kelly Williams, 29**  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
Biloxi, Miss.

“Oftentimes, people are surprised I am a sister because I am under 50. Several people seem to be under the false impression that religious life is declining, that we are dying out. The truth is that religious life is changing, not declining. And as I understand it, for most of church history, religious have been “the mighty few.” With the exception of the rare boom of the mid-1900s, religious life has been a small part of the Catholic faithful. The Spirit is guiding us to a new future, to a new way of responding to the needs of the world.”

**Julia Walsh, 36**  
Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration  
Arbor Vitae, Wis.

**Supporting the Unborn and Their Mothers**

Re: “Standing With the Unborn” by Matt Malone, S.J. (Of Many Things, 1/8): Pro-choicers are puzzled by pro-lifers’ favoring cuts in government services to pregnant women in financial need. Such cuts not only increase the chance that these women will choose to abort; they also deprive the unborn of sufficient intrauterine nourishment to develop, in some cases causing miscarriages or so-called spontaneous abortions.

The unborn need significant support if they are to develop. This means the women carrying them need support. Pope Francis clearly favors government programs that do this. Private programs are also helpful, of course, but private food charities would have to increase their support 20-fold if we cut federal food programs that now provide 95 percent of food for those in need.

**Jim Lein**

Online Comment

**Refusing to Pay Up**

Re “What’s the Catholic Response to the Opioid Epidemic? Hope in Action,” by Lucas Briola (Short Take, 1/8): When you have an administration that calls addiction an emergency situation but provides no adequate resources to address the problem, examples like those given in this article make one feel good, but they don’t resolve the problem. There needs to be political will and advocacy to get the government to provide the resources. The truth is that those unaffected by the issue refuse to pay up for it, as is the case with so many other issues.

**Vincent Gaglione**

Online Comment

**Start With Illiteracy**

Re “A U.N. Mission Offers a Sobering Assessment of Poverty in America,” by Kevin Clarke (1/8): The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and our own federal Department of Education have for years shown high correlations between low literacy skills and poverty, chronic dependence on state support and other problems. The failure to detect and criticize this problem and call for alternative systems to be made available to those in low-income areas, is remarkable and unfortunate. Literacy is a fundamental need.

**Joseph J. Dunn**

Online Comment

**Poverty Tourism**

Re “What the Hurricanes Revealed About Puerto Rico” by J. D. Long-García (1/8): As a Puerto Rican, Jesuit-educated, living in situ through the aftereffects of Hurricane Maria, I find the political overtones of this article highly inappropriate. If the author wishes to add his two grains of salt in favor of independence for Puerto Rico, please be more forthright about it, and avoid the coded language.

**Andrés L. Córdova**

Online Comment

**Examine Our Complicity**

Re “Sister Antona Ebo’s Lifelong Struggle Against White Supremacy, Inside and Outside the Catholic Church,” by Shannen Dee Williams (1/8): I am so very glad to know the story of Sister Antona Ebo’s life and work. She experienced racism up close in her own order, and yet she remained and worked through it. It is important for white Catholics to know these people and their stories so that we might recognize our complicity in the scourge of white supremacy that continues to rage through our church, our country and our souls.

**Beth Cioffoletti**

Online Comment

**Beloved Community**

Re “Set Apart With a Purpose,” by Brendan Busse, S.J. (12/25): I enjoyed this article. It sounded sincere, down to earth, and from the heart.

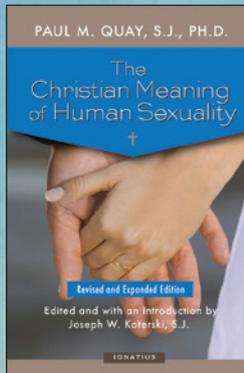
Father Busse asks some important questions regarding religious worship, being religious, sacraments and structures of organized religion. He says the priesthood is not about power and prestige but about mediation and solidarity. I think this is also true of my own role as a parent and as a parishioner.

In terms of the ramifications and significance for the liturgy, the sacraments and events sponsored by the parish, I like his statement indicating that God seems concerned that you find yourself and feel yourself forgiven in the real presence of a beloved community.

**Jim Redding**

Online Comment

# The True Meaning of Human & Divine Love



## ◆ THE CHRISTIAN MEANING OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

Paul Quay, S.J.; Ed. by Joseph Koterski, S.J.

An updated, expanded edition of the best-selling work on the Christian meaning of human sexuality by an acclaimed teacher. Sexual morality can only be fully understood if we understand what our sexuality truly means. Drawing upon divine revelation in Scripture, tradition, the Fathers of the Church, and more, Fr. Quay gives insight into the marriage covenant, shows us what sexuality means in Christian terms, and describes the complementarity of male and female that is psychological, spiritual and bodily. The new material in this expanded edition considers the theology of natural family planning (NFP).

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“A superb book that is intelligent, realistic and grounded in a profound faith in the truths about human persons and human sexuality set forth in divine revelation.”

— William E. May, Ph.D., Professor of Moral Theology, Catholic University of America

## ◆ MADE FOR LOVE : Same-Sex Attraction and the Catholic Church

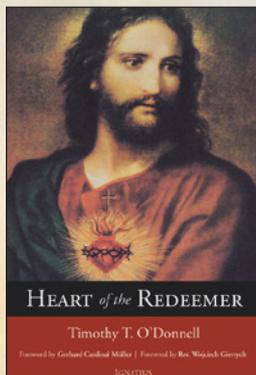
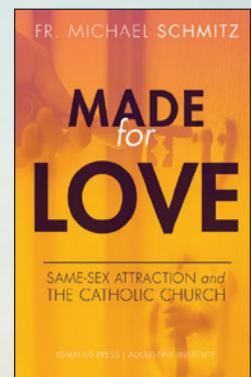
Fr. Michael Schmitz

Father Schmitz presents the Catholic teaching on same-sex attraction and same-sex “sexual” relations. He discusses various worldviews of the human person, the philosophy of nature and purpose, objective and subjective truth, and fallen human nature from Original Sin. He then presents in great detail the nature and ends of human sexuality and the nature of true love, while, in a compassionate and non-judgmental way, explaining the flawed nature of same-sex “sexual” relations.

MFLP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$16.95

“Fr. Schmitz helps us approach this topic with compassion and clarity, showing how the Church’s teaching on this topic is all about love. If we want to love the people in our lives, we must share this truth with them.”

— Edward Sri, Ph.D., Author, *Whom Am I to Judge?*



## ◆ HEART OF THE REDEEMER

Timothy O'Donnell, S.T.D

Forewords by Cardinal Gerhard Muller and Fr. John Hardon, S.J.

This revised, updated edition of the classic work on the Sacred Heart of Jesus examines the doctrinal roots of the devotion to the Sacred Heart in Scripture and in the Apostolic and Patristic ages; charts its development through the Middle Ages; explains the enormous contribution of St. Margaret Mary; and unfolds the magisterial teaching on the subject. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is a response to the tremendous love of Christ symbolized by his human heart pierced on Calvary. It lies at the core of Catholic spiritual life and is the key to effective renewal of individuals, the Church and the world.

HR2P . . . Sewn Softcover, \$19.95

“This book is the last and best word on its subject. Devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart is a wellspring of both charity and profound theology.”

— Scott Hahn, Ph.D., Author, *Rome Sweet Home*



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## A Crisis of Catholic Women?

Where you stand depends on where you sit. If you are one of the 24 percent of Catholic women who sit in the pews at least once a week, some of the results of America Media's comprehensive survey of women in the church, featured in this issue, could be disheartening or even dismaying. Over 50 percent of Catholic women attend Mass a few times a year or less; 70 percent go to confession less than once a year or never; very few take on parish ministry roles like lector or eucharistic minister.

But there are also more hopeful findings. All the women who responded to this survey still identify themselves as Catholic, however far they may have strayed from a consistent practice of the faith they

were raised in. Despite their low level of traditional engagement in the life of the church, 82 percent said they never considered leaving Catholicism; the vast majority have no or little doubt about the existence of God; 68 percent "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" that they are proud to be Catholic.

What are we to make of this wide and growing gulf between sacramental participation and Catholic identity? One reaction can be that of the older brother in the Gospel of Luke: dismiss apparently prodigal believers as unworthy of the designation "real Catholics." A more productive and Christlike response would be to go to the peripheries of the church to listen to what is driving women from the pews—

and to learn what is keeping them nonetheless Catholic. The America Media survey reveals several explanations for the former, from disagreement with church teachings to dissatisfaction with their local pastor or parish, that deserve deeper exploration.

The data should invite neither complacency nor despair. Most respondents said helping the poor (79 percent) and receiving the Eucharist (69 percent) are "somewhat" or "very much" important to their Catholic identity. Whatever human or institutional failings have led Catholic women to disengage from the church, Jesus and his good news continue to shape how they see themselves and the world.

## Padre Melo Stands Up for Honduras

Democracy is for the dedicated, and sometimes holding government leaders accountable requires more than voting. That is why Ismael Moreno Coto, S.J., known as Padre Melo, has stepped up as one of the leaders of a national protest against the disputed outcome of the recent Honduran presidential elections.

The incumbent, President Juan Orlando Hernández, claimed victory last month, three weeks after the Nov. 26 election. According to the disputed results, he defeated his opponent, Salvador Nasralla, by a narrow margin—42.95 percent to 41.42 percent. The Organization of American States would not stand by the results in Honduras and called for a new vote. A report issued by the Electoral Observation Mission in Honduras describes

in detail intrusions into the computer system, improbable participation levels and recently printed ballots, among other irregularities.

Despite the O.A.S.'s misgivings, the United States has already recognized Mr. Hernández, a friend of White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, as the next president.

Less certain that the elections were decided justly were thousands of Hondurans who took to the streets to protest peacefully. They were met with tear gas and violence; more than 30 have died. Padre Melo and others resisting the election results have called for protests to continue. In an apparent effort to counteract the demonstrations, an anonymous flyer circulating in Honduras has accused Padre Melo and other protest leaders

of ties with criminal organizations and inciting violence.

"All of the accusations are lies aimed at counteracting the grassroots organizing and the peaceful and democratic resistance," wrote Roberto Jaramillo, S.J., president of the Conference of Jesuit Provincials in Latin America and the Caribbean, in an open letter defending Padre Melo.

Padre Melo and those who stand up for democratic norms against a government that abuses them are examples of good citizenship. The Trump administration erred in recognizing Mr. Hernández as president before a vote that citizens can accept as legitimate was carried out. When a government tries to thwart the will of the people, it is a citizen's duty to stand up and peacefully protest.

## The Work of the Women's March Remains Undone

It is propitious that this special issue of **America** falls on the day after the anniversary of the Women's March, a signal moment in the nation's history. Who was not moved by the grassroots cry of millions for justice that was made on Jan. 21, 2017?

**America's** editors continue to oppose legal abortion, an unfortunate inclusion in the official platform of that march. But we stand in solidarity with every woman and man (more than five million) who marched a year ago against some of the basest offenses of a sexist culture. Their witness was a reminder that Americans still have a chance to change their culture.

The sins of sexism include but are not limited to sexual abuse; they also include the objectification of women; the denial of human rights on sexist or religious grounds; the economic marginalization of women, especially immigrant women; and the ubiquitous harassment in the workplace that women have endured for so many years in silence.

The march's rallying call last January became even more poignant in the year that followed. Many men in positions of power have been called to account by the ongoing #MeToo movement, and there will no doubt be many more.

The nation has begun a difficult and critical conversation on the abuse of power and women in the workplace. It is a discourse that cannot be limited to Hollywood and Washington, and it is one that must soon be translated into significant, practical change.

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# PROUD TO BE CATHOLIC?

A groundbreaking *America* survey asks women about their lives in the church

By Mark M. Gray and Mary L. Gautier

Catholic women may be part of a Democratic voting wave in 2018. They are ready to welcome women deacons. Many feel their parishes are inclusive of women and welcome divorced and remarried Catholics and non-heterosexual Catholics. But they think the church could do more to welcome unmarried parents, single mothers and people who have lost their spouses. And while Catholic women who are Republicans and Democrats differ slightly on whether or not “protecting life” or “helping the poor” is most important, on most other markers of Catholic identity their differences are statistically insignificant.

These are just a handful of the findings of the **America** Survey, commissioned by America Media and conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University in partnership with GfK, a survey firm. It is the most comprehensive survey of American Catholic women ever conducted. The following is an excerpt from the executive summary. The full summary is available online at [cara.georgetown.edu](http://cara.georgetown.edu).

The study was conducted between Aug. 3 and Aug. 24, 2017. A total of 1,508 women self-identifying as Catholic in the United States completed the survey (in English or Spanish). The margin of sampling error for the overall sample is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. CARA estimates that there were 37.3 million Catholic females in the United States at the time of the survey. Of this population, 28.8 million were adults.

## RELIGIOUS BELIEF, PRACTICE AND PARISH LIFE

About a quarter of Catholic women in the United States attend Mass once a week or more often (24 percent). Nearly the same share, 23 percent, attend Mass less than weekly, but at least once a month. Twenty-seven percent attend a few times a year and 26 percent attend rarely or never.

Millennials (born in 1982 or later) and post-Vatican II generation women (born between 1961 and 1981) are less likely than older Catholic women to attend Mass at least once a week. Seventeen percent of millennials and 18 percent of post-Vatican II respondents indicated they attend

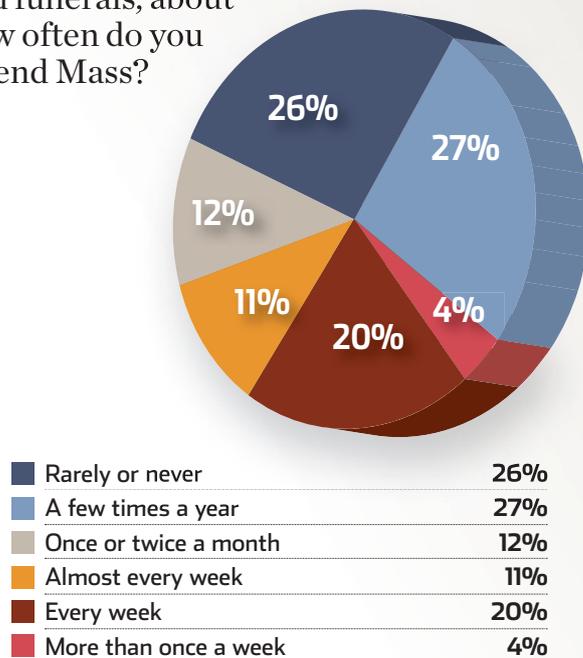
Mass at least once a week, compared with 31 percent of Vatican II respondents (born between 1943 and 1960) and 53 percent of pre-Vatican II respondents (born before 1943). There are no statistically significant differences in

frequency of Mass attendance by education or race and ethnicity. But married Catholic women are significantly more likely to attend Mass weekly (29 percent) than those who are divorced or separated (19 percent), have never married (16 percent) or are living with a partner (6 percent).

Fifteen percent of Catholic women have served as catechists or religious education teachers in a parish. Fewer than one in 10 have served in other roles. Overall, 67 percent of Catholic women have not served in a parish in any of the ministry roles they were asked about. Respondents are least likely to be involved in young adult ministry (4 percent), as an R.C.I.A. team member or sponsor (4 percent) or as an usher or minister of hospitality (4 percent). One in 20 has been an altar server (5 percent).

Helping the poor and receiving Communion are the most important to respondents’ “sense of what it means to

Aside from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend Mass?



be Catholic” (45 percent “very much”). Less important are being involved with their parish (18 percent) or going to confession regularly (20 percent).

Catholic women who self-identify as Democrats are more likely than others to say helping the poor is “very much” important to their sense of what it means to be Catholic. Catholic women who self-identify as Republicans are more likely than others to say protecting life is “very much” important to their sense of what it means to be Catholic. Partisan differences for other questions are minimal or not statistically significant.

### WHAT’S IMPORTANT?

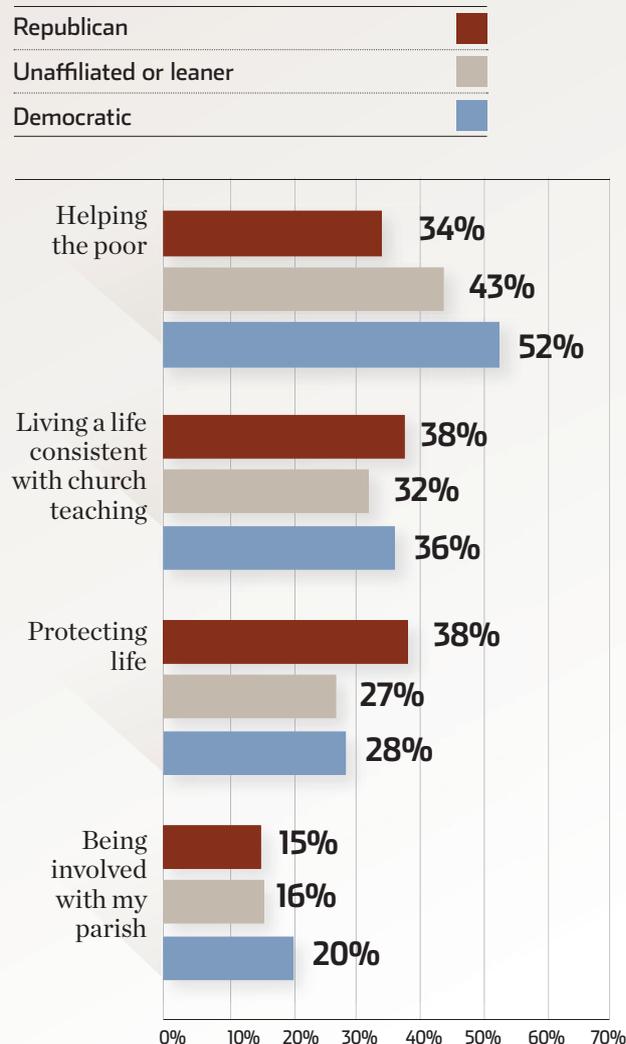
Catholic women are more likely to agree “very much” that divorced and remarried Catholics (25 percent) and non-heterosexual Catholics (25 percent) are welcome in their parish than are unwed Catholic parents (16 percent). Fewer than a quarter agree “very much” that their parish has ministries to help widows deal with the loss of a spouse (22 percent) or that their parish provides support for new mothers (19 percent). Only 18 percent agree “very much” that women are involved in the decision-making of their parish (a majority, 53 percent, agree “somewhat” or “very much” with this statement).

