

America

FEBRUARY 3, 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE



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‘In Victory, Magnanimity’

Thirty-one years ago, on a cold February night, I stood on the South Lawn of the White House awaiting the president of the United States. George H. W. Bush had been in office for just over a month, and in one of his first official acts he had decided to attend the funeral of Hirohito, the emperor of Japan who had reigned before, during and after the Second World War and whose personal culpability for that conflict is still debated among historians.

I was a junior in high school that winter and had taken my first solo flight to Washington, D.C., to take part in a congressional seminar for young people, the highlight of which turned out to be this chance to see the president. If you are ever invited to watch the presidential helicopter land at the White House, I suggest you say yes. It is an impressive sight.

More impressive, however, is what President Bush had just done for his country and for Japan. That the president had flown halfway around the world to pay his respects to the Japanese emperor, a mere 44 years after the end of the war in the Pacific, represented a major milestone in the new relationship between our countries. That George Bush had personally done this was even more significant. He was, after all, a former U.S. Navy pilot, who was shot down by the Japanese in an engagement that killed his crewmates and nearly cost him his life. Japanese combatants had killed many of his comrades and friends. In turn, Lieutenant Bush had killed many Japanese sailors and airmen. And yet, as he said in 1991 at an event commemorating the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, “I can still see the faces of fallen comrades, and I’ll bet you can still see the

faces, too. [But] just speaking for one guy, I have no rancor in my heart.”

The war in the Pacific was one of the deadliest, ugliest conflicts in human history, marked by a savagery unprecedented in warfare and brought to a close only by the deadliest weapon ever devised. Millions perished in the cataclysm. Yet in the decades after the war, men who had fought through the horror and then entered public life took up the task of reconciliation. John F. Kennedy, whose PT boat was famously sunk by a Japanese torpedo, welcomed the Japanese prime minister to the White House in June 1961. At the time of his assassination in 1963, President Kennedy was planning a visit to Japan that would have been the first by a sitting U.S. president.

In 1971, President Richard Nixon, who had served in combat in the Solomon Islands, welcomed Hirohito during his first visit to the United States, during a stopover in Alaska. In 1974, Nixon’s successor, Gerald R. Ford, who had served on the U.S.S. *Monterey* during combat in the Pacific, became the first U.S. president to visit Japan. To everyone’s surprise, Mr. Ford was met by a Japanese band playing the University of Michigan football song, “Hail to the Victors.”

“In War: Resolution,” Winston Churchill once wrote, “In Defeat: Defiance. In Victory: Magnanimity. In Peace: Good Will.” Christians have another word for magnanimity and for good will. As the historian John Meacham reminded us, it is the last word George H. W. Bush used in his diary to sum up his personal life code: “Be strong. Do your best. Try hard. Forgive.”

Forgive. I don’t know whether these presidents ever described their

diplomacy with Japan as an act of forgiveness, but it sure looks like that from here, for the result of their efforts is a friendship between our two nations that, though it has been put to the test, still endures and is a source of strength for both countries.

The next time someone suggests that forgiveness is naïve or impractical, we should remember this history. In so many places, at so many times, forgiveness is the only way out. In that sense, nothing is more practical.

•••

On Jan. 17 America Media announced that Traug Keller has been appointed executive vice president and chief operating officer. Mr. Keller began his career at The New York Times Company, then worked his way up through the ranks of ABC to become president of the ABC Radio Network. Most recently, he was senior vice president at ESPN, the global sports network, where he led ESPN Audio and the ESPN Talent Office. Under his leadership, ESPNRadio became the most listened-to live stream of any terrestrial broadcaster in the world.

Mr. Keller is also a graduate of two Jesuit schools, Fairfield Prep and Boston College. He served on the board of trustees of the former. And most important, he is a lifelong reader of **America**. We are pleased to welcome him to our team as we chart a course for the next phase of America Media’s transformation.

As always, I am grateful to you, our readers, who make it all possible. Thank you.

Matt Malone, S.J.
Twitter: @americaeditor.



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AP Photo/Vadim Chirida

Children with Down syndrome hug before performing in a dance show, in Bucharest, Romania, in December 2019. During Romania’s communist era, children with disabilities were shunned.

Cover: “Francis ‘neath the Bitter Tree,” by William Hart McNichols. Father McNichols ministered to people with AIDS at Saint Vincent’s Hospital in New York.