About half of Catholic women (49 percent) “agree strongly” with the statement “I am proud to be Catholic.” One in five “agree somewhat” (19 percent). Thus, collectively, 68 percent of Catholic women agree that they are proud to be Catholic. A quarter neither agree nor disagree. Seven percent disagree with the statement (4 percent “somewhat” and 3 percent “strongly”).

Respondents were asked if they ever considered leaving Catholicism. Overall, 82 percent of Catholic women had not considered this. Twelve percent had considered it but never left. Six percent considered this and for a time no longer considered themselves Catholic. Note that all respondents to the survey self-identified as Catholic in the first question, meaning they all consider themselves Catholics today. An open-ended question about the reasons why they had left, however, revealed that some have made only a partial return—considering themselves Catholic but not feeling that they have “come back to the church.”

## How important are the following factors to your sense of what it means to be a Catholic?

Percentage responding “very much”



**18%** SAID THEY SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED LEAVING THE CHURCH; ONLY 6% DID ‘FOR A TIME’

When asked to “briefly indicate why you left,” respondents who had considered leaving the church were able to describe their reasons in their own words. These responses were categorized, coded and counted. The most common reasons were related to some disagreement with the Catholic Church’s stance on a particular issue (39 percent) followed by being attracted to another faith or religion (23 percent). Fifteen percent cited an issue with their local parish; 9 percent cited “hypocrisy” of the church or its members; and 7 percent cited the clergy sex abuse scandal. One in five (21 percent) provided a reason that did not fit these categories and that could not be combined with other similar responses.

Following the open-ended question about reasons for considering leaving, a series of closed-ended questions asked about the importance of some specific reasons. Respondents who had considered leaving were most likely to cite disagreement with church teachings (38 percent) and the status of women in the church (23 percent) as being “very much” important to their thinking. They were less likely to have been attracted to another religion (9 percent).

As noted previously, all respondents self-identified-only as Catholic. Those who had noted that they left the faith for a time were asked to explain why they returned. Thirty-five percent indicated they had not returned to the church—even though they continued to self-identify as Catholic. This result represents the gap between self-identifying with a religion and feeling that one is a member of that religion (i.e., in the broader church or in a parish).

Nearly all of these self-identifying-only respondents report attending Mass a few times a year or less often. Seventeen percent indicate they felt a call or sought to return to the faith they were raised in. Sixteen percent noted their return was related to family. Thirteen percent cited a need for spiritual fulfillment. Nine percent indicated they had come to feel more positive about Catholicism. Seven percent cited a change in their local parish community as bringing them back. One in 10 cited some other reason that could not be classified with other responses.

## WOMEN IN THE PARISH

Around half of Catholic women say the priests in their parish “do a good job” of including women in various aspects of parish life. Respondents were most likely to say “yes, definitely” that priests in their parish do a good job of including women in the parish community (57 percent). Thirty-five percent “somewhat” felt like priests do a good job at this.

Only 8 percent said priests do not do a good job of this. Fewer said “yes, definitely” that priests do a good job of including women on parish councils (50 percent), in lay ministry positions (49 percent) and in the decision-making of the parish (45 percent).

As shown in the figure on Page 15, the more frequently respondents attend Mass, the more likely they are to say the priests in their parish are definitely doing a good job including women in aspects of parish life. See Page 18 for **America’s** feature article on Catholic women in leadership.

There are also some partisan differences. Women who self-identify as Republicans are more likely than others (those unaffiliated with a party and Democrats) to say the priests at their parish are definitely doing a good job including women in the parish community (67 percent compared with 53 percent of the politically unaffiliated and 55 percent of Democrats); on parish councils (60 percent compared with 48 percent and 47 percent); in lay ministry positions (58 percent compared with 46 percent and 46 percent); and in the decision-making of the parish (51 percent compared with 45 percent and 42 percent).

Respondents were given the definition of the deacon’s role and then asked: “Do you feel the Catholic Church should allow women, ages 35 and older, to be ordained as permanent deacons?”

Six in 10 Catholic women, after reading the description provided, responded “yes,” that they supported the possibility for women ages 35 and older being ordained as permanent deacons (60 percent). One in five indicated that they may support this but want to learn more before answering (21 percent). Twelve percent said they “didn’t know.” Only 7 percent said “no,” that they would not support women being ordained as deacons.

The oldest and the youngest Catholic women are less likely than those of the Vatican II and post-Vatican II generations to respond “yes” to the question about female deacons. There is not much difference in the proportions responding “no” across generations. (Note: Vatican II generation women would have been coming of age in the church when the permanent diaconate was restored. They may be more familiar with the role of deacons than women of other generations.) However, there is an increase in “don’t know” responses among younger Catholic women.

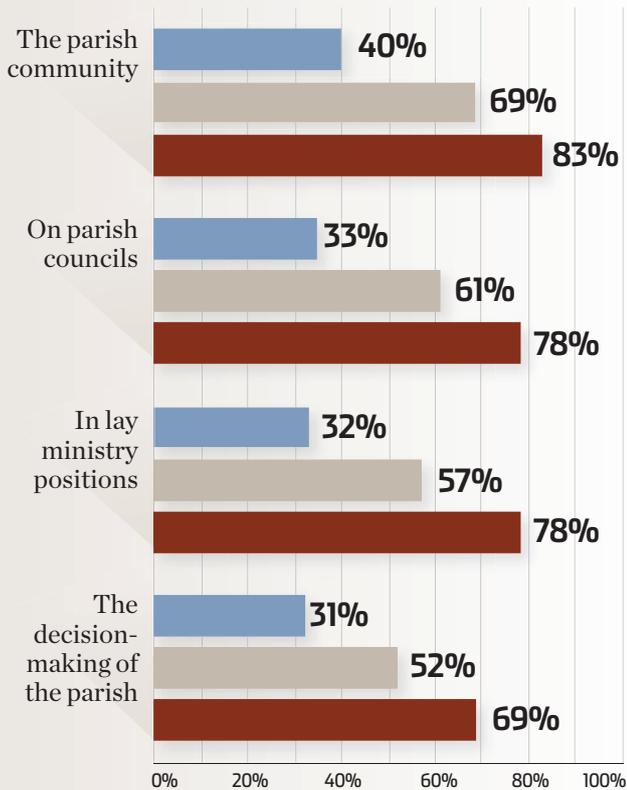
Weekly Mass attenders are less likely than those attending Mass less often to respond “yes” and more likely to respond “no” to the idea of female deacons.

Women who self-identify as Democrats are more likely

## Do you feel the priest(s) in your parish do a good job including women in...?

Percentage responding “yes, definitely” by Mass attendance

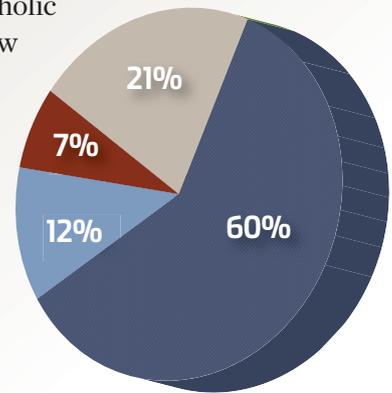
A few times a year or less often	Blue
Less than weekly, but at least once a month	Light Brown
Weekly or more often	Dark Brown



than Republicans or the politically unaffiliated to say “yes,” they support female deacons (65 percent compared with 57 percent of the unaffiliated and 55 percent of Republicans). Non-Hispanic white women are more likely than those self-identifying as Hispanic or Latino to support women being able to be ordained as deacons (66 percent compared with 50 percent).

Catholic women with more education are more likely than those with less education to support women being able to become deacons. Seventy percent of those with a college degree responded “yes” they support female deacons compared with 63 percent of those with some college, 57 percent of those with a high school degree and 39 percent of those with less than a high school degree.

## Do you feel the Catholic Church should allow women ages 35 and older to be ordained as permanent deacons?



Yes	60%
Don't know	12%
No	7%
Maybe, but I'd like to learn more	21%

## 10% HAVE PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED SEXISM WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Respondents were asked if they had ever personally experienced sexism within the Catholic Church. One in 10 said “yes” they had; nine in 10 responded “no” to this question. Those who responded “yes” were instructed, “If you wish to do so, please describe your experience.” The most common responses relate to women feeling they were perceived as inferior in the church and not being allowed to serve in ministry—especially as altar servers.

Five responses, representing 0.3 percent of women surveyed, referred to accusations of inappropriate behavior. (Note: CARA does not know the identity of respondents nor did any respondents name individuals in the comments made.)

Among sub-groups, the following are more likely than all Catholic women to say they have personally experienced sexism in the church: those who attended a Catholic college or university (25 percent); those who considered becoming a religious sister or nun (23 percent); those who attended a Catholic high school (16 percent); and those who have served in a parish ministry role (15 percent). Among those who say they have personally experienced sexism within the church, 44 percent say they have seriously thought about leaving the church at some point.

Sixty-three percent of Catholic women in our survey are married (46 percent to a Catholic spouse and 17 percent to a non-Catholic spouse). Six percent are widowed. One in 10 is separated or divorced. Six percent live with a partner. Fifteen percent have never married.

### CHURCH WEDDING PLANNING?

Never-married Catholic women were asked if it is important for them to marry a Catholic and how important it is to them to be married in the Catholic Church.

Only 18 percent of never-married Catholic women say it is “very much” important to them to marry someone who is Catholic. Twelve percent said they do not plan to marry (2 percent of all adult Catholic women). About a third, 32 percent, of those who did not answer the question about marrying a Catholic as “do not plan to marry” (i.e., they feel likely to marry in the future) said it is “very much” important to them to marry in the Catholic Church. A majority of these respondents said it is at least “somewhat” important to them (56 percent). (Note: An additional 1 percent of the respondents for this second question said they did not plan to marry.)

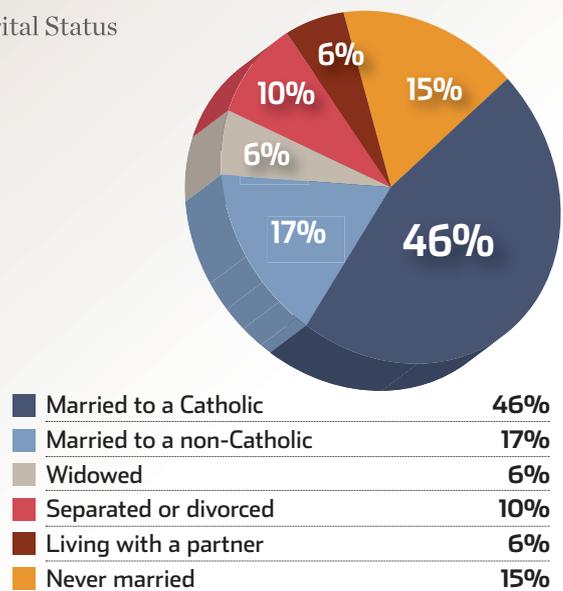
The typical Catholic woman in the United States has had two children, and both of those children are Catholic. (Note: “Typical” refers to the median observation.) Most often, they grew up in households where they had at least three brothers or sisters. Thus, their parents often had twice as many children as they have had. (Note: Among those with brothers and sisters, 59 percent indicate all of their siblings are Catholic today. Fifteen percent indicate none of their siblings are Catholic now. Twenty-six percent indicate some of their siblings are Catholic now and some are not.) For the typical Catholic woman, two of their three siblings remain Catholic as adults. Today, only one in 10 Catholic women has had four children (9 percent), and 20 percent have had three. Twenty-eight percent have had two children, 13 percent one and 25 percent none.

The median number of children for married and for separated or divorced Catholics is two. The median number of children for widows is three. The median number for never-married Catholics is zero (80 percent have no children). For those living with a partner, the median number of children is one (47 percent have no children).

Of those who have had children, 73 percent report that all of their children are Catholic now. Fifteen percent say none of their children are Catholic. Twelve percent indicate some of their children remain Catholic and some are not.

Respondents who had ever married or who are living

Marital Status



with a partner were asked, “Have you and a partner ever practiced Natural Family Planning or N.F.P., which Catholic marriage preparation programs often teach as a method of postponing pregnancy without the use of artificial contraception?” Overall, 22 percent said “yes” and 78 percent said “no.”

About a third of ever-married Catholic women (including those living with a partner) who attend Mass weekly have used N.F.P. compared with 12 percent of those attending Mass a few times a year or less often. Hispanic respondents are more likely than non-Hispanic respondents to say they have used N.F.P. (27 percent compared with 19 percent). Generationally, the oldest and youngest generations of Catholic women are the most likely to indicate that they had used N.F.P. Thirty-six percent of those of the pre-Vatican II generation have used N.F.P. as have 26 percent of those of the millennial generation. Vatican II Catholics (those born between 1943 and 1960) are the least likely to have used N.F.P. (18 percent).

### POLITICAL LEANINGS

Forty-one percent of adult Catholic women in the United States are Democrats (excluding those who lean Democratic; 59 percent including “leaners”). Twenty-four percent of adult Catholic women in the United States are Republicans (excluding those who lean Republican; 38 percent including those leaners). Thirty-five percent are

undecided or party leaners (3 percent are unaffiliated if “leaners” are excluded).

Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say they intend to vote in November 2018 (87 percent compared with 79 percent). Given the larger number of Democrats, however, this segment would still outnumber Republicans at the polls if actual turnout reflects voter intentions. Only 59 percent of the undecided or party leaners say they intend to vote in 2018. Overall, the poll estimates 74 percent of Catholic women intend to vote in next year’s election.

There are an estimated 25.3 million Catholic female adults who are eligible to vote. If 74 percent of this population were to turn out to vote at the midterms, this would be equivalent to 18.7 million voters. Voter intentions do not always translate into voter turnout, however. Since 2002, between 36 percent and 41 percent of the voting-eligible population has voted in midterm elections. If 40 percent of eligible Catholic women were to vote in November 2018 this would be equivalent to a voting bloc of 10.1 million. In 2014, a total of 83.3 million votes were cast in the midterm elections.

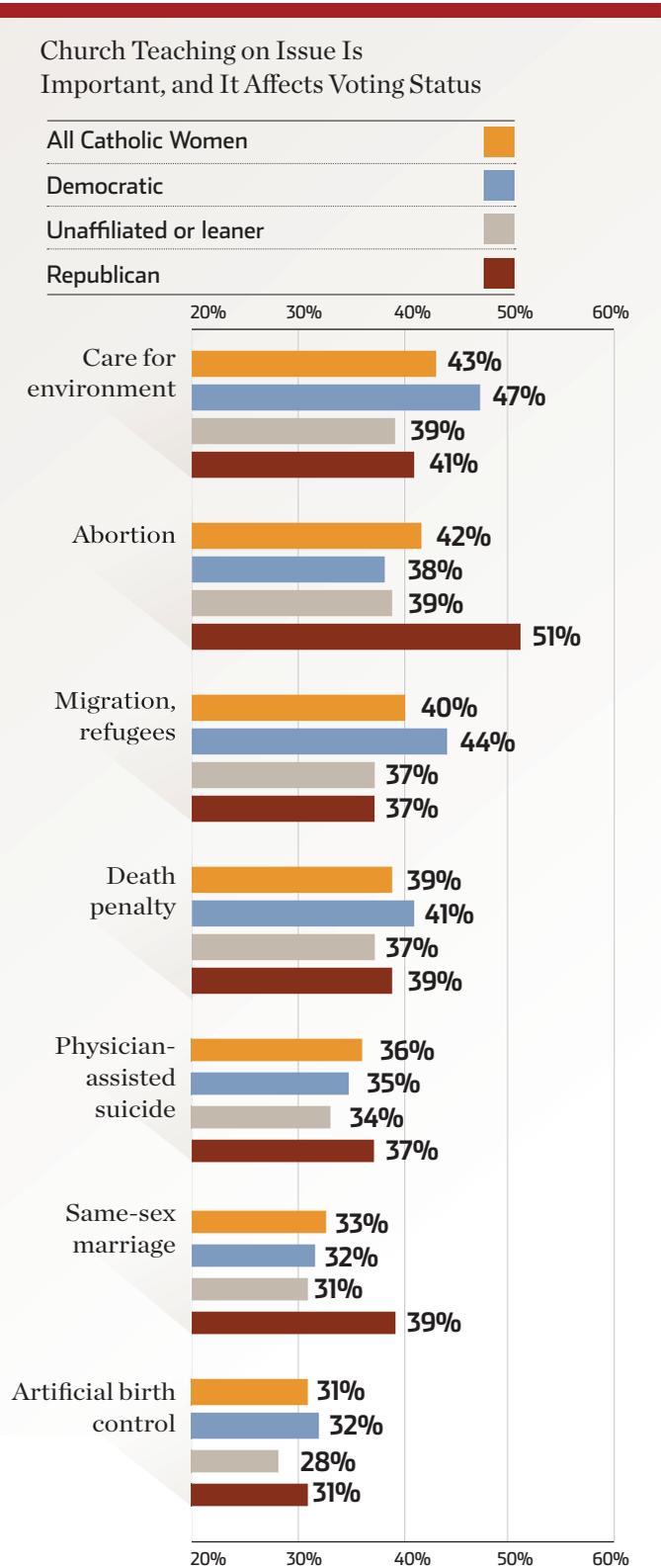
Among those with an intention to vote in 2018, Democrats are most inclined to vote for Democratic candidates (94 percent) and Republicans are most inclined to vote for Republicans (91 percent). The unaffiliated lean toward voting Democratic (41 percent) instead of Republican (34 percent). Overall, more Catholic women intend to vote for Democrats (55 percent) than for Republicans (37 percent).

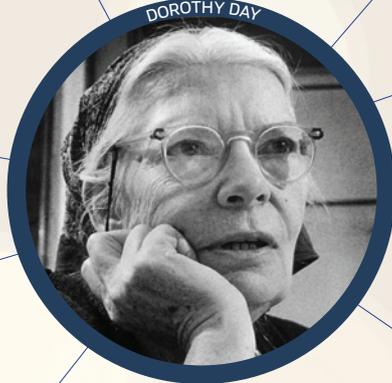
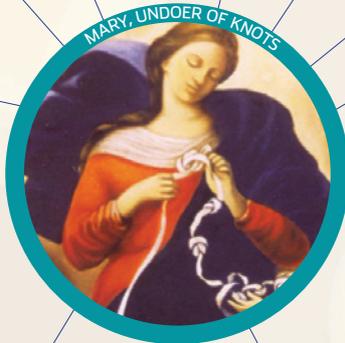
Overall, only 12 percent of Catholic women who intend to vote in 2018 say they will use Catholic social teaching to help them decide how to vote.

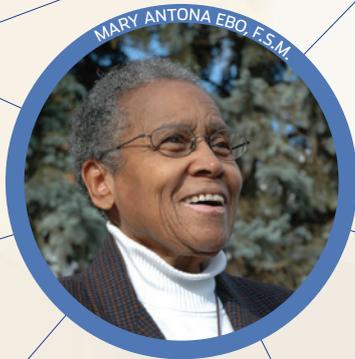
Respondents who intend to vote are slightly more likely to say that statements made by Pope Francis will help them decide how to vote in 2018 than will Catholic social teaching (19 percent compared to 12 percent). Significantly more Democratic women say Pope Francis’ statements will be helpful to them rather than will social teachings of the church (20 percent compared with 7 percent). See Page 28 for **America’s** feature article on Catholic women and voting.

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# MODELS OF FAITH

## THE HIDDEN, INDISPENSABLE LEADERSHIP OF CATHOLIC WOMEN

By Kerry Weber

Coleen Heckner grew up immersed in Catholic culture. From her parents and her devout grandfather, who served as an usher in his parish, to the Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of Mercy, who educated her in grade school and high school, she was surrounded by examples of faith. A member of the Vatican II generation, she was influenced by St. John XXIII and became passionate about issues of social justice, in part because the peace activists Daniel Berrigan, S.J., and Phil Berrigan were among the speakers brought to her Baltimore classroom. “I grew up in a really



neat time to have all these folks touch my life in some way," she said.

In the years that have followed, Ms. Heckner's faith commitment has not waned. While working as a psychiatric nurse practitioner, she has attended Mass weekly and has been active in parish life, having served as a member of a parish council and a eucharistic minister to the homebound. Her adult son spent some time in seminary, and she enjoyed her visits there. She would love to be a deacon someday and has a devotion to Mary ("I've always believed if you want to get something done you give it to a woman"). In 2011 she earned a master's degree in pastoral studies from St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry in Albany, N.Y., which allowed her to serve as a chaplain resident at Albany Medical Center and now as a pastoral associate at a nearby nursing home.

Her wealth of experience would seem to make her a natural role model for others looking to put their faith into action, but she shies away from the title. "I don't see myself as a role model," Ms. Heckner said. "I tend to work one on one behind the scenes."

Yet Ms. Heckner is, in some ways, just the type of person many Catholic women name when describing their models of the faith: friends and family simply trying to do their best to live their faith authentically. According to the **America** survey of Catholic women, "parents, family, and friends" were cited as the most common example (38 percent) of where their "ideas/models of being a woman in the Catholic Church come from." Catholic education and religious education ranked second (33 percent), followed by the Bible/saints/God/Scripture (19 percent), women religious (9 percent), "no one in particular" (9 percent), their own beliefs (8 percent) and their Catholic upbringing (5 percent).

Yet examples like Ms. Heckner, who was one of the

1,508 participants in our national survey, may be difficult to find. Her commitment to the faith represents a level of investment and involvement that our data show is uncommon among Catholic women in the United States (see executive summary, Page 12).

Catholic women have often been heralded as the people most likely to pass on the faith and are frequently described as the backbone of parishes. Yet the **America** survey found that significant percentages of the women surveyed, all of whom identify as Catholic, do not regularly go to Mass, do not pray on a regular basis and do not feel it necessary to be a part of parish life. Of the women surveyed, 51 percent said they prayed daily and 24 percent went to Mass weekly or more often.

Less than half of women surveyed felt it was "very important" or "somewhat" important to be involved in one's parish. The survey found that women were most likely to have served in parish ministry as a catechist or religious education teacher (15 percent) and least likely to have served as an usher/minister of hospitality, an R.C.I.A. team member or sponsor, or in young adult ministry (4 percent each). As visible and valuable as these roles are, they are performed by a small percentage of Catholic women over all.

Of course, being active in parish life is not the only way to express one's Catholic identity, and not all forms of meaningful leadership in the church exist within the church's official structures. But signs of Catholic women's disengagement with the organized church come with serious implications for the life of the church as a whole. Additional survey data in recent years also showed dispiriting results: a drop off in the involvement of millennial Catholic women in the faith.

"The sociological data shows that millennial Catholic women are more disengaged from the church than their male counterparts," said Kathleen Sprows Cummings, an



## THE PRAYER LIVES OF CATHOLIC WOMEN

By Leah Libresco

associate professor of American studies at the University of Notre Dame and director of the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism. “We are at a crisis point. For centuries, as long as we’ve been tracking these things, it’s always been the women who are more engaged. Historically, it’s the mothers who bring their children [to Mass]. If you lose the women you lose the children.” Ms. Cummings added that young Protestant women remain more engaged than their male counterparts, making the problem a uniquely Catholic one.

Roughly half of women surveyed (49 percent) strongly agree that they are proud to be Catholic. Nineteen percent agreed “somewhat.” Yet, even as participation declines, most women surveyed (82 percent) had not considered leaving the church. Of those women who considered leaving, 48 percent said that the status of women in the church “somewhat” or “very much” played a role in their choice to leave, and 69 percent said disagreement with a church teaching “somewhat” or “very much” played a role.

According to Ms. Cummings, the church would benefit from a more deliberate effort to reach out to Catholic women. “The Catholic Church has given young women so many reasons to dismiss it out of hand, and many people do,” she said, adding that she has not seen “the sense of urgency” within the church that is required to address the lack of engagement among many Catholic women. Ms. Cummings hopes that some concerns can be addressed in part by emphasizing the need for leadership roles for women in the church. As valuable as family-based role models can be, a longer list of examples in the professional and pastoral sphere could help keep women connected to each other and the faith.

“Let’s show women that there is a space for them in the church, a place at the table,” she said. “There is a rich history that they are a part of. Women are not always seeking

Catholic women who regularly attended Mass were the most likely to report that, outside of Mass, they prayed every day (81 percent). But more than half (57 percent) of those who attended Mass less than weekly but more than once a month also prayed daily. A little over a third (35 percent) of those who attended Mass a few times a year or more rarely also prayed daily.

We asked women about the circumstances in which they regularly prayed. A third (33 percent) of the women in our sample did not engage in any of the three practices of regular prayer that we asked about: prayer when waking up, prayer when going to bed and prayer before meals. A little over a quarter (28 percent) participated in at least one of these practices, and a fifth (19 percent) relied on all three.

Sustaining prayer practices of this type were correlated with age and Mass attendance. Millennials (44 percent) were twice as likely as pre-Vatican II Catholics (23 percent) to have none of these regular prayer practices. A quarter (27 percent) of pre-Vatican II Catholics relied on all three of these practices, while only 10 percent of millennials did the same. For the most part, the intervening generations traced the decline in prayer.

The infrequency of prayer by millennials was not simply a matter of decreased Mass attendance. When millennials who attended Mass regularly were compared with regular Mass-going Catholic women of preceding generations, the gaps narrowed but were still noticeable. Among Catholic women who rarely attended Mass, millennials were the most likely of the generations to have no daily prayer practices.

*Leah Libresco is a contributing writer for America.*

attention, and they're almost never getting it."

Many people may be unaware of the leadership positions that are already available to women because these often are roles at the diocesan level, like chancellor or chief financial officer or superintendent of schools, which are crucial but largely behind the scenes. Ms. Cummings said that lacking knowledge of these roles, many women believe that positions of leadership within the church are restricted to priests and look elsewhere to share their talents.

"Women look around in the secular world, and there's a lot of doors open to them, but they look at the church and they see this door that is closed to them," Ms. Cummings said. "A lot of my students in my class don't know that the call to leadership flows from the sacrament of baptism, not the sacrament of ordination."

•••

Mary Edlund has been chancellor of the Diocese of Dallas since 1997, a role that involves serving as a canonical advisor to the bishop. It was not always her aim to work for the church; in her early career, she worked as a microbiologist for the federal government while also volunteering as a religious education teacher at her parish. But she realized that "increasingly what was giving me more joy was the C.C.D. role." A male lay colleague welcomed her as his assistant at her parish, and the parish helped to pay for her graduate degree in religious education at The Catholic University of America.

Today, Ms. Edlund also serves as the victim assistance coordinator for the diocese and has earned a canon law degree with additional financial assistance from the diocese. (She also sometimes texts with Cardinal Kevin Farrell, the former archbishop of Dallas, who now serves as the head of the Dicastery of Laity, Family and Life—she recently sent him a congratulatory message for appointing two laywomen to the Vatican department.) In many ways, Ms. Edlund is a perfect example of how a Catholic laywoman can combine a calling with a career, yet she hesitates to call herself a role model and says that most people in the diocese likely do not know about the role of chancellor or that a laywoman holds the position. She is happy to have it that way and is more concerned with servant leadership than celebrity.

"I work at my job and my ministry in a way that I hope is responsive and in service to the people," Ms. Edlund said. Still, she wishes more women knew that the church could be part of a viable career path, and she wishes that the church would do more to help make it one, providing more opportunities for others to receive the mentorship

and especially the tuition assistance that she received. "I see a lot of structures that entice women to volunteer positions in the church but not to career opportunities," she said.

Just under one-fifth of Catholic women in the **America** survey (18 percent) felt that women were "very much" involved in decision-making at their parish. (The total rises to 53 percent when including those who responded women were "somewhat" involved.) For women who attended Mass frequently, the percentage who agreed "very much" was 32 percent versus 11 percent for those who attended a few times a year or less, indicating that those attending Mass frequently are more likely to be aware of the women in those leadership roles—or may even be the ones making the decisions.

Parishioners at Holy Family Parish in South Pasadena, Calif., do not have a hard time finding women in visible leadership positions. The parish is led by Cambria Tortorelli, the parish life director, who is one of seven lay people in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to hold this role. Of the seven, three are women (two laypeople and one religious). In this role, Ms. Tortorelli tends to both the spiritual life and administrative needs of a parish, working collaboratively with a priest minister and team of weekend presiders, who tend to the sacramental needs of the parish.

Ms. Tortorelli is a convert to the faith who arrived in California by way of England and Japan. It was while studying for a master's degree in religious studies that she was inspired by two Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to begin thinking of herself as capable of taking on a leadership role in the church. They prompted her to "step up" as a volunteer in her parish. She found herself wanting to become even more involved and went to the archdiocesan Office of Parish Life, where her nonprofit background, religious training and parish experience made her a great fit for a role as a parish life minister. Six months later, she received a call asking her to interview at Holy Family, beginning a process of mutual discernment with the parish.

When she began her time at the parish, Ms. Tortorelli met even more Catholic lay people and clergy eager to encourage her in her role. "One of my struggles with Catholicism [when deciding to convert] was that you don't see women in formal leadership roles in the church," said Ms. Tortorelli. Yet she said she took heart, not only from learning about the "marvelous examples of women saints" but from the women around her, particularly those in the Bible study group at her parish.

## CATHOLIC WOMEN AND NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

By Leah Libresco

Ms. Tortorelli now says that “by virtue of my role and job” she often is seen as a role model in her community. “I know young women have shared with me that they’re encouraged to see me in this role, and parents have shared that they’re happy that their daughter is in a church where they will grow up with the assumption that a woman can be a leader,” she said. “But ultimately, it’s not about you. You’re trying to hear what God’s call is.”

Kathy Enright, the director of the Office of Parish Life for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, was another person who encouraged Ms. Tortorelli to listen to that call. It is one she worked hard to hear in her own life as well. Ms. Enright’s role is to help with the formation of lay ecclesial ministers, including pastoral associates and parish life directors.

Prior to finding a career path in the church, Ms. Enright trained as a spiritual director and participated in a Bible study program and was passionate about her faith. But after the death of her husband in 1999, when she was 53, she sought a way to both pursue her passion and support her five children. At the invitation of a friend, she started work at a parish, where she built a religious education program and an R.C.I.A. curriculum, created a parish bookstore and established a Scripture study group and a bereavement ministry. “It was real, live ministry, and I loved it,” she said.

Despite receiving consistent encouragement from her parish community, Ms. Enright said she did not have an example to follow. “I’d never seen a woman in any of these roles,” she said, a fact that is still true for many of the women she works with in her current position. “Sometimes my people get discouraged,” she said of the women training to be lay ecclesial ministers. “Sometimes priests are not

A minority of Catholic women in our survey have used natural family planning (defined in our question as “a method of postponing pregnancy without the use of artificial contraception”). One in five women who had ever been married or were living with a partner said they had practiced N.F.P. with a partner.

Natural family planning is a method of observing the signs of fertility, so couples can decide whether or not to have sex at the times a woman is most likely to be able to conceive a child. The Catechism of the Catholic Church answers the question “When is it moral to regulate births?” with a variety of factors to observe: Is it a decision free from external pressure; is it driven by serious reasons, not selfishness; is it sought using moral (non-contraceptive) means? (No. 497).

We asked the women who used N.F.P. about what factors were most important to them when they decided how to space births. Financial concerns were some of the most commonly cited: 38 percent of women said it was very important to them. The next most frequently cited reasons were not wanting more children (34 percent) and a woman’s relationship with her husband (33 percent).





open. I have to keep reminding them that they're pioneers. They're forging a new path. Sometimes people see them doing things they recognize, but because they're laywomen and not a priest, the people in the pews don't always know how to handle all of this."

Yet Ms. Enright makes clear that she sees her role and that of her lay ministers as team players. "I am not here to show the men that the women can do this better," she said. "I don't have an agenda. I'm just here to serve."

Though she has influenced many men and women through her work, Ms. Enright also hesitates to call herself a role model in the church. "I'm not a role model like Sheryl Sandberg, who maps out a path to get to the top," she said. "I wasn't ever thinking about that." Her role as a mother and now grandmother is more complicated still. She said her family has been supportive and her children traveled from all over the country to be with her when she was commissioned as a pastoral associate, but that her daughters express frustration with the fact that she is still involved with the church.

"As a role model for them, I think I'm that connection to the hem of the skirt of the church," she said. "I'm attached to the church, and they're attached to me." She said the church's teaching on same-sex relationships has become a sticking point for many young people she knows; and she sees many young people "maintaining a faith life independent of the church," including many young women "who are mad at the church and they cannot understand a church that doesn't welcome people at all levels."

Yet she says she finds hope in the many "outstanding

women and men" who remain in the church and feel called to serve, and she appreciates what each brings to the table: "I watch and I see the difference that a woman makes in a conversation. I see how important it is that we show up. We need the two halves of the whole. God made us in his image, male and female. It's got to be both."

•••

Sara Hoverstad, 25, grew up in a Catholic family in California, with parents who taught her to appreciate diversity and to be of service, values she says were reinforced by her diverse public school experience and stories from Scripture like that of the Samaritan woman at the well. Yet for all her formation in the faith, she also said that "conversations about what it means to be a Catholic woman didn't specifically enter my sphere of understanding" until she "started to break down those different categories of experience" in graduate school at Boston College, where she is studying theological ethics. "Many people ask me, 'Why do you stay in a church where many people have negative perceptions of women in the church?'" she said. "But I have had the opportunity to encounter so many women who have encouraged me and used their own voices so well in the church, and I see my continued engagement as an opportunity to engage my own voice but also to be a voice that challenges."