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2019's most spiritually significant films

To mark the 92nd Academy Awards, which will take place on Feb. 9, **America** turned to its Catholic Movie Club discussion group on Facebook for recommendations about the most spiritually significant film they saw in 2019. Results were not limited to the Academy's nominees.

"A Hidden Life" tells the story of the conscientious objector and martyr Franz Jägerstätter. Jägerstätter explicitly posed, and his story continues to pose, some of the most fundamental questions about the Christian life: At what point is an individual Christian required to oppose and resist evil, instead of tolerating it? At what point is the sacrifice of one's own comfort and even safety a moral imperative? In short, as a character in the film says: Are we content merely to admire Christ or are we going to actually follow him, as he invites us to do? In addition to its content, which includes more depictions of intimate, personal prayer than I have ever seen in a film, the film is made in such a way that the experience of watching it is itself an act of contemplation. This film is not only about prayer, it is a prayer.

Christopher Rivers

Granby, Mass.

"Parasite." Bong Joon-ho's commentary on the way modern capitalism breeds disconnection, inequality and diminished respect for human dignity is brilliant, brutal, creative, vulnerable and sensitive.

Chad Evans

San Francisco, Calif.

"Biggest Little Farm." It's a beautiful journey of two young, aspiring farmers, evoking Genesis and affirming "Laudato Si'."

Lisa Woodall

Cincinnati, Ohio

"The Last Black Man in San Francisco." I saw many movies in 2019, but this is the one that most deeply connected me to my eternal communion with Christ. I can't think of a movie that I saw this year that is so reflective of the ways I was taught in my 13 years of Jesuit education to see God's presence in the face of personal pain, growth, compassion and, finally, fulfillment.

Nick Bergeman

Detroit, Mich.

"A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood." Mr. Rogers treated the skeptical reporter with transcendent love. The movie is all about love. In our tense national climate, the movie is timely and based on a true story. I watched Mr. Rogers as a little girl in the 1960s. Then I watched with my own girl and boy in the '90s. Later, I thought of him when I led children's liturgy with puppets. We even sang his song, "You are my friend," there. One of my favorite parts of the Bible is when Christ says, "I call you my friends." I still quote Rogers's alter-ego, Daniel Tiger!

Kate Brown Torrella

Pittsfield Township, Mich.

Martin Scorsese's "The Irishman." You can say what you will about the facts (or lack thereof) that surround the story of "The Irishman," but deep inside the film lies a story of sorrow, regret and the complicated nature of both. The entire film is a confession. The film begins with a nameless, faceless, floating presence that finds Frank Sheeran (Robert De Niro) in a retirement home. Upon their "meeting," Sheeran immediately begins confessing his lifelong list of transgressions, the fruits and the sorrows of those transgressions and his complications in coming to terms with whether or not he is, in fact, sorry for them. It is a beautiful, if not poignant look at a life of sin, the opportunity we are given for forgiveness and the decision we make to seek it...or not.

Mike Moore

Portland, Ore.



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Congress Must Limit the President's War Powers

As a consequence of the drone strike used to kill Qassim Suleimani, the commander of Iran's Quds Force, the United States has been reminded that the legal question of when and whether the use of military force is legitimate has been left murky by design. In the days immediately following the strike, President Trump and various administration officials provided a variety of legal justifications, some of them overlapping and conflicting.

Most of these justifications depend upon the 2002 Authorization for the Use of Military Force Against Iraq, which is still in force today. (The 2001 A.U.M.F. against those involved in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks also remains in force.) While presidents have many avenues through which to justify the use of the military—pre-eminently through the inherent powers of the commander in chief to act in defense of the United States—such “statutory authorizations” from Congress have become, under the terms of the War Powers Resolution of 1973, the standard model by which military interventions are legitimated.

When the A.U.M.F. was passed in 2002, legislative debate was focused on reports (since discredited) of the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. That the authorization

could be used almost two decades later to justify the targeted killing of Iran's top general certainly was not in the minds of those who voted for it, many of whom have since been replaced in Congress.

But the killing of General Suleimani is only the latest—and by no means unique—example of reliance on an A.U.M.F. long after its passage and far outside its reasonable scope. When President Obama used a drone strike to kill 150 people in Somalia in 2016, he justified that action under the 2001 A.U.M.F., arguing that the targets were Islamist terrorists, part of the “associated forces” of Al Qaeda against whom Congress had authorized military force.