The **America** survey found that many Catholic women had few people to reach out to for spiritual guidance in times of hardship. Overall, nearly half (49 percent) would reach out to a family member. But among Catholics less involved in parish life, 44 percent were not "very likely" to speak to anyone. Yet the maintenance of a supportive faith community has benefits beyond those apparent in a crisis. Often members of the community are instrumental in helping one develop a clearer picture of one's identity as it relates to the faith.

For Ms. Hoverstad, a crucial experience occurred in college when a campus minister encouraged her to work on finding her voice as a Catholic woman and to consider how she might use it. "It was powerful for me to acknowledge that there is a voice in me that wants to say something and that this person recognizes in me that I haven't really used it," Ms. Hoverstad said.

Ms. Hoverstad draws strength from Scripture, too, but at times has felt discouraged that there are not more wom-

en in the scriptural tradition and historical writings of the church. “It is easier to engage with women who are living their faith now,” she said, adding that she admires many women working in theological ethics today. “I can imagine that these women are like the women that have been reading and speaking within the church through the centuries but of whom we don’t have records now,” she said.

The power of the modern-day examples of faith became clear to Christina Garcia, 35, when she took a course on Catholic social action at Cornell University. Now a lawyer living in San Antonio, Tex., she had grown up admiring the faith of her grandmother and today counts her godfather, her sister and her pastor among her greatest supporters in the faith. But the course was the first step in helping her to see faith as more than memorizing prayers. “I couldn’t believe I had gone through all those years of C.C.D. and I hadn’t heard of [modern-day examples like] Dorothy Day or Mother Jones or Helen Prejean,” she said. “They are Catholic, and they are also women who have done great work. And I consider them role models in the work that helps to form my identity.”

•••

Although supportive communities, leadership opportunities and positive role models in the faith are helpful in maintaining a connection to one’s faith, the **America** survey found that most women named two things as the most important aspects of what it means to be Catholic: helping the poor (79 percent said “somewhat” or “very much”) and receiving the Eucharist (69 percent said “somewhat” or “very much”). And when Beth Murphy-Snodgrass decided to convert to Catholicism in college, it was these very things that drew her in.

Ms. Murphy-Snodgrass grew up in a nondenominational Christian household but began dating a Catholic during her freshman year at Ball State University in Indiana. They attended Mass together, and while the relationship did not last, the impression the Catholic Mass left on her did. She felt the Catholic Church treated the Eucharist “with the sanctity it deserves.” She was also awed by the fact that “the church is one of the most philanthropic organizations in the world.” She said that “though I know that the church as an organization has done wrong and individuals have done wrong, when it comes down to it they do far more good than damage.”

Now a graphic designer in Scottsdale, Ariz., Ms. Murphy-Snodgrass was also drawn in by the church’s art and

history. She considers herself a “raging feminist and a Democrat” as well as a “Marvel comic books nerd” who enjoys listening to podcasts by Father Roderick Vonhögen, the “geek priest,” and says friends often are surprised to learn she is Catholic. Ms. Murphy-Snodgrass does not mind, since she says she “likes to play against type, and I like other atypical women,” which she said is what instilled in her a devotion to Mary, Undoer of Knots. “There are things I do not agree with,” said Ms. Murphy-Snodgrass, “but the best way to change something is from the inside.”

Kitty Hanley, C.S.J., understands what it is like to struggle with the church at times, but she also has found

## RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS

By Leah Libresco

Just over one in 10 (12 percent) of the women in our survey said that they had ever considered becoming a woman religious. Of these women, 38 percent said that they had considered the vocation a little seriously or not seriously at all. Less than half (42 percent) had considered the vocation somewhat seriously, and one-fifth (20 percent) said they had considered the vocation very seriously.

We asked the women who had never considered a vocation to the consecrated life what factors had influenced their thinking—what were the barriers between them and this way of life? The most frequently cited reason was the desire for a different vocation: to be a mother. Almost half (56 percent) of the women who had never considered being a woman religious said that the longing for children was “very much” related to their choices.

Women who had never considered being women religious said, “I could do God’s will without becoming a religious sister” (39 percent), “God is not calling me to a religious vocation” (36 percent), and “I’ve just never really thought about it” (36 percent). Additionally, 14 percent of women said that they had never felt invited.

Relatively few women cited the vows of obedience (15 percent) or of poverty (10 percent) as something that had “very much” to do with their not considering consecrated life. The least cited barrier was fear that family would not approve. Only 3 percent of women said this thought held them back from considering vows.

## CATHOLIC WOMEN ON MASS, CONFESSION AND BELIEF IN GOD

By Leah Libresco

great strength and encouragement in the Eucharist and in the Gospel call to serve, though along a slightly different path. Sister Kitty, a cradle Catholic, academic and spiritual director, worked as a teacher and administrator at the College of St. Rose in Albany and as the dean and director of St. Bernard's School of Theology Ministry, where Coleen Heckner was her student and mentee. Sister Kitty now directs Holy Ground, a two-year program she co-founded to form spiritual directors, training both clergy and lay people.

She hopes that those with whom she works can see both the beauty of the church and the challenges that continue in the midst of its imperfect members. She encourages her students to network and recruit each other, to model that church for each other. She draws strength from examples like St. Teresa of Avila, the Maryknoll martyrs of El Salvador, and her fellow sisters. What the church needs, she says, is leaders who are filled with joy and a desire to serve. "The leaders who have impressed me are joyful women and not 'Jolly Little Mary Sunshine' but deep joy," she said. "That's what drew the disciples to Jesus. And along with deep joy, it's good to have a deep skill set and a sense of a call that this is where I need to be—because it isn't always easy."

She said that if one's primary goal is to lead an organization, the church may not be the easiest place for women to start but that their skills should be no less welcome. "One of the major challenges is to keep inviting, to keep saying, 'Your home is here and your home is not perfect, but you can only change it if you stay within it and love it and speak your truth,'" Sister Kitty said.

"Why I stay has little to do with opportunities for women," she said. "It's because of Jesus. This is my church, and I am church, and I believe that with my whole heart. This is my home."

Kerry Weber is an executive editor of *America*.

The women we surveyed do not, for the most part, keep the Sunday obligation to attend Mass. A little over a quarter of the self-identified Catholics (26 percent) rarely or never attend Mass. Another quarter (27 percent) attend only a few times a year. Twenty percent attend every week (an additional four percent attend more than once a week).

Participation in the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) is also infrequent. A quarter of respondents (27 percent) went to confession at least once a year. A higher share (38 percent) reported that they had "never" been to confession. This is higher than might be expected, as confession in most dioceses is now required prior to making one's first Communion.

Nearly all of the survey participants professed a strong belief in God. Seventy-eight percent of Catholic women said they believed in God and had no doubts about God's existence, and an additional 16 percent said they believed but "sometimes" had doubts. Less than 1 percent of women said they were confident God did not exist and only 2 percent said they did not expect that God existed but that they considered his existence to be possible.

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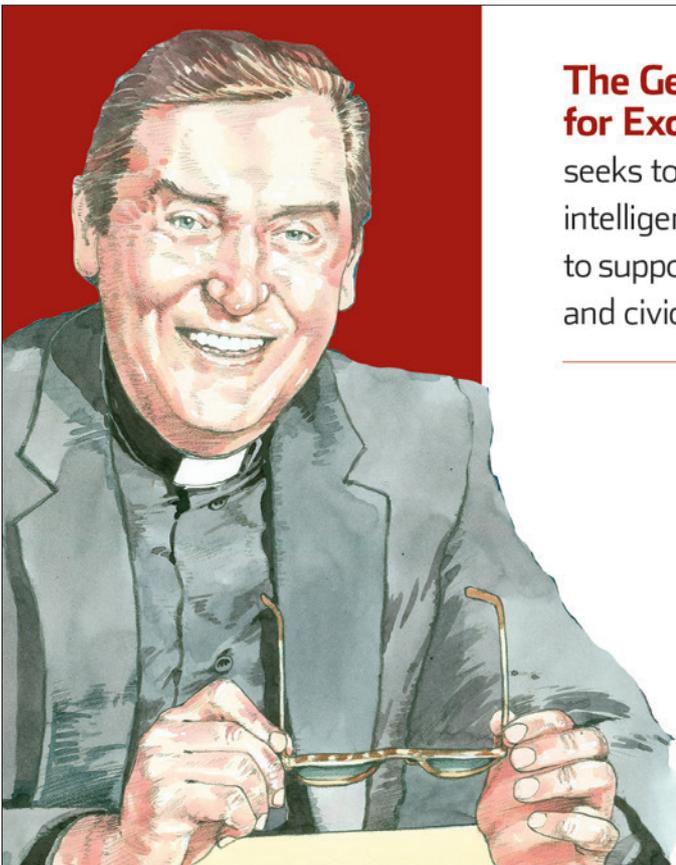
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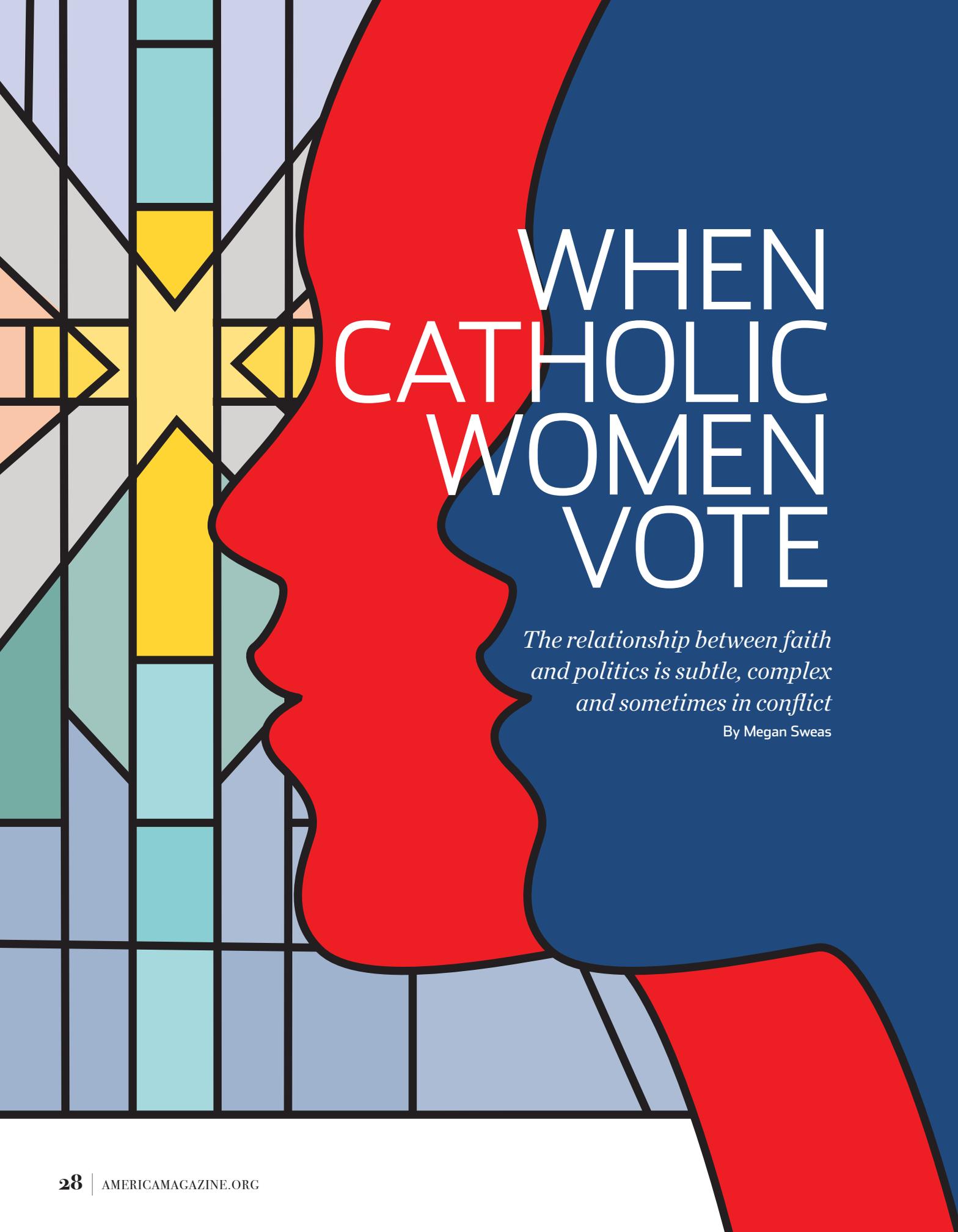
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# WHEN CATHOLIC WOMEN VOTE

*The relationship between faith  
and politics is subtle, complex  
and sometimes in conflict*

By Megan Sweas

Having spent two years as a volunteer in Amate House, a Chicago-based Catholic volunteer program, Leslie Carranza is committed to the values of service, faith, social justice and community. She now brings what she learned about Catholic social teaching into the voting booth with her. But the church's influence on her choices is, as with many Catholic voters, complex.

As someone whose parents made her go to church without providing a reason, the 24-year-old likes to question, "Why?" And her experiences as a volunteer helped her be aware of "the influence I know that policy will have on other individuals" and not just herself, she said.

So when Ms. Carranza learned more about Catholic social teaching, ideas about the fundamental importance of life, the dignity of the human person and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable spoke to her deeply. The daughter of naturalized citizens, she has worked with unaccompanied immigrant minors from India and cares passionately about church teaching on migration, as well as on the environment and the death penalty. She is personally pro-life and favors a strong social safety net that would allow women to support their children. At the same time, having worked with women who have been raped or abused, she believes they have a right to make their own reproductive decisions.

"I often feel like I have opposing viewpoints," said Ms. Carranza, who leans Democratic. "There are definitely times where a phrase [from Catholic social teaching] has caught me, and my reaction has been along the lines of, 'Wow, this has settled a conflict within me.' It confirms that it's fine that I believe these things, even if they seem at odds."

Ms. Carranza's perspective—that the relationship between her faith and politics is subtle and sometimes contradictory—may not be all that unusual. A nationally representative survey of Catholic women commissioned by **America** in partnership with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University has found that few Catholic women say they look to the church for help in deciding how to vote, even while about half say Catholic teaching on key political issues is important to them.

Personal experience is typically more influential than church teaching on political opinions, said Michele Dillon,

a sociologist at the University of New Hampshire who has studied Catholics' political opinions. "Just like Americans in general, for the most part, Catholics vote regardless of what the bishops say," Ms. Dillon said. "In fact, poll after poll shows that...they are not going to be widely influenced" by the church.

Indeed, the **America** survey, conducted in August 2017 (see Page 12 for executive summary), found that only 9 percent of Catholic women say that statements by the U.S. bishops or their pastor or parish priest will help them decide how to vote in 2018. Pope Francis is slightly more influential, with 19 percent reporting that they find his statements helpful.

Only 12 percent of Catholic women say Catholic social teaching helps them decide how to vote—with splits along party lines and Mass attendance. Twenty percent of Republicans, versus 7 percent of Democrats, see Catholic social teaching as helpful. Even when considering only women who go to Mass weekly or more, only a quarter say it is helpful.

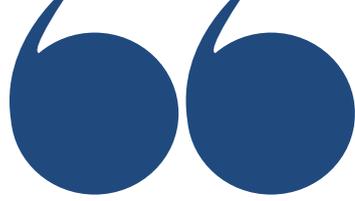
The two sociologists who reviewed the survey data prior to its publication agree, however, that few U.S. Catholics are familiar with Catholic social teaching.

"For some people, social teaching will be about the church's concern for the poor," Ms. Dillon said. "For others who are answering the same question, social teaching will be the church's teaching on marriage, same-sex marriage and abortion."

Unlike the respondents to the survey, those interviewed for this story are not nationally representative. They tended to be more liberal and educated than Catholic women at large and typically had given deep thought to the role of faith and politics. Nevertheless, they represented a variety of points of view on how the two go together.

Margaret Schettler, 63, took a class on Catholic social teaching when she was a student at Loyola Marymount University. She credits that class with allowing her to stay in the church and see its teachings as relevant to her politics.

"It was the first time I was aware that there was a whole body of teachings on things like rights of workers and labor unions," she said. "Because it was more thought out, I was more inclined to be open to it." Before the class, she had assumed "Catholic thought about politics and voting to be



# *Only 12 percent of Catholic women say Catholic social teaching helps them decide how to vote.*

very dogmatic and not a discussion that was reasoned and studied,” she added.

Two of Ms. Schettler’s friends, both Catholic and in their 70s, share similar points of view. One attends Mass weekly, and the other only attends a few times a year. Yet neither sees Catholic social teaching as influential on their vote because of how they understand those teachings.

“So much of what [the church] has emphasized is what they call the bedroom issues, but those are not the only issues that are important in people’s lives,” said Maureen McLaughlin, one of Ms. Schettler’s friends, explaining why she is wary of what she considers to be Catholic social teaching. “My criticism of the church on political issues is more omission over commission. It isn’t that they come out in favor of prejudice or in favor of wealthy people over poor people. They just don’t stand up for them.”

As a Republican, Catherine Montalbo, 55, sees pro-life issues as an essential part of Catholic social teaching, and for that reason she does see it as influential on her vote.

For Debra Crosby, 58, Catholic social teaching helps her decide how to vote, but she understands this to mean looking for honesty, integrity, humility and competency in political candidates.

“I’ve never been a student of theology or Catholic doctrine, so I can’t pontificate about it,” she said.

The term Catholic social teaching does have a specific

meaning. “Catholic social teaching refers to Roman Catholic reflections on contemporary social, political and economic realities, from the industrial revolution to today,” said Meghan J. Clark, an associate professor of moral theology at St. John’s University in New York and a member of **America’s** board of directors. Starting with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical letter “*Rerum Novarum*” in 1891, encyclicals became the way for popes to provide guidance on “how to live the Gospel in an industrialized, globalized reality,” she said.

The average Catholic, however, rarely reads encyclicals. Even with “*Laudato Si’*,” Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment, polls showed that only a quarter of Catholics were aware of the encyclical a year after it was released, Ms. Dillon said.

“Despite all the publicity and claims in the media of the Francis effect on environmental awareness...in terms of changing Catholics’ opinions about climate change or what to do about climate change, it’s minimal at best,” she said.

## READING THE NUMBERS

Nevertheless, **America’s** survey found that two-thirds of Catholic women say that the church’s teachings on care for the environment are “somewhat” or “very much” important to them.

Sixty percent of Catholic women find the church’s teachings on abortion to be somewhat or very much important to them. Although abortion was slightly less a priority than environmental concerns, the church’s teachings about abortion are slightly more influential on voting decisions than its teachings on care for the environment—55 versus 52 percent, a difference just larger than the sampling error of plus or minus 2.5 percent.

Other issues that are important to a majority of Catholic women, according to **America’s** survey, include migration and refugees and the death penalty.

The level of influence on the individual issues shows that the church’s teachings are relevant to women’s lives, says Mary Johnson, S.N.D.deN., a professor of sociology and religious studies at Trinity Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Sister Johnson points out that the data show high levels of influence despite the diversity of U.S. Catholic women, who include every party, age, race and educa-

tion level. Women seem to agree widely on a “consistent ethic of life,” she said—on caring for the most vulnerable from before birth through every stage of life, including death—even if they are unfamiliar with this term or the term “Catholic social teaching.”

“These women aren’t caught up in how it’s described; they are believing this and living it in large numbers and in a significant way,” Sister Johnson said.

The church is less influential on the subjects of physician-assisted suicide, same-sex marriage and artificial birth control. But even with artificial birth control, the issue with the lowest rates of approval in this survey, 43 percent say that church teachings matter somewhat or very much to them, and nearly half say it affects their voting somewhat or very much.

Even as high numbers of women report that the church teachings influence their vote, however, it is unclear what they mean by “influence.”

Ms. Dillon uses same-sex marriage as an example. Some have found support for same-sex marriage within what they understand to be the church’s opposition to discrimination. “Increasingly in America, Catholics believe that their support for same-sex marriage is aligned with the church’s teaching on same-sex marriage, even though objectively it’s not,” she said.

“The body of social teaching is complicated. There are many strands of it, and within that, there are certainly ambiguities,” Ms. Dillon said.

Those ambiguities leave room for individuals to find what resonates with them in Catholic social teaching. Ms. Crosby, for instance, likes what Pope Francis says about the environment but admits that it merely confirms what she already believes about protecting the earth.

Ms. Schettler, too, said that her college class on Catholic social teaching merely provided her with a religious rationale for her political beliefs, which were shaped by growing up in the 1960s and witnessing the civil rights movement. The assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. happened when she was in eighth grade.

“It gives a framework to describe something that I agree with,” she said. “I’m not aware that there have been areas where I’ve changed my thinking based on [Catholic teaching].”

## FAITH AND POLITICS

Just as Ms. Schettler was influenced by growing up in the 1960s, Ms. Carranza, the 24-year-old former volunteer, wonders what effect coming of age during Barack Obama’s presidency—and starting to take her faith more seriously under Francis’ pontificate—has had on her faith and politics. In general, her generation is influenced by secular concerns more than religious ones. More than a third claim no religious affiliation, according to the Pew Research Center, and Catholic millennials tend to be less connected to the church than previous generations.

Sociologists have found that childhood, family and community shape one’s political beliefs, Ms. Dillon said. One’s generation can also exert a significant influence. Historical events, like the civil rights era or election of the first black president, “tend to make their imprint in the consciousness of those people coming of age...and that tends to have an enduring effect across the life course on how these people think about a lot of issues,” she said.

One’s life experiences have a place in Catholic social teaching, too. The Catholic Church emphasizes the need for an “informed conscience” to be aware of church teachings across the various documents, Ms. Dillon said. “But ultimately, the individual has to assent to the teachings...has to use reason to make sense of church teaching in the light of the circumstances of their own lives and the experiences that they are confronting.”

For instance, through her work in pastoral ministry, one woman—who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the issue—has seen how a woman might choose abortion in situations of abuse or when her life was at risk or “the baby’s condition was not compatible with life.” She, however, chose to continue carrying a baby when doctors told her it would be stillborn and recommended abortion.

Ms. Crosby’s family experience has led her to embrace the Catholic Church’s call for peace and concern for migrants and refugees. Her grandparents came to the United States from Mexico during a time of conflict in that country. While her grandfather had a good government job in Mexico, he ended up working—and dying—in the salt mines in the United States. “He came over to work, to look for a better life,” she said.

When she was young, Ms. Crosby’s father served in



*With Americans looking to the church to confirm rather than shape their views, it is not surprising to see differences of opinion along party lines. ●●*

Vietnam. She still gets choked up remembering how she would look for him in the news footage from Vietnam every evening for the two years that he was there. When she hears the church speak out on war and migration, therefore, it resonates with her.

With same-sex marriage, knowing somebody who is gay—or being gay oneself—often has more influence on a person’s opinion than church teachings.

Ms. McLaughlin, 75, came out to her “staunch Catholic” mother at age 35 when she first got together with her now-wife. Ms. McLaughlin had stopped taking part in the sacraments, but her mother’s embrace of her and her partner, and later the kindness and acceptance of the local parish when her mother was dying, allowed her to return to the church.

But Ms. McLaughlin’s personal journey has made her feel it is impossible to look to the church for guidance on political questions. “I go to church because I like communal worship. I love the sacraments; I like the music, and we have developed a wonderful community of friends,” she said.

Part of the lack of connection between church teaching and personal experience for many Catholics, Ms. Clark said, comes from underestimating “what Catholicism means to who we are.”

“Even when my personal experience contradicts something that is official church teaching, it’s often rooted in a very deeply lived Catholic reality about who we are as persons, what it means to be made in the image of God, what it means to treat people with dignity,” she said. The church’s challenge today, she added, is to help people integrate their faith into how they interpret their experiences.

Kaitlyn Troilo has had that opportunity as a student at The Catholic University of America. Ms. Troilo grew up in a conservative Catholic family in San Antonio, Tex., where her grandfather was involved in fundraising and campaigning for local politics. Still, coming of age during the Obama presidency made her unsure of her political beliefs—she favored Mitt Romney in 2012 but also liked some of what she saw in Mr. Obama.

At C.U.A., Ms. Troilo started having serious conversations about both faith and politics and became involved with the pro-life movement and College Republicans. The combination of church teachings and her campus experience made her more confident in her conservative views. For instance, she always knew what the Catholic Church taught about pro-life issues, she said, but “I came into it by talking to people, by seeing this huge young Catholic community being for that movement.”

Relationships also shaped Catherine Montalbo’s political views. Her former husband’s Southern Republican family, whom she respects greatly, introduced her to what she described as the “true conservative principles” that she now embraces. Dialogue with them and reading conservative sources convinced her to favor small government, “rule of law” and pro-life policies. She disagrees with the church on issues that don’t fit with these principles. For instance, she disagrees with Pope Francis on the economy and capitalism, and on immigration she believes that we have to care for the poor and vulnerable but also values border protection.

“It seems to me that the church’s position on illegal immigration is that anybody should be able to come into the country and we should welcome them with open arms and just take care of them and turn a blind eye to the fact that they broke the law, and I’m opposed to that position,” Ms. Montalbo said.

Her “biggest issue with the church right now,” though,



Margaret Schettler



Kaitlyn Troilo



Corrine Hanley

is contraception. She would love to see the church evolve in its position.

Indeed, the survey shows little political divide between Democrats and Republicans on the issue of artificial contraception. “Most Americans have made up their own minds about contraception since the early 1970s,” Ms. Dillon said. While contraception may have been in the vanguard for Catholics dissenting from church teachings on issues of “private morality,” Ms. Dillon is quick to point out that U.S. Catholics also make up their own minds on large societal issues like policies on poverty and the environment.

### ALONG PARTY LINES

With Americans looking to the church to confirm rather than shape their views, it is not surprising to see differences of opinion along party lines within **America’s** survey of Catholic women.

Indeed, more Democrats (47 percent) than Republicans (41 percent) say that church teaching on care for the environment is both personally important to them and influences their voting decisions. The reverse is true for abortion: 51 percent of Republican Catholic women say church teaching on abortion is personally important to them and influences their vote versus 38 percent of Democratic Catholic women.

At the same time, Catholic women’s opinions on these issues are not as polarized as one might expect, Sister Johnson pointed out. About 40 percent of both Democratic and Republican Catholic women value church teachings on issues where the teaching contradicts their party’s positions.

Though Ms. Troilo is a Republican from Texas, her involvement in her college pro-life movement convinced her to oppose the death penalty. She took a class in “Christianity and Capitalism” and said she feels “more confident” in being Catholic and fiscally conservative. But Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment particularly challenges her conservative views. “Catholic social teaching is a little problematic but in a good way, as it provides me with questions,” Ms. Troilo said.

Ms. Crosby admits that her pro-life stance contradicts her support of pro-choice candidates. “I look at the whole basket of issues and I have to go with what I think is

the most appropriate course,” she said.

“There is rarely, if ever, going to be a candidate with whom you agree on everything,” Ms. Clark said. Nevertheless, she added, Catholic social teaching upholds voting as a moral responsibility that requires serious discernment.

From a sociological point of view, “the emphasis on faith and reason” in Catholicism means that individuals often develop one’s identity as a Catholic by choosing the strand of teaching that they want to identify with, Ms. Dillon said.

At its heart, Catholic social teaching is not about following rules but about being disciples, Ms. Clark said, quoting Matthew 25—whatever you did for the least of these, you did for Christ. “It tries to help give us ways to discern and think through living out Matthew 25 in an industrialized, globalized, interdependent world.”

And on issues of caring for the poor, vulnerable and unborn, Sister Johnson said, women are leading the church rather than the other way around.

Corrine Hanley, 77, is unconcerned with whether her political decisions neatly align with bishops’ pronouncements. Like many women interviewed for this article, she roots her political decisions in compassion. “On the last analysis, we all have to speak for ourselves,” she said. “When the day comes when we meet the great Lord, we have to be able to be honest with him and say, ‘I did this because this is what I believe and this is what I thought was the right thing to do,’ not because somebody told me to do it.”

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*Megan Sweas is a freelance journalist based in Los Angeles and an editor at the University of Southern California’s Center for Religion and Civic Culture.*

*Colleen Dulle, a Joseph A. O’Hare fellow at America, contributed reporting to this story.*

## The Political Leanings of Catholic Women

With the Women’s March and #MeToo movement galvanizing women politically, Democrats seem positioned to gain congressional seats in 2018. And Catholic women may be poised to help. According to America’s nationally representative survey of Catholic women, 55 percent of Catholic women who intend to vote in 2018 plan to vote for Democrats, while 37 percent plan to vote for Republicans. Three-quarters of all Catholic women intend to vote in 2018.

Both the survey data and recent state elections suggest “that there is a gender dimension to voting behavior,” said Mary Johnson, S.N.D.deN. “The gender dimension points to women being very committed to electing candidates who can speak to an array of issues that we as Catholics would describe as social justice issues or consistent ethic of life issues.”

Right now, these values favor the Democrats, she added.

Overall, the survey found that 59 percent of Catholic women are Democrats or lean Democratic, whereas 38 percent are Republican or lean Republican. (Those numbers decrease to 41 percent Democratic and 24 percent Republican without “leaners.”)

Exit polling for the 2016 election suggested that Donald J. Trump won the Catholic vote. CARA’s analysis of American National Elections Studies data, however, showed Hillary Clinton to have narrowly won the Catholic vote, 48 percent to 45 percent. Ms. Clinton had significant advantages with young Catholics (59 percent) and with Hispanic and other non-white Catholics (74 percent).

“To talk about the Catholic vote, or to talk about Catholics in general and how they vote, misses important divisions within Catholicism,” Ms. Dillon said. Hispanic Catholics, in particular, are likelier to be or lean Democratic than white Catholics.

Sister Johnson predicts the midterm elections in 2018 will reflect the trend of recent statewide elections, like the special Senate election in Alabama, in which women and particularly black women played a significant role. “There is something happening relative to women in general and women of color in the voting booth, and I would predict that Catholic women will to a large degree follow the trend we’re seeing nationally,” she said.

Women tend to care for and protect the most vulnerable, Sister Johnson said, “and now women are bringing that experience to the ballot box.”

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Megan Sweas



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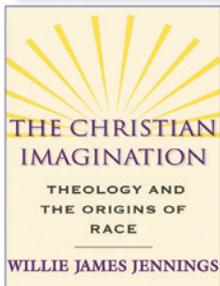


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# A CATHOLIC WOMAN DISCOVERS HER PRIESTHOOD

By Nancy Small

“What are you, a deacon?” the man asks from his bed. We are about 20 minutes into a pastoral visit. His parish deacon has been visiting regularly since he got sick. Now I have entered this man’s life as a hospice chaplain, and he does not quite know what to make of me.

It is not the first time I have been asked the question. Sometimes they ask if I am a priest or a sister or if they should call me “Reverend.” Their questions bring a smile to my face, but they also take me back to a time when I did not know what I wanted the answer to be.

In those days, I was a lifelong Catholic studying at a Protestant seminary. My choice to attend Union Theological Seminary in New York was deliberate. I wanted my tuition dollars to support a school that prepared women for ordination. Plus, I am a daughter of a Lutheran mother and Catholic father who promised to raise their children Catholic. Studying at a Protestant seminary would give me a chance to step outside my Catholic comfort zone and learn about the other half of my spiritual heritage.

My fellow students included a number of formerly Catholic women seeking ordination in other faith traditions. When they found out I was Catholic, one after another began asking me a rather pointed question: “How can you stay in a church that refuses to ordain women?”

Their question left me speechless. Like them, I entered seminary because I felt called to ministry. But I planned to live out my calling as a Catholic lay minister. Was it not enough that I chose a seminary where other women were preparing for ordination? Why were they challenging me to go further?

I plunged myself into seminary life, hoping these questions would resolve themselves.



# *I stopped running from the ordination question and started wrestling with it.*

...

I quickly came to love weekday worship services at the seminary chapel. I felt a special thrill each time women stepped into roles I had never seen them in before. One day two women took on the roles of Martha and Mary in a joint homily, offering a feminist interpretation of each woman's posture before Christ. Another day African women swung colorful banners, beat drums, chanted in their native tongue and danced God's delight into the hearts of all gathered.

There were moments that took my breath away, like the first time I witnessed an ordained female minister consecrating the bread and wine, and she happened to be visibly pregnant. Women preached, presided and prayed in a place that welcomed the fullness of their spiritual gifts and in ways that made my spirit soar.

On Sundays I set aside all this newness and stepped back into my Catholic world at the Jesuit parish where I was active. There lay leadership was vibrant, the community spirit was contagious and women's gifts were honored. The prayers and rituals of this community, which had long been my spiritual sustenance, were growing more important to me.

At the same time, however, I was becoming more aware of the limited roles women could fill in the Catholic Church. I found I could no longer put off the question of ordination.

...

Was I really called to a life of lay ministry as a Catholic? Or was the true nature of my call to ordination? The door to ordination in a Protestant church was open, and a number of people were encouraging me to walk through it. They noticed spiritual gifts in me that were well suited to ordained ministry. What a shame it would be to let those gifts go to waste, they said.

Their voices were strong and compelling. I knew the ordination process for Protestant women was not easy. But I could not deny that God was molding the clay of my being into a shape I was not sure could fit within the confines of the Catholic tradition.

I stopped running from the ordination question and started wrestling with it.

Shortly after I did, a new question arose in me. Some of the formerly Catholic women called to ordination had not decided which Protestant denomination to pursue. Some were thinking about becoming Congregational, others Episcopal or Lutheran. This struck me as odd. Wouldn't the call to ordination grow out of a faith that you knew and loved in a church where you felt at home? Would not the first step be to find your spiritual home and only then to pursue ordination within that tradition?

At that time in my studies I was researching the documents of the Second Vatican Council. One day I read something that caught me by surprise: "The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood" ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," No. 10).

Those words struck a chord in me. They kept washing over my heart, like a mantra. Perhaps God was trying to get my attention.

I started contemplating the spiritual house I was baptized into and realized how much there was to love in it. There were religious communities whose charisms and witness were beacons illuminating the path of the holy in my life. There were mystics and monastics, seekers and saints, peacemakers and prophets whose words of wisdom spoke to the depths of my soul. There were spiritual practices that connected me to God and communities of prayer. And there was the treasure of Catholic social teaching, a repository so rich that my Protestant professors turned to it again and again in class. Each time they did they noted (often with apology) that the Catholics had the deepest wells to draw from when it came to social justice teachings to transform the world in which we live.