The problem is that such justifications have become largely pro forma because Congress has not provided itself with a mechanism to reject or limit them or even to regularly debate whether they have been misused. Indeed, it is more accurate to say that with these A.U.M.F.s, Congress has instead abdicated its constitutional responsibility for declarations of war. Democratic candidates for the 2020 presidential election are still arguing about how they voted on the 2002 Iraq authorization. There is plenty of motivation for legislators to avoid going on the record,

handing off these choices and their consequences to the president.

In addition to undermining the constitutional separation of powers, this state of affairs makes unwise and unjust use of military force more likely. Even if Congress does rouse itself to object, revoking an A.U.M.F. and limiting the president's authorization for force would often require a veto-proof majority. Absent that, the status quo is a continuation of armed conflict in whatever way the president deems justified.

Any “statutory authorization” under the War Powers Resolution should have an expiration clause, and the War Powers Resolution itself should be amended to require this. If Congress had to vote every 180 days to extend these authorizations, the initial debates about whether or not to start down these roads would look far different. The president would still have inherent authority to defend the United States against attacks but would not hold a blank check for military intervention.

If Congress cannot muster the votes to authorize military action—or the courage to conduct a debate about it—the default should be the cessation of conflict, not ongoing and endless war.

How Not to Respond to Sluggish Population Growth

In December, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the nation's population rose by only 0.5 percent between 2018 and 2019, the slowest rate of growth in 100 years, since an influenza epidemic contributed to a decline in the number of Americans in 1918. Ten states actually lost population. The demographer

William H. Frey calculated the total growth over the past decade at 6.7 percent and told *The New York Times* this would be the lowest since the government started taking population counts around 1790. “This is even lower than the Great Depression,” he said of the 2010s.

Two factors are primarily respon-

sible for this slowdown. The country's “natural increase” (births minus deaths) is declining steadily, as people wait longer to have children; and the annual number of immigrants to the United States has dropped by almost half since President Trump took office, partly as a result of policies like turning away refugees (see story on

Page 12). By contrast, Canada recorded a population growth of 1.4 percent from 2018 to 2019, almost all of it attributable to an increase in the number of immigrants admitted to that country.

A population slowdown may not sound bad in this climate change era, as we try to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other causes of injury to our environment. Unfortunately, a sustained population loss would be incompatible with economic growth. Fewer people would mean a decline in business activity, imminent labor shortages and a worsening age imbalance that would leave more senior citizens without enough caregivers.

Population decline has already taken hold in many parts of the world, including Japan, Russia and several Eastern European nations. One of them, Hungary, has not grown in 40 years, but Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is staunchly opposed to admitting more immigrants. Instead, he is pursuing a “procreation over immigration” strategy to achieve growth, combining tax exemptions for mothers with free in-vitro fertilization treatments at state-run fertility clinics.

A culture of life needs children, and the United States could certainly do more to help family formation by making child care, health coverage and housing more affordable. But Mr. Orbán’s approach has the uncomfortable feel of treating family formation as a mere economic transaction, even as it shuts the door on refugees and other immigrants who have historically revitalized and energized modern nations. The United States should pursue both a healthy birth rate and a welcoming attitude toward newcomers in order to maintain population growth.

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The humanities are ‘pointless,’ and that is the point of studying them

A few years ago, I was discussing the state of humanities education with a friend, a literature teacher in his 40s who was born in Italy. “When I was a kid, we never justified the humanities,” he said. “My mother didn’t know Latin. But she thought I should study it because Latin was part of the world, part of the reality of things.”

I have come to see the wisdom of this remark. It holds the key to defending the humanities in American universities today.

In the United States, Catholic universities, especially Jesuit ones, still for the most part have humanities requirements. But elsewhere humanities education is imperiled and undervalued. One reason is our quasi-utilitarian value system. Under this system, the humanities are only worth studying if they are useful for something like ethical training or developing business skills. The latest version of this argument holds that Silicon Valley leaders should have studied literature and philosophy to avoid unethical applications of new technology. But thinking about literature and philosophy exclusively as *useful*—in effect, as tools—ultimately undermines their worth.