I came to realize that the spiritual house I had lived in since my childhood had shaped my faith and become my stronghold. My Catholic faith housed a spirituality that enlivened me and drew me deep into the heart of Christ.

What I had not known until then is that I already belonged to a holy, hidden priesthood by nature of my baptism. If they taught that in my catechism classes, I had

missed it. Now that I knew about this holy priesthood, I began to see things in a new light. I shared this priesthood with all women and men baptized into the Catholic community, and there was power in that bond we shared. I belonged to a parish of people claiming their priesthood and living it out in ways that stretched people's understanding of lay ministry. I was one of a growing number of Catholic women weaving the gifts of our priesthood into the fabric of the Catholic faith.

Discovering I was a priest by virtue of my baptism did not take away the challenge of living out my vocation in a church that does not ordain women. But it validated in me a call already consecrated and a priesthood already blessed that no one could deny. Would that be enough to support my life of lay ministry? Would it be enough to put the ordination question to rest?

After graduating from seminary I made a directed retreat. Late one night I went to the chapel alone, knelt down and offered a prayer promising myself to Jesus in ministry. As I did soft tears began to flow. I did not feel the laying on of hands that happens at ordinations. But I did feel the warmth of the Spirit wash over my heart. As I knelt there, I had a strong sense that the decision I made was the right one for me.

...

Many years later, I am still growing in my life of ministry. Sometimes people do not know what to make of me; I do not always fit into the mold of ministry they are accustomed to.

When that happens, I remember the covenant I made with Jesus, who lived his priesthood in unconventional ways. He did not fit the mold of messiah they were expecting. He stretched people's understanding of what ministry looked like. As a disciple, I try to follow in his footsteps and learn from others who are doing the same. I am one of a multitude of Catholic women stretching conventional models of ministry with the spiritual gifts we bear.

We are all invited to be part of this stretching as each of us lives our baptismal priesthood in dynamic and differing ways. The stretching may feel uncomfortable at times. But in the stretching we grow. And we make room for the flourishing of one another's gifts in the spiritual house I call home.

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Nancy Small is a hospice chaplain, spiritual director and the author of *Seizing the Nonviolent Moments: Reflections on the Spirituality of Nonviolence Through the Lens of Scripture*. She and her husband, Carl, oblates of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, live in Worcester, Mass.



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# 'I HOPE WOMEN WILL CONTINUE TO SPEAK THE TRUTH'

*A conversation with Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin*

By Kimberly F. Baker

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., was named by Pope Francis to the College of Cardinals on Oct. 9, 2016, while serving as archbishop of Indianapolis. On the eve of that announcement, he participated in a panel discussion alongside Bishop Charles Thompson of Evansville at the Women of the Church Catholic leadership conference in Ferdinand, Ind. I moderated their conversation. On Jan. 6, 2017, Cardinal Tobin was installed as archbishop of Newark, and Bishop Thompson later was named as his successor in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Cardinal Tobin and I met again in August 2017 to renew our conversation about women in the Catholic Church. The interview has been edited and condensed for length and clarity. The full-length version of this interview can be found at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).

**Baker: Pope Francis has captured the attention of many people with his call for a more incisive female presence in the church. What do you think he has in mind?**

Tobin: I would think he's talking at a couple levels, because Francis believes in a sense of collegiality and subsidiarity. I think he's not simply thinking of the leadership at the level of the universal church, but he's also speaking to his brother bishops. He's saying you have to ensure that the gifts of women are reflected in the local church that has been entrusted to you. I think that it's also at that level that the Holy Father is hoping for a new vision and a new horizon.

**What are some examples of collaboration that you have had with women?**

A study was done by CARA, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, on the role of women in diocesan leadership. One of the assumptions of the study was if you take orders off the table, what are the most significant or incisive positions for women at the diocesan level. They named three: the chancellor, the superintendent of schools and the chief financial officer.

In Indianapolis—no credit to me but to my good predecessor—two out of the three were women. The chancellor and the superintendent of schools certainly brought to that level gifts and insights without which we would have been impoverished otherwise.

**What motivates you to promote and encourage women in leadership, whether on the local level or on the level of the universal church?**

I think some of the most deeply held values are values that we experienced as children. Growing up in a family that had a lot of women—a mother, her two sisters who lived with us and eight sisters of my own—and to see all of them encouraged and confident in themselves, with a very strong and non-coerced connection with their faith, encouraged me.

What has struck me in the years that followed, especially years in ministry, is being more and more aware of how women have been given a lot of reason to abandon the church—the sort of disrespect. And even more than disrespect. If you look at the Gospels, Jesus doesn't really get on people for overtly oppressing the poor. What he does get on them for is not seeing them. And I think it's true with women, who often, in particular outside of North America, form the real poor. The first sin is not to see them and to go on your merry way. Or if you see them, to cross to the other side of the road.

**What would you say to a young woman who is considering leaving the Catholic Church?**

I hear this pronouncement with kind of a sad frequency. I always ask, "What do you think you're leaving?" At least in my belief, it's not the Elks or the good old boys club. This is the body of Christ, and this is where his word is proclaimed and the sacraments are celebrated. I wouldn't let anybody drive me out of that. In saying this, I don't want to minimize the sort of estrangement that I think younger women feel.

I think one way we could respond is for women who stay in the church to be open and eloquent as to why. To say, despite the disappointments and the suffering, this is why I'm there.

**As you look to the future, what would be your hopes for women in the church?**

First, my hope would be that they embrace it as their home. I remember back in 2010, I promised to lead a retreat for our Irish brothers in Ireland. There was a lot of turmoil there, and still is, in the Irish church. I said: But, where do you hear the word of God; where do you celebrate the Eucharist? What church is that? That's the home. That's it, you know.

My hope is that the complexity of the mystery of the church is always revered. And that people don't lose faith in the power of Christ, present in his church. Then you settle for something that's less.

I hope that women will continue to speak the truth, and speak the truth to power when they need to. And most of all that they don't lose a sense of joy. Not to lose the joy that we have because of God's incredible love.

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*Kimberly F. Baker is an associate professor of church history at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad, Ind. She was co-chair of the inaugural Women of the Church conference, held from Oct. 7 to Oct. 9, 2016, in Ferdinand, Ind. (womenofthechurch.org).*



# *Investigating Mystery: The Fictional Journeys of Kirstin Valdez Quade*

By Jenny Shank

Kirstin Valdez Quade is a wanderer. She estimates that while she was growing up, she attended 13 different schools throughout the Southwest as her father, a research geologist, moved around for work. She read constantly in the backseat of the car, as they traveled for her father's field studies, and absorbed desert lore. "My parents would tell me stories connected to where we were," Ms. Valdez Quade says

in her sunny office on the campus of Princeton University. "We frequently crossed the Mojave Desert. There's this one span called the Forty Mile Desert, where a lot of settlers would die because there was no water for 40 miles. In the middle of it there's a grave that's allegedly that of the LeBeau sisters—three sisters who died of diphtheria."

Ms. Valdez Quade carried the stories she picked up in her childhood

travels with her as she continued her peripatetic ways into adulthood, garnering prizes for her writing along the way. She attended Stanford University as an undergraduate, earned her master of fine arts degree in creative writing from the University of Oregon and returned to Stanford as a prestigious Stegner Fellow in 2009. She was a visiting professor at the University of Michigan, and also lived in Texas and



Photo: Ricardo Barros

While Kirstin Valdez Quade's stories frequently feature Catholic characters, she says her relationship to the church "has always been a little bit complicated."

that story and the penitential rites in general is the pageantry of it," Ms. Valdez Quade explains, "and that tension between pageantry and performance and the feeling of faith, which is a very private, quiet experience. I wanted to explore what it meant for Amadeo to have this outsized role of the most important person in Christianity. And he needs redemption. It's so important to him. He was going to go over the top. He was going to do anything he could to be Jesus."

Ms. Valdez Quade kept crafting rich, layered family dramas, culminating in the publication of her debut collection, *Night at the Fiestas*, in 2015. The National Book Foundation chose it for their 5 Under 35 honor, and The New York Times and The San Francisco Chronicle, among other publications, named it among the best books of the year.

In Ms. Valdez Quade's tidy Princeton office, with a neon portrait of her parrot Frito (a "beautiful" but "tricky family member" because of his loud voice and possessiveness) and a Virginia Woolf doll on the shelf, she appears to have settled in. She is an assistant professor of creative writing at Princeton, where she has taught undergraduates since the fall of 2016.

When Ms. Valdez Quade interviewed at Princeton, she was dazzled by the literary stars on its faculty, including Jeffrey Eugenides, Joyce Carol Oates and the Pulitzer winner and the current U.S. poet laureate, Tracy K. Smith. It is clear they believe Ms. Valdez Quade's work is strong enough to achieve similar honors. Ms. Smith told a Princeton publication that she admired Ms.

Valdez Quade's stories' "ability to keep a number of thematic balls in the air in the compressed manner of poetry."

"It's funny, all I've wanted since I was a kid is to live in one house and stay there for the rest of my life," Ms. Valdez Quade says. She may have finally achieved that vision for a stable address with this latest move.

Ms. Valdez Quade believes one of the reasons she became a fiction writer is the observational skills she honed from always being the new kid: "When you enter a new place you have to be really alert to what the rules and social structures are. I was always having to figure out my place in the world, and who I was in each new context, because that shifts in each new place."

She also thinks her curiosity about unanswered questions in her family's stories drove her to seek answers through fiction, such as the mystery of the time she was cursed with *mal de ojo* ("the evil eye") as a child: "When I was an infant I got very sick—stomach cramps or something. My mother took me to the pediatrician and nothing really changed. My great-grandmother, who used to take care of me every day while my mother worked, diagnosed me with having the *ojo*. She took me to a *curandera*, one of her friends, who did something and cured me. I asked my mother, 'What did the *curandera* do?' and she said, 'I don't know, I didn't ask.' And I asked my grandmother and she said the same thing." Ms. Valdez Quade laughs. "Why would you not ask?"

"We have these family stories that are incredibly mysterious to me and that nobody will explain," she

Nova Scotia, among other places. "I feel like I've lived all over," she says.

Ms. Valdez Quade's short stories, in contrast, are for the most part firmly rooted in the northern New Mexico landscape, where her family has lived for generations, imbued with the imagery and traditions of the Catholic faith her grandmothers passed on to her. Many readers first encountered her work in 2009 when The New Yorker published her arresting story "The Five Wounds," about a ne'er-do-well named Amadeo Padilla, who hopes portraying Jesus in his town's re-enactment of the crucifixion will bring him redemption in the eyes of the community.

"I think what interested me about

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continues. “My grandfather’s father, Epifanio, was one of 10 kids in his family. They lived on a big ranch in Miami, N.M. His parents declared that none of the children were allowed to get married, and that if they did they would be disinherited. Epifanio was the only one who did. He fell in love with my great-grandmother because she was the girl in school who always raised her hand. And in fact, he was disinherited. That makes no sense. Why would parents decree that?”

Ms. Valdez Quade found yet more mysteries to ponder in the rituals of the Catholic Church. “My sense of myself as a Catholic comes from my great-grandmother and my grandmother,” she says. “When I was a child my great-grandmother took care of me. She lived in this high-rise of subsidized apartments. There were lots of other elderly people there, and people with developmental disabilities. It was such a wonderful place to be a kid. My great-grandmother would take me down the hall and we’d visit all of her friends and they’d feed me caramels, and we’d go down to Mass in the common room...We would light candles on her altar. Catholicism felt both cozy and mysterious to me. This idea that you could light a candle for your prayer: I loved that.”

Ms. Valdez Quade also became fascinated with the more quotidian aspects of the church when her grandmother would take her to the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Santa Fe, whose parish office is the model for the story “Ordinary Sins.” In that story a young, unmarried pregnant woman named Crystal works in a parish office and keeps the church running smoothly despite priest crises and co-worker crankiness. Ms. Valdez Quade’s grandmother “was in the altar

society for years. I used to love going up to the altar to clean it with her. She would gather the sacramental cloths. I was so excited about the opportunity to go through the door behind the altar and see the secret backstage of the Mass.” In the parish office, she says, “I was interested that this was just an office job, clearly, for some of the people working there.”

“I love the juxtaposition of the everyday tedium of the job and the holiness of it,” she continues.

“I’m interested in priests because they are dealing with the most sacred and important moments in their parishioners’ lives, and they’re this intermediary between their parishioners and God,” she says. “On the other hand, it’s a job that they have to do, day in and day out. And presumably there are office politics and all kinds of tedium.”

While Ms. Valdez Quade’s stories frequently feature Catholic characters, she says her relationship to the church “has always been a little bit complicated.”

“I consider myself Catholic,” she says. “That history, that tradition, feels very central to my understanding of my family history and my place in the world. On the other hand, there are a lot of ways in which I feel that it’s a pretty inhospitable religion for me. I think that’s another tension that I keep returning to. What does it mean for me to love this religion that I don’t always feel wants me?”

While Ms. Valdez Quade’s grandmothers took her to Mass, her father offered her a different perspective: “My dad is a geochemist and an atheist. I grew up knowing about early man. Science was important to me. It always felt like I was living between absolutes. I remember being in Sun-

day school and asking questions and being really frustrated by the answers that I got. I didn't feel that my teacher was taking me seriously. She was talking about how Jesus was man and he was also perfect. I was like, 'But if he's human, then he's not perfect. Because humans aren't perfect.'"

Even saints are not perfect, which the author explores in her most recent published story, "Christina the Astonishing (1150-1224)," which appeared in *The New Yorker* in July. The life of Christina, a 12th-century Belgian holy woman revered as a saint in her times, who has never been formally canonized by the Catholic Church, inspired the story.

"I have to tell everyone to read Margo H. King's translation of Thomas de Cantimpré's story of Christina's life because it's just delightful and so outlandish," she says. "The details that I put in my story are just the tip of the iceberg. When I encountered the story of Christina the Astonishing, I just thought, she is awful. What an awful human being to live near! She was always screeching at people and telling them they stank. Not terrifically Christian behavior! I was interested in how hard it must have been to live with her, and how hard it must have been for her. That kind of compulsive judgment of other people and the compulsion to hurt herself: it must have been so lonely and so painful."

If Christina lived today, some of her behavior might be attributed to mental illness. "How much of mental illness could be grace?" Ms. Valdez Quade asks. "I do think we have this tendency to diagnose and dismiss people. Certainly for a fiction writer, that's the least interesting path to take. So I did want to take her holiness seriously. In the world of the story, I wanted to respect that and still explore what it

## Blue Willow Plates

for A.B.

By Annabelle Moseley

Those childhood nights I ate at your table,  
where life's mysteries were broken and shared—  
I studied the blue willow plates you set each night.

Even during the worst winter,  
my fork swept potatoes, gravy, bits of savory meat  
and uncovered a story.

Each night I told myself a different tale, cast in the familiar pattern—  
there were pagodas, fences, shining waterways  
and a boat with a figure searching the horizon.

But what kind of wind made the willow fronds splay so far apart?  
Who were the three figures holding lanterns on a bridge?  
And why was the pair of birds larger than the strife below?

You fed me from willow-patterned dishes  
when I didn't think I could eat—  
when my father was dying, and daffodils were frozen under snow.

But always on your plates  
flying above the relentless searching—  
two birds, facing each other, wings arched in triumph.

That winter, in blue and white patterns,  
the Holy Spirit, in its many-feathered glory  
descended on each dish you placed before me.

**Annabelle Moseley is the author of nine books, including the double volume *A Ship to Hold the World* and *The Marionette's Ascent* (Wiseblood Books). She teaches theology and literature at St. Joseph's Seminary and St. Joseph's College in New York.**



Ms. Valdez Quade's short stories are firmly rooted in the northern New Mexico landscape, where her family has lived for generations.

Photo: iStock

might have been like to live with her.”

Ms. Valdez Quade found her entry point into this story set hundreds of years ago through a “throwaway line” in de Cantimpré’s account, which mentioned “her sisters tied her up like a dog, and nobody had any pity for her suffering.” Ms. Valdez Quade explains: “When I saw that, I thought, oh, there were sisters...how galling to live with somebody who causes so much trouble—and to see her lifted up out of their lives and be revered.”

Jealousy over a family member’s elevation also surfaces in her story “Nemecia,” narrated by a New Mexico girl named Maria, whose cousin Nemecia is sent to live with her family because her mother “couldn’t care for her” after a tragedy. When Maria is finally chosen to lead the Corpus Christi procession because of her superior recitation of a psalm, Maria’s mother instead installs Nemecia as the procession leader, because of her hard childhood. This sparks a family-splitting revolt. “I’m interested in jealousy,” Ms. Valdez Quade says. “I have felt jealousy and it’s an ugly, ugly emotion. I’m interested in how a person can be jealous of trauma—jealous of the at-

tention and the story. Maria is jealous of Nemecia’s larger-than-life backstory. It’s no good for Nemecia—her life isn’t great. But in Maria’s jealousy, she doesn’t see that.”

Ms. Valdez Quade tries to cultivate a kind of serenity in which to work by staying off social media. She has no blog, Twitter handle or Facebook account, which is unusual for young writers today, who are often asked to promote their work in this way. Staying out of social media dramas helps her root herself in the fictional worlds she creates, with nothing to distract her but Frito’s squawking.

She prefers writing fiction to non-fiction, and found the experience of reviewing another writer’s book uncomfortable because she kept thinking about how she felt when she was waiting for *Night at the Fiestas* to be published. “I was imagining what the reviews would be like,” she recalls. “I was seeing all of the weaknesses of the book. I was certain I’d be shown to be the fraud that I am.”

She is “incredibly grateful” for the positive reviews her book in fact received, and is now working on her next project, a novel, with the help of reg-

ular trips to writing retreats, like the one in Umbria, Italy, she visited this summer. “There’s something about having this amount of time blocked off, and to be in a space that isn’t my own that is incredibly productive,” she says. “I don’t have that many books with me, I don’t have that many distractions, and I don’t have to clean my house, which is my main distraction. I find that incredibly productive, to be away from my life and my parrot.”

Since only some of her work includes a Catholic dimension, Ms. Valdez Quade says she has been surprised by how many Catholic and Christian publications, conferences and events are enthusiastic to feature her. “I always feel a little bit like I’m maybe not equal to the task,” she says. “I think one of the reasons I continue to write about these themes is because my own thoughts about it are still uncertain. I’m still figuring out what I think and I believe. So I don’t always feel like I’m the best person to actually talk about it.”

But the growing number of Ms. Valdez Quade’s fans might consider her the best person to talk about it, and will continue to read her work eagerly as she writes into the mystery of being a woman in the Catholic Church, and into the larger mystery of being a human in this world.

---

Jenny Shank’s first novel, *The Ringer*, won the High Plains Book Award, and her work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post* and *Image*. She is on the faculty of the Mile High M.F.A. program in creative writing at Regis University in Denver.

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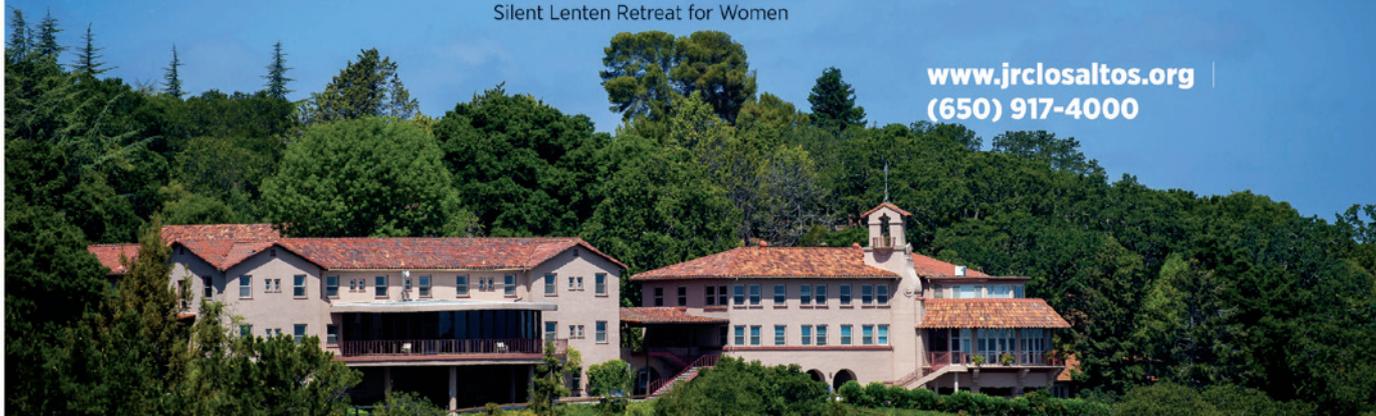
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## Science and religion: complementary, not contradictory

By Christiana Zenner

Introducing oneself as a professor of theology and science frequently elicits looks of consternation, a laugh or a rejoinder: “Aren’t they totally opposite ways of understanding reality?” It is more accurate to say that *science* and *religion* are capacious terms, so any respectable description of their mutual relationship depends on specifying which religion, what kind of science, in what historical

periods and regions.

Three books published in 2017 chart some of the contours of science-religion dynamics. The most general is *On Faith and Science*, by the historian Edward J. Larson and the philosopher Michael Ruse, a descriptive tour de force of revolutions in epistemology and the historical figures that have shaped many contemporary sciences in post-Enlightenment England and

post-Darwinian United States.

The first several chapters are organized by scientific discipline—astronomy, physics, neuroscience, geology, biology—which then give way to treatments of topical issues, like Darwinism and belief, sex and gender, eugenics and ecology. Ruse, a longtime philosopher of biology who has little patience for the simplistic and oppositional science-religion binaries promulgated by the



Oratorian Father Giuseppe Lais (1845-1921) is pictured in this undated photo using the Carte du Ciel (Celestial Map) telescope in the Leonine Tower at the Vatican

new atheists, is well known among scholars for his interpretations of Darwinian thought. Readers will benefit especially from the synopses in “Darwinism and Belief” and “The Evolution of Humanity,” both of which are eminently accessible.

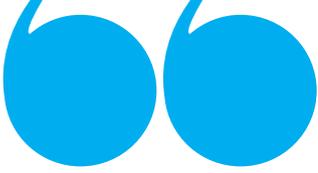
Elsewhere, the tone of *On Faith and Reason* is uneven, partly because of challenges arising from dual authorship but also because it attempts to cover huge topics in

a compressed space. Still, the attempts at synthesis are important, and the volume does a fair job of historical and philosophical characterization, while also engaging important topics like sex and gender and ecological degradation (with a sustained engagement with Pope Francis and “Laudato Si”).

As with many treatments of science and religion, “faith” in this book tends to be synonymous with

Christianity, occasionally augmented by comments about the jurisprudential monotheisms of Judaism and Islam, with the rarer nod to non-Western traditions, primarily Buddhism.

Religions figure somewhat differently in John Haught’s *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, a critical-constructive account that boldly postulates that any sufficient account



# For Thomas Hosinski, there are no acts of God that are not also acts of agents of the universe. ●●

of “our awareness of an unfinished universe requires not only a new understanding of religion but also a new way of understanding religion’s relation to science.”

Whereas science describes external reality, religion for Haught is an essential “inside voice” and a subjective, narrative reality manifesting an ever-developing cosmos. Perhaps most dramatically, Haught claims that “it is through our own subjectivity—mental, moral, aesthetic and religious—that the universe now carries on its long anticipatory adventure toward fuller being,” and that this is not an escapist or eschatological fantasy but rather “the very pathway the universe is taking toward communion with its ultimate ground and destiny.”

Scholars of religion may be puzzled at the degree to which Haught relies on the psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers, or the sensibilities of religion that he understands to be more or less universal and upon which he neatly structures each chapter of the volume. Is it truly possible to speak of “traditional religion’s intuition of indestructible being, meaning,

truth, goodness, and beauty” and to call these “rightness”?

Haught offers a useful typology of “ways of reading” the natural world: *archaeonomically*, which regards the world as the product of physical determinism (the purview of the new atheists and other staunch materialists); *analogically*, which views the world as an imperfect manifestation or corruption of distant and ultimate truths (the preference of many otherworldly inclined Christians); and his preferred category, *anticipatory*, which is “aware that the cosmic story is far from over [and] looks patiently and expectantly ahead for a possible meaning to it all...it reads the cosmic story both scientifically and religiously, from outside and inside simultaneously.”

Like Larson and Ruse, Haught has little patience for the new atheists; and he, too, writes as one who has been immersed in these debates for many years and knows how to communicate to his audience (rarefied though that audience may be). Haught’s constructive account contains elements inspired by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., and Alfred North

Whitehead, and it also bears some family resemblance to the cosmic integrationist thought of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme.

A Whiteheadian interpretation of an anticipatory universe is also part of the theological proposal in Thomas Hosinski’s *The Image of the Unseen God: Catholicity, Science, and Our Evolving Understanding of God*, which is the most explicitly Christian of the books reviewed here. Hosinski writes: “It may seem strange to begin a book on how our understanding of God has developed because of contemporary science with a discussion of God in the teachings and life of Jesus.” But, he argues, this is vital because science is not the benchmark for the Christian notion of God; Jesus Christ is. Nonetheless, “if we are to speak of our faith to our contemporary world, we need to think in terms compatible with what we know of the world through empirical science.”

Any account of divine action, Hosinski writes, “ought to be able to offer some persuasive reason for why science fails to find any acts of God in its examination of the universe and its processes.” For Hosinski, “there are no acts of God that are not also acts of agents of the universe.... God’s action is therefore completely hidden within the ordinary structures and processes of the universe.” Of course, he is not the first to postulate such claims, but the admirable clarity and organization of his writing make this a very readable and useful tome.

Indeed, if paired together, Haught and Hosinski would make for interesting comparison and

discussion. Both are informed by recent scientific developments and are drawn to consider how reconceptualizations of God may be necessary. But where Haught is willing to opine on religion as a general category, Hosinski keeps his analysis centrally within Catholic theology.

While it is surely a strength of Catholicism that scientific epistemologies are incorporated into Catholic teachings rather than minimized or avoided, it is not entirely clear that the proposals that these authors put forward would be recognizable in historical creedal formulations. One example of an integrationist attempt that is extensively argued in a more Thomistic than Whiteheadian formulation is Elizabeth Johnson's *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*, which is structured along the affirmations of the Nicene Creed.

In my view, many persistent inner tensions among Western Christianities have to do with what kind of God can be seen to endure or even be salvageable from the epistemologies that the Enlightenment and scientific revolutions have wrought. It is not merely that the scientific method relies on more-or-less objective and repeatable, external experiments and data-gathering, while religious faith speaks to the inner, subjective experience, which is by default impossible to universalize. It is a concern about the viabilities of cleaving to particularized notions of ultimacy. What certainties can science or theology be reasonably said to provide? What does that mean for the assumptions and narratives that we hold dear?

Perhaps the enduring question is not, then, about whether science and religion are ultimately compatible but about how the authoritative figures and scholars, the scientists and the faithful, strive to articulate what it means to be human and to understand the world around us. To my mind, the question of purpose—especially teleology, or final causes—looms as the largest philosophical variable, as our scientific epistemologies ever-better narrate natural processes that decisively shape patterns of life and perception but may or may not imply final ends.

It is admirable and refreshing that these books ably demonstrate complementary approaches to religion and science with a minimum of vitriol and a standard of appreciable rigor. That such discourses could also surely benefit from sustained attention to non-Christian and nondominant epistemologies remains a perpetual truism.

---

*Christiana Zenner is an associate professor of theology, science and ethics at Fordham University and the author of Just Water (Orbis Books).*

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## Taking singleness seriously

In *Singleness and the Church*, Jana Bennett reflects theologically on the diverse realities of single life today and finds liberating resources from the Christian tradition that challenge single people's experiences of invisibility within or exclusion from church life today.

Defining singleness very broadly, including “never married, single parent, engaged, divorced, widowed, cohabiting, and same-sex attracted and single,” Bennett challenges all Christians to take singleness seriously as part of what it means to be a Christian community. She resists any privileging of ordained, married or vowed religious life as a holier state of life than singleness and instead invites all Christians to consider what it might

mean to seek holiness in whatever state of life one finds oneself.

The text has clear strengths. Bennett demonstrates expertise in the field, the book is well researched, and the project is laid out in a compelling way, as “guides” from the tradition provide examples of each state of single life to provide texture and realism to the theological commentary. A further strength is the book's ecumenical structure, engaging both Protestant and Catholic thinkers and guides.

The success of the guides is uneven; they are presented as Christian models, but is it because of their words, actions or some combination of the two? I found Dorothy Day to be a far more compelling guide for single parents than Augustine is for uncommitted sexual relationships or John Wesley is for engaged couples.

The book raises important questions about what it means to be church and draws attention to the witness of single Christians and their joys and struggles. Bennett's goal was to provide a “jumpstart” to the church's conversation about singleness; the book certainly does that. The real test of the book's success will be how it is received by single readers and whether they find the guides and reflections liberating and helpful in light of their own experiences.

---

Emily Reimer-Barry is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego.

## Can fraternities be redeemed?

Collegiate fraternities have always promoted themselves with an emphasis on high ideals, including leadership and development of character. At the same time, fraternities regularly come to public attention for racism, hazing or dangerous alcohol use. Focusing in *True Gentlemen* on one fraternity, Sigma Alpha Epsilon, John Hechinger offers a deeper look at the problems associated with fraternities.

For S.A.E., these ideals are expressed by the “True Gentleman” creed. Written in 1899, it notes that “The True Gentleman is the man whose conduct proceeds from good will and an acute sense of propriety.” He is self-controlled, does not elevate himself above others, is not boastful, is honest, is con-

siderate of others and is “a man with whom honor is sacred and virtue safe.”

Even among fraternities, however, S.A.E. has a particularly troubled reputation. Statistics demonstrate that members of fraternities are the heaviest drinkers on college campuses, leading yearly to numerous alcohol-related deaths. Fraternity parties also prove to be an unsafe environment for college women. Women in sororities, who typically mix more often than other students with men in fraternities, are three times more likely to experience sexual assault than other college women. Finally, historically white fraternities like S.A.E. often manifest racist attitudes and policies.

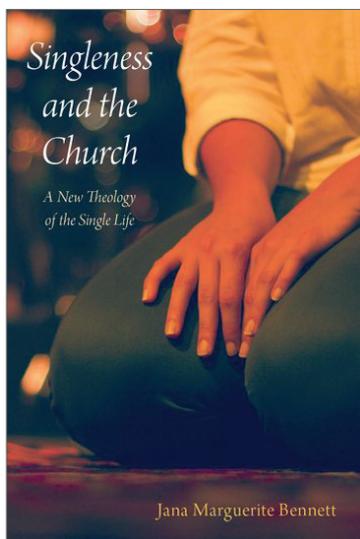
All of these features of fraternity life are compounded by a culture of apathy and of extreme loyalty that

prohibits meaningful responses. Two examples: When a woman was raped in an S.A.E. house at Loyola Marymount University, nobody at the party helped her or called the police. When the S.A.E. chapter at the University of Oklahoma sang “There will never be a n—r in S.A.E.” and made lynching jokes, no member intervened.

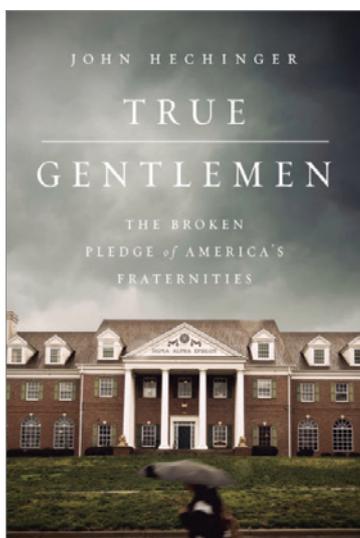
Hechinger suggests that a return to the ideals of the “True Gentleman” creed may be what can ultimately redeem S.A.E. One wonders, however, how successful such a strategy can be given that the creed itself is an artifact of the same racist and sexist values that still manifest themselves today.

---

Megan K. McCabe is an assistant professor at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash.



**Singleness and the Church**  
A New Theology of the Single Life  
by Jana Marguerite Bennett  
Oxford University Press. 288p \$29.95



**True Gentlemen**  
The Broken Pledge of America's Fraternities  
By John Hechinger  
PublicAffairs. 320p \$28

## The redemption of Radric Delantic Davis

*The Autobiography of Gucci Mane* is the story of Radric Delantic Davis, a 37-year-old rapper who started writing his memoir in 2014 while serving a two-year prison sentence. At its core it is the redemption story of the artist better known as Gucci Mane. "If I really wanted to start fresh, I was going to have to find closure with everything that landed me here," Mane writes. "Maybe I could do that in twenty-four months."

In 270 pages, the rapper (along with co-author Neil Martinez-Belkin) takes readers on a gripping ride. Born in Bessemer, Ala., Mane was introduced to hip-hop by his brother Duke. Together, they saw artists like Run-DMC and LL Cool J in concert. His father, Ralph Everett Dudley, had a strong influence on the rapper. Mane watched as his father hustled people for money, and the rapper would copy his father's skills—and take Dudley's nickname, "Gucci Mane." Dudley, he writes, taught him "how to size people up, how to read body language, and how to use that information for my benefit."

In the seventh grade, Mane began selling drugs. In 2001, he was arrested for the first time by police in Atlanta. The 21-year-old accepted a plea deal and was placed on probation. The arrest inspired Mane's decision to pursue a music career. He began working with Xavier Lamar Dotson, also known as Zaytoven, a D.J. and producer. Together, they gave birth to the rap sub-genre of "trap music," described by Mane as "music that sounds as grimy as the world that it came out of."

*Gucci Mane* brilliantly captures Mane's struggles and successes, providing an inside look into one of the most influential and prolific rappers of the 21st century. "I done made a lot of mistakes, and I feel like I'm a resilient person," Mane says in an NPR interview. "I shook it off and I kept going and I just want to let people know."

Written in a style that emulates the bravado, cool and effortless lyricism found in Gucci Mane's discography, this book will appeal both to rap fans and to those who want to learn more about the music that defines a generation.

Olga Segura, *associate editor*  
Twitter: @OlgaMSegura.



**The Autobiography of Gucci Mane**  
By Gucci Mane, Neil Martinez-Belkin  
Simon & Schuster. 304p \$27

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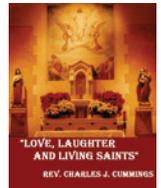
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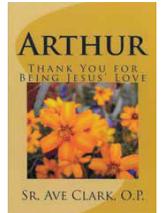
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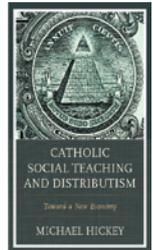
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## The multiple perspectives of David Hockney

David Hockney's subject is the very act of looking.