The humanities should be studied for their own sake. One reads *The Great Gatsby* in order to enjoy the novel, to live within its imaginary world and to learn about our own world through its refracted image of the same. There is a sense in which the humanities are useless because they are not practical, at least not in a way that can be measured with statistics. They build up the soul only indirectly and over the period of a lifetime (as any teacher who receives appreciative emails from students several years after their graduation can

attest). This building up of the soul is often part of a spiritual birth or a political awakening.

But our politics can illustrate how difficult it is for our culture to properly value the humanities. When he was the Republican governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker proposed removing the terms “search for truth” and “improve the human condition” from the mission statement of the state university system, replacing them with “meet the state’s workforce needs.” As a Democratic president, Barack Obama once disparaged art history as a major. Even in France, President Nicolas Sarkozy complained that civil service entrance exams included questions concerning a classic novel, *La Princesse de Clèves*—implying that getting a public sector job required a minimal familiarity with literature.

There is something to be said for this way of thinking. In the United States especially, students are saddled with college loan debt, and they have every right to expect a return on their investment. But the fact that Mr. Obama immediately corrected himself and said he had nothing against art history as such shows just how shaky pure utilitarianism is. Even though he had little time for *La Princesse de Clèves*, Mr. Sarkozy followed the French tradition of celebrating great artists wherever they are found when he made public remarks lamenting Norman Mailer’s death; for his part, Mr. Obama entered into a fascinating public dialogue with the writer Marilynne Robinson.

Every major political ideology has thinkers who have lamented our utilitarian culture. The socialist William Deresiewicz has criticized neoliberalism and its impact on the

humanities, arguing for an education that builds the soul rather than provides marketable skill training. Conservatives like Russell Kirk speak of “permanent things” and the nonutilitarian value of a liberal education. The political philosopher Michael Sandel, often tagged as a communitarian, has sought to distinguish a market economy from a market society, arguing that not all values should be market values. Classical liberals have also argued as much—see Mario Vargas Llosa in his book *Notes on the Death of Culture*, in which he decries the reduction of all cultural value to commodified entertainment.

When time or money is spent for the sake of enjoying something without added benefits, it is a protest against utility. In my own teaching, I admire the way students, under constant pressure to compete for grades and internships and jobs, or under the stress of having to work part-time to afford tuition, are often able to forget all that and let themselves be fascinated by an idea, a work of art or a philosopher.

We need more such moments of rebellion against utility. These occasions can lay the groundwork for a gradual cultural transformation, where utility is not the only source of value, and where the humanities can be taught and enjoyed without appealing to any extraneous advantage that can be received from them. Why study history or philosophy or literature? Simply because they are worth studying.

Santiago Ramos teaches philosophy at Boston College.



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Trump administration executive order creates new barriers to refugees

By Kevin Clarke

New bureaucratic obstacles created by an executive order from the Trump administration forced refugee advocates to scramble in December and January. Advocates say refugee programs have for years placed people fleeing global conflict or humanitarian crises in communities across the United States without controversy. But the president's executive order requires for the first time that resettlement agencies get written consent from state and local officials in any jurisdiction where they hope to place refugees after June 2020.

The new federal mandate generated a giant headache for Sandy Buck, the regional director of Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Charlotte in North Carolina, one no doubt shared by other Catholic Charities directors around the nation. "This has really been a bear for me because of the time that it's taken up," she said. "It's created chaos, which I think it was designed to do."

According to the order, the administration seeks to take into account the preferences of state governments "and to provide a pathway for refugees to become self-sufficient."

"These policies support each other," the order states. "Close cooperation with state and local governments ensures that refugees are resettled in communities that are eager and equipped to support their successful integration

into American society and the labor force."

Immigration advocates challenged the executive order in federal court, and on Jan. 15, a Maryland justice issued a preliminary injunction, blocking the order as "arbitrary" and contrary to the intent of Congress. The White House has so far not indicated if it intends to contest the court ruling.

When Mr. Trump issued his executive order in September, "it was very unclear what we were supposed to do," Ms. Buck said. A storm of conference calls and discussions with Catholic Charities affiliates and with representatives of the other eight national organizations engaged in refugee resettlement followed. She added that people in local government "had no idea what was happening and didn't understand refugee resettlement."

"So we had to do a lot of educating and trying to help people understand what we were talking about when we say 'refugee resettlement,'" she said. "Unfortunately, the word refugee has a very negative connotation because of things in the news."

Some county officials, she said, equated the handful of refugees that Catholic Charities of Charlotte was assisting with images in the media of desperate people pressing up against the borders of European countries in flight from

Refugees and migrants are rescued from an overcrowded rubber boat 60 miles off the Libyan coast in February 2018.



AP Photo/Olmo Calvo, file

conflict in the Middle East. Ms. Buck explained to officials that most of the clients accepted by her office represented family reunification cases. Most refugees coming to the Charlotte area are escaping conflict in Ukraine, Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of Congo, according to Ms. Buck.

What she hears back are local politicians expressing a “fear of the unknown,” she said, advising her that “putting families together, we’re O.K. with that,” but expressing alarm at new arrivals from “third world countries” and specifically Syria.

“Unfortunately, this is becoming a political issue,” she said. “It should be a humanitarian issue.”

Despite the new administrative and political pain, Bill Canny, executive director of the U.S. bishops’ Office of Migration and Refugee Services, had some good news to report on Jan. 9. “We have 41 ‘years’ so far,” he said, explaining that governors across the country, both Democratic and Republican, had agreed to keep their states open to refugee placements.

But just a day after Mr. Canny’s optimistic assessment, Greg Abbott, the Republican governor of Texas, announced that his state would become the first to refuse the resettlement of new refugees. The governor’s decision was quickly criticized by the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops, which called the move “discouraging and disheartening” and “simply misguided.”

“It denies people who are fleeing persecution, including religious persecution, from being able to bring their gifts and talents to our state and contribute to the general, common good of all Texans,” the Texas bishops said in a statement released on Jan. 10. “The refugees who have already resettled in Texas have made our communities even more vibrant,” they said. “As Catholics, an essential aspect of our faith is to welcome the stranger and care for the alien.”

In a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, released to the press on Jan. 10, Governor Abbott, a Catholic, wrote

that Texas “has been left by Congress to deal with disproportionate migration issues resulting from a broken federal immigration system.” He said that Texas has done “more than its share.”

“At this time, the state and nonprofit organizations have a responsibility to dedicate available resources to those who are already here, including refugees, migrants, and the homeless—indeed, all Texans,” he argued.

A number of Republican governors across the South, and in Hawaii and Wyoming, have yet to make a decision on resettlement, but fellow Republicans who have consented to refugee placements within their state borders have faced some tough intraparty criticism for those decisions.

Ms. Buck believes the consent hurdle thrown up by the Trump administration reflects an undeclared effort to sharply reduce refugee placements in the United States, even as the global number of internally displaced and refugees, at 71 million, represents the gravest crisis of uprooted people since the end of World War II.

Each year since his election in 2016, Mr. Trump has lowered the presidential determination for refugee admittance, a kind of refugee quota (actual resettlement numbers are usually lower). Refugee ceilings of 70,000 to more than 90,000 had been consistent since 1987, but the presidential determination last year was just 30,000; and the president agreed to allow no more than 18,000 refugees into the United States for 2020—a historic low.

“At Catholic Charities in Charlotte, we used to resettle 350 to 400 refugees a year,” Ms. Buck said. And last year? “About 157.”

“We were happy to get 18,000” for 2020, said Ms. Buck, “but my sense is that [the Trump administration] would like it to be zero.”

And as the numbers decline, the viability of refugee resettlement offices diminishes with them.

“Our leadership is entirely dedicated to keeping the program open,” said Ms. Buck. During other periods when arrivals were low, she said, Charlotte Catholic Charities kept the office afloat with private donations. “But if [the presidential determination] goes to zero next year, I would imagine that the program would have to go away. We can’t sustain it without new arrivals.”

Mr. Canny reports that as many as 25 Catholic Charities refugee offices around the country have already closed. “The agencies are being reimbursed on a per refugee arrival basis,” he said, “so it’s just extremely difficult for them to

maintain staff to support and assist these refugee families with housing, health care, education for their kids” and other services like English as a second language programs.

He added that the Trump administration plans to shut out an undisclosed number of the nine social service agencies that manage resettlement agencies next year. “We all have been duly warned that given the lower number of refugees coming in, they may eliminate the entire infrastructure of some of the nine agencies.”

That will likely sound just fine to critics of refugee resettlement programs, who perceive refugees as an unwelcome social and economic burden and who frequently accuse church-based providers like Catholic Charities of cashing in on federal largess through their assistance programs for refugees.

“That’s entirely incorrect,” Mr. Canny said. While he hopes that support staff are paid a fair wage, he explained that federal contracts are based on well-defined formulas and audited spending expectations per individual refugee client. A percentage is retained by affiliates for their overhead and staffing costs.

“Those affiliates have been bleeding over the last few years,” he said. “What we do know is that for the Catholic agencies, the money that is given by the federal government is supplemented by donations in kind and in cash and many, many volunteer hours. The [local] Catholic church and their community participate heavily in this program.”

“Our faith calls us to welcome the stranger, but people still have to feed their family,” Ms. Buck said. “They can’t be

expected to do it for free.”

Refugee settlement is “not a moneymaker” for Catholic Charities, she added. “We’re just trying to keep the lights on and pay our people a fair wage to do some sometimes very difficult work.

“We do depend on people of good will to help with the programs,” she said, noting donations of furniture that help fill empty apartments for new arrivals, as well as volunteers who develop “mentor-type relationships with people coming in to help them acclimate, learn the language, learn the culture.”

“It is a public-private partnership,” Mr. Canny said of the federal process for supporting incoming refugees, “and it’s a good partnership that’s been built historically on mutual trust, understanding and information- and cost-sharing. Under this administration, that partnership has been disrupted.”

Mr. Canny hopes before too long to see a changing attitude about refugees in contemporary U.S. political culture, restoring a perception of these new arrivals as vibrant and welcome contributors to U.S. life. “These refugees come over, they’re hungry to work.... These refugees are actually an asset to us both economically and, frankly, culturally.”

He added, “I would say, finally, they give us an opportunity to exercise our compassion, and we need opportunities to be compassionate.

“They build our own humanity,” Mr. Canny said.

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent*.
Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.

FEWER REFUGEES FIND A SAFE HAVEN IN THE UNITED STATES

WHERE ARE THEY COMING FROM?

Top five countries of origin 2019

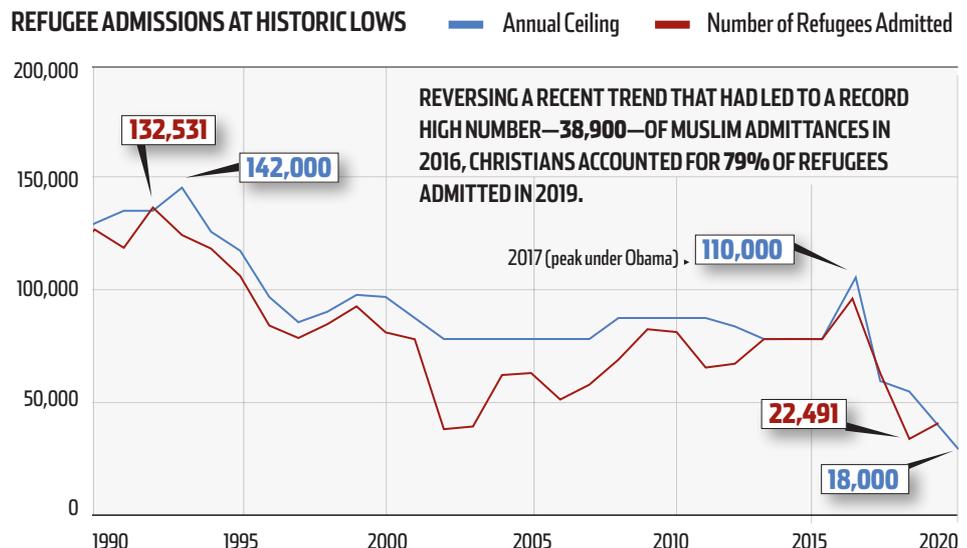
| | |
|-------------|---------------|
| D.R. Congo | 13,000 |
| Myanmar | 4,900 |
| Ukraine | 4,500 |
| Eritrea | 1,800 |
| Afghanistan | 1,200 |

WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

Top five states for resettlement 2019

| | |
|------------|--------------|
| Texas | 2,500 |
| Washington | 1,900 |
| New York | 1,800 |
| California | 1,800 |
| Kentucky | 1,400 |

REFUGEE ADMISSIONS AT HISTORIC LOWS



Sources: “Key Facts About Refugees to the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, Oct. 7, 2019; Migration Policy Institute.

The German Military Cemetery at Manicourt in the Somme region of France

Burying Germany's war dead is a delicate work of mercy

Courtesy German War Cemetery via Wikimedia Commons

The Christian corporal work of mercy “to bury the dead” is perhaps nowhere more challenging—and challenged—than when it comes to the remains of German soldiers who died during World War II. Millions of German soldiers were killed or went missing in action in that conflict, according to Diane Tempel-Bornett, spokeswoman for the German War Graves Commission. The commission’s goal is to locate and bury all German war dead with dignity.

“For us Germans, it is not easy to remember our dead because they brought about terrible atrocities with two world wars,” Ms. Tempel-Bornett said. “That is why German war cemeteries are minimalistic. For the Germans there can be no hero tributes.

“Nevertheless, these German soldiers, fallen as invaders across Europe,” she said, “are also sons and fathers, brothers and beloved husbands. Thus every mourning is justified.”

Locating, identifying and burying these remains is no easy task and has met with opposition for decades. Strong resentments are still present in countries whose people were victimized by the German Army during World War II.

The Soviet Union once stood firmly against locating German war graves in Russian territory. Information on German war dead in the U.S.S.R. was made fully available only after its collapse in 1991. The German cemetery in Prague remained derelict and was vandalized for more than 50 years because of bitter feelings left over from the war. And the decayed remains of 4,000 German soldiers were stored in cardboard boxes in a factory in the Czech Republic for more than 60 years.

Yet the steel-helmeted soldiers who once terrified the world left behind grieving family members and descendants—many of whom were children in the postwar era and lived in a state of limbo, not knowing the location or circumstances of their relative’s death. Some Germans have

spent decades trying to discover what happened to missing or dead relatives.

While among the deceased are people who may have been guilty of crimes during life, commission members say, all human beings are entitled to a decent burial. Ms. Tempel-Bornett said she has witnessed many personal expressions of relief and tragedy in putting the individual dead to rest: an older man who expressed both sorrow and happiness attending the 2018 burial of his father, missing since 1944, in Russia and a 94-year-old woman who brought earth from her South German home region to sprinkle on her brother’s grave in the Caucasus.

“For many, it is a great relief to know that their fathers and grandfathers are buried with human dignity in a maintained military cemetery,” she said. “I have constantly experienced people say, ‘At last the circle has closed. I am thankful to know where he is buried.’”

Remains of German soldiers continue to be discovered. Recently nearly 2,000 bodies were found near the site of the Battle of Stalingrad in Russia, and another estimated 100 were unearthed in Estonia in 2018. “We recover continuously about 20,000 dead per year; we can identify just under half of them,” said Ms. Tempel-Bornett.

The commission has adopted “Reconciliation Over the Graves” as its official motto and works with youth groups from different countries to promote international peace and tolerance. “We want as the War Graves Commission to do everything we can to preserve peace and to use our war graves as learning places, so that young people can learn from the past and above all from the failures of history,” said Ms. Tempel-Bornett.

Zita Ballinger Fletcher, *journalist and author.*
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Bushfire crisis calls Australia's Catholics to action and prayer

Catholic churches and volunteers have been joining fellow Australians in offering prayers and providing much-needed disaster relief to people caught up in the bushfire crisis playing out across the country. At the same time, the nation's Catholics have started to reflect on their long-term responsibilities in the face of this unprecedented environmental catastrophe.

By the end of the first week of January, 25 people had been killed and many more had been injured as the fires continued to rage. An estimated one billion animals have perished, and over six million hectares of land—around 24,000 square miles—have been devastated by the fires, which have been burning since September. Entire towns have been evacuated, and thousands of homes have been lost.

The Rev. Tony Percy, vicar general for the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, said that two parishioners have died in fires in his archdiocese and 13 have lost their homes. Parishioners in Kiah on the southern coast of New South Wales have lost their church; it had been opened in 1929 after bushfires destroyed the original building in 1926.

“Let’s pray together, let’s work together, and let’s stick together in this time of crisis,” Father Percy urged parishioners.

One of the largest charitable organizations in Australia, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, has contributed to the bushfire response in all affected states and territories.

Vinnies, as society members are called in Australia, will be working for the long term.

“Disasters don’t just go away,” said Rick Williams, a volunteer assisting in Queensland. “We’ll be there, no matter how long it takes.” Through their Vinnies Bushfire Appeal, the society is providing food for evacuees as well as clothing, household items and financial assistance to those recovering from bushfires.

The Rev. Peter Slater is the vicar general of the Diocese of Sale. “Many homes have been destroyed