David Hockney, Britain's most celebrated living artist, turned 80 in July, giving museum curators in London, Paris and New York an occasion to mount a retrospective of his work over the last 60 years. The exhibition "David Hockney" is now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City through Feb. 25.

While Hockney's greatness as an artist is a subject of ongoing debate, the popularity of his work is beyond dispute. "A Bigger Splash" (1964), for instance, has become a cultural icon, with its flat-roofed California house, palm trees, pool and a splash with no sign of the one who caused it. We see the artist's sense of play here and the result of his experiment: to paint water suspended in air for a fleeting second. "Mount Fuji and Flowers" (1972), in which a blooming narcissus in a bamboo vase is set against a watery blue background and a snow-capped Mount Fuji, is the best-selling postcard at the Metropolitan Museum.

Yet Hockney's images might not have been so accessible. When he studied at the Royal College of Art in

London, Abstract Expressionism still reigned. His early works show an engagement with the expressionism of Jackson Pollock and the Cubism of Pablo Picasso. But Hockney soon began to blend representation (almost anathema at the time) and abstraction in portraits, landscapes, cityscapes and interiors. His buildings are the geometrical grids of Minimalist art and Modernist architecture; his people and interiors are constructed of simplified shapes, sometimes flattened, sometimes imaginary or remembered, rather than painted from life.

Hockney's choice of vivid colors, sometimes referred to as a "Matisse palette," are also popular. One might think of Hockney as a Matisse for our time, designing sets for operas and creating drawings and films big enough for viewers to inhabit.

Hockney's early adoption of the iPhone and iPad as artistic tools convey more than technological acumen, rare enough at his age. By relishing new technology the artist demonstrates his place in the vanguard and communicates his ideas to larger, younger audi-

ences. Several of Hockney's Polaroid collages are on view. The Polaroid that seems quaint now was new technology when Hockney made these works.

The retrospective begins with the artist's adolescent works on sexual identity and homosexuality (the "Love series"), acts criminalized until 1967 under British law. These works evince raw power and indignation. Later, in crisp, nearly life-sized, dual portraits—refined, restrained, even corporate looking by contrast—Hockney explores the various relationships of patrons and friends.

Hockney moved to California in the 1960s. There he recorded on canvas his infatuation with the sunny culture and lifestyle. The Yorkshire lad also drove across the country and found a red-rock Southwest unlike anything in England. In his paintings of the Grand Canyon and his views from road trips, Hockney offers his appreciation of the American landscape.

Hockney has also adapted the Cubist idea of showing multiple viewpoints in a single work. In "Large Interiors, Los Angeles" (1988), for example, the



artist shows viewers rooms in his own home. He has not fractured the space as Picasso or Braque would have done. Rather, the viewer seems to hover overhead, or to be floating above the room and its furnishings. The painting on the mantle is tipped up so a viewer can see its contents, as are wall paintings and the fireplace decoration.

Hockney's preoccupation with multiple perspectives can and should be broadly applied. To preserve the environment means looking not from our own backyard or from our own nation, but from the wider vantage point of the planet's air and water. To promote peace and prevent war means considering the viewpoints of people and groups unlike ourselves. These are examples of multiple perspective too.

Overall, Hockney's subject is the very act of looking. When he looks, Hockney tends to showcase beauty. It is part of his stance against despair.

---

*Karen Sue Smith is the former editorial director of America.*

## Lucky number 13

For the first time in 55 years, "Doctor Who," a series about an extraterrestrial adventurer traveling through time and space, will feature a woman in its title role. Jodie Whittaker will play the 13th doctor in Season 11, which starts later this year.

Doctor Who has been portrayed by over a dozen different actors, all white and male, but the character is always the same person. The show's explanation for the Doctor's different faces is the concept of regeneration, a process which allows the Doctor to change his form to circumvent death. Over the years, each incarnation of the Doctor have become known by the order in which they appear (excluding the out-of-sequence War Doctor). Audiences got a brief look at the 13th Doctor during last year's Christmas special.

In 2013 speculation first rose about a person of color being cast as the 12th Doctor. Steven Moffat, the showrunner, cast a black actor, but the offer fell through and Peter Capaldi got the role. During Capaldi's run, the episode "Hell Bent" showed a character named "The General" regenerate into a black woman. It was the first time a

change in gender happened on screen.

Thirteen will endure extra scrutiny because Whittaker is a woman. Fans want a woman Doctor who doesn't play into gender stereotypes and maintains the core tenets of the character's personality. The show has been using more women writers of late, and women may have their own writers' room this season. The Doctor's female form opens up the opportunity to tackle new themes. Viewers will get an honest depiction of what it is like to fight for justice and equality for marginalized people while being a person who faces those same issues because of gender. Seeing the world through the beloved Doctor's eyes may help many of the show's (mostly male) viewers understand the battle women fight just to exist and be respected.

---

*Tai Gooden is a freelance writer who has written for The Guardian, SyFy Fangrrls, BlackGirlNerds and Vice.*



Jodie Whittaker will play the 13th doctor in Season 11 of "Doctor Who."

Images: iStock, BBC One/Illustration: America

# He Speaks With Authority

Readings: Dt 18:14-20, Ps 95, 1 Cor 7:32-35, Mk 1:21-28

Someone who speaks with authority combines clarity of vision and compelling experience. A superb example appears in the movie “Scent of a Woman.” Early in the film, Charlie Simms (Chris O’Donnell) catches sight of a group of pranksters at the elite prep school he attends. Whether or not he recognizes the vandals is never clear. Headmaster Trask (James Rebhorn), however, believes Charlie knows exactly who they are. He attempts with promises and threats to wheedle the information out of him, even at the expense of the school’s traditions of integrity, courage and leadership. As Charlie continues to maintain that he never got a clear look at the vandals, Trask summons him to an all-school assembly to pressure him to come up with names.

Accompanying Charlie to the assembly is Lt. Col. Frank Slade, U.S. Army (ret.), played by Al Pacino. Slade recognizes that the process is a sham and will lead inexorably to Charlie’s expulsion. Slade turns things Charlie’s way, however, when he speaks on Charlie’s behalf. Though Slade is not an alumnus, his life experience and clear insights embody the school’s traditions in a way that Trask’s rhetoric never will. The headmaster’s self-centered grudge is obvious, in spite of his eloquence and appeals to virtue. Slade, by contrast, mesmerizes his listeners with his plain but confident speech and the authenticity of his experience. Trask can impress with learning or threaten with power, but Slade can speak with authority.

This is what Mark describes in this week’s Gospel passage. Jesus did not have scribal training; he did not have the full knowledge of the traditions and interpretations that surrounded the Scriptures. Scribes had carefully compiled these for centuries, and they took a lifetime to learn. Those who gave their lives to this learning were rightly proud of their role as Israel’s lore-keepers.

Jesus saw a problem. He also knew the Scriptures, and he applied them at home, in his workshop and among his family, friends, neighbors and employers. He recognized that although scribal traditions could open one to grace, they could also be a source of vanity, manipulation and snobbery. Jesus’ teaching, based on the same Scriptures

*‘What is this? A new teaching with authority.’  
(Mk 1:27)*



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What authentic truth has Christ taught you?

How can you embody Christ’s message with greater authenticity?

but reinforced with real experience, humility and clear vision, electrified his hearers.

In their thrill, they experienced something more. In the Book of Daniel, God gave his own authority to “one like a son of man,” who was coming to restore Israel’s freedom (7:14). Likewise, as we hear in this week’s first reading, God promised to send a prophet who would speak God’s own words to Israel. As Jesus spoke with authority, many came to believe that he was the fulfillment of these prophecies.

Jesus’ authority extended to power over illness. In this is guidance for our own discipleship. We all know leaders who speak of values but fail to embody them, who promise clear guidance but use their power instead to serve their ego. It is easy to wonder what to believe and to let a sense of anxious confusion affect all aspects of life. Those disciples who can live in Christ with authenticity will, through word and example, deliver others from this anxiety and all the trouble it brings. Then we, like Christ, can teach and heal with God’s own authority.

Michael Simone, S.J., teaches Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

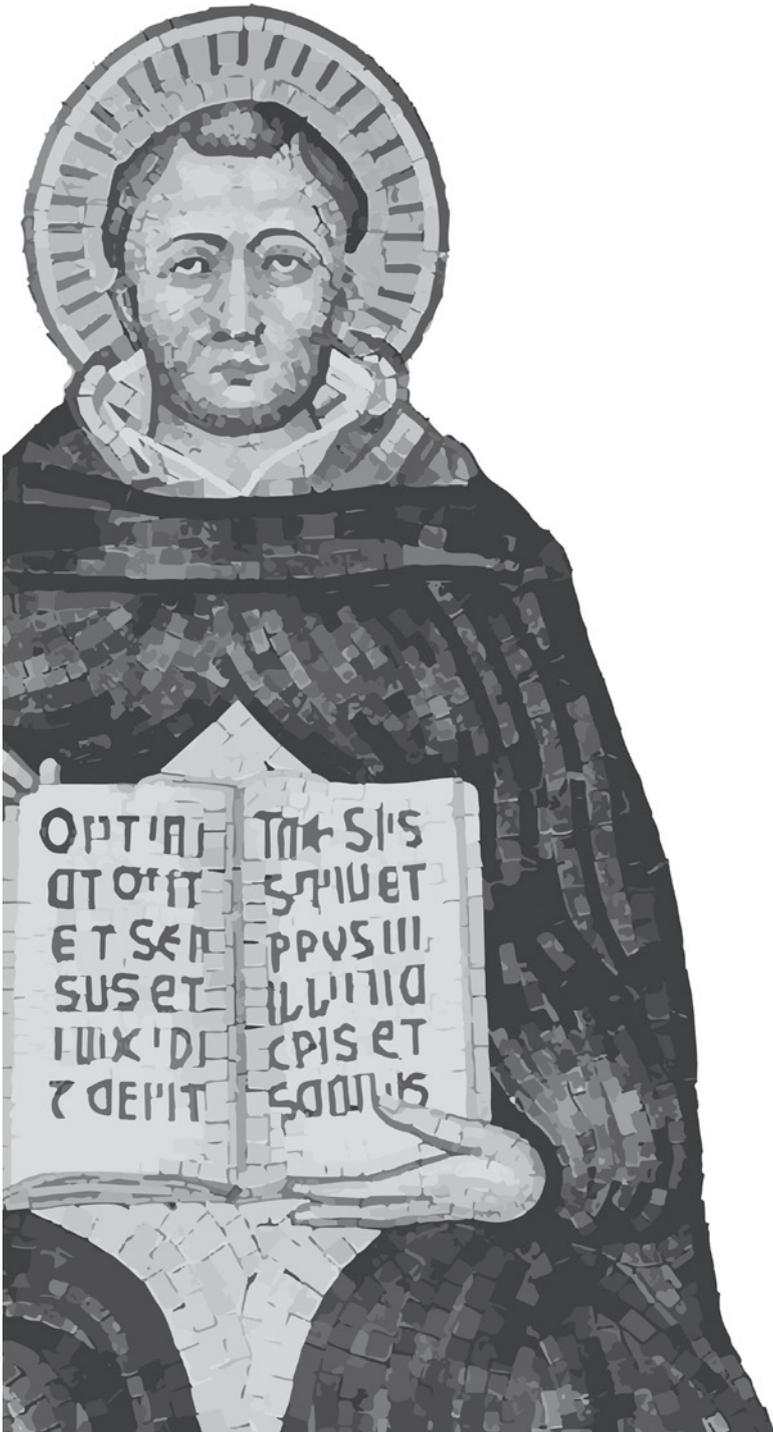
# Denys Turner

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*Aquinas, Augustine, & their Greater Friend*

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# For This Purpose I Have Come

Readings: Jb 7:1-7, Ps 147, 1 Cor 9:16-23, Mk 1:29-39

From its inception, Jesus' mission was the conquest of death. This is not always easy for modern Christians to understand. Most people today avoid thinking about death, or they try to spiritualize it with platitudes and euphemisms. Without an awareness of death's power, Jesus might seem little more than a wonder-working philosopher. The understanding of death in Jesus' day, by contrast, gave an importance to his healing ministry that we might not understand today. Death was God's great enemy. It was a thing with intellect and will. It stalked creation, hungering for the breath in every living throat. Death took advantage of every calamity and conflict to snatch away the gift of life that God had shared with creation. Jeremiah spoke of death in these terms when he lamented the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem: "Death has come up through our windows and has entered our citadels, to cut down children in the street and young people in our squares" (Jer 9:21).

Moreover, death had servants that prowled the world. Things like slavery, illness, demonic possession, war and oppression were the physical signs that death's servants were at work. This is the reality Job laments in our first

reading. Although he is alive, he already feels the grip of death closing around him as one calamity after another strikes his family.

This is the context, then, for the many miraculous healings Jesus performs in the opening chapters of Mark's Gospel. From the first moment of his ministry, Jesus was locked in battle with death. As he drove away demons and freed people from illness, he proved that the good news he preached was true, that it was at last the time of fulfillment, that God's kingdom was indeed at hand.

More than the other evangelists, Mark stresses the urgency of this message. Mark wrote during a time of great distress throughout the Roman world, but the story he told emphasized Jesus' subjugation of the causes of this distress. Jesus' work had a built-in multiplier effect. In Mark's account, the healing of one person (1:30) rapidly became the healing of the whole town (1:33-34) and led soon after to the deliverance of all Galilee (1:39). Jesus' ministry takes off like a brushfire, spreading the power of new life at a pace death cannot match.

In this week's second reading, St. Paul teaches us how to live out such a ministry in our own discipleship. The promise of the resurrection frees Christians from the kind of despair that haunted Job and Jeremiah and others who lived before Christ. Because St. Paul knew that the power of death was an illusion, he was able to thrive in situations that filled others with desolation. In a sense, St. Paul could "slip behind enemy lines," becoming weak to accompany the weak, and a slave to preach to slaves. Just so, Christ's disciples today must renew their confidence in the Lord's victory, and in that confidence place themselves in the company of any who still find themselves in death's grip. Our message of hope and our acts of mercy will reveal to all who despair that the kingdom of God is indeed at hand.

*He went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee. (Mk 1:39)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How has Jesus conquered death in your life?

How can you share that story to give hope to others?

Michael R. Simone, S.J., teaches Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

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# A Portrait in Black Catholicism

## Celebrating 40 years of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium

By C. Vanessa White



This year, the Black Catholic Theological Symposium will celebrate its 40th anniversary. The conference was started in 1978 by Thaddeus Posey, O.F.M., and sponsored by the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus. The first gathering took place in Baltimore at the motherhouse of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the country's first religious order of black women. There, 33 members gathered in prayer, discernment and dialogue to discuss the topic of black theology and its reception in the Catholic Church.

This first gathering included theologians like Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A., M. Shawn Copeland, Jamie Phelps, O.P., and the late Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. The scholars at the conference wanted to focus on defining black theology and challenge the association of terms like "black" and "black consciousness" with violence and separatism. "The distinct experience of being Black in this country and in the Church of the U.S.A. can only give profound validity to our singular understanding of racism and to the value of our contribution in dealing with it," stated the proceedings of the symposium's first conference, published in *Theology: A Portrait in Black*.

For 40 years, the B.C.T.S. has sought to share with the wider church the unique experience of living in a society that has not always valued the contributions or presence of black Catholics. Today, it includes over 60 members. Since its establishment, its members

have worked to form and educate the next generation of black Catholic leadership, through programs like the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana and the Augustus Tolton Pastoral Ministry Program at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

Its members have also published books, articles and resources on the black Catholic experience, including *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, by Bryan N. Massingale; *Anti-Blackness and Christian Ethics*, edited by Vincent W. Lloyd and Andrew Prevot; and *Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: A Womanist Theology*, by Diana Hayes. I, along with Cecilia A. Moore and the late Paul M. Marshall, S.M., wrote *Songs of Our Hearts, Meditations of Our Souls: Prayers for Black Catholics*. As a scholar whose focus is spirituality, it was important for me to assist in developing prayers and spiritual resources for black Catholics.

I have also served as convener at B.C.T.S. for three years. In my role as the public face of the organization, I promoted the scholarship and theological gifts of the black Catholic community at various theological gatherings. As convener, I had to be proactive in reminding associations and gatherings of Catholics, including the National Association of Lay Ministry, the Catholic Theological Society of America and the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership, that the voices of black

Catholics were often omitted or invisible in their planning.

Over these past years, the B.C.T.S. has joined members of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States in combating the rhetoric of hate and intolerance that has infected our national climate. In 2017, the B.C.T.S. published, along with the A.C.H.T.U.S., the "Statement Regarding the Most Recent Surge in Racist Hate Crimes in the United States." This statement, along with our joint summer colloquium "To Set the Captives Free," on the detention and incarceration of people of color, demonstrate the importance of theologian-activists and scholars from diverse communities learning from one another and working together to continue to advocate for racial and social justice.

The current leadership of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium includes Maurice Nutt, C.Ss.R, Kimberly Lymore, Timone Davis, Nathaniel Samuel and Kathleen Dorsey Bellow. As the leadership and members of the B.C.T.S. gather this year, may they continue to be guided by the Holy Spirit to work for justice within the church in the United States.

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**C. Vanessa White is a past convener of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium and assistant professor of spirituality and ministry at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.**

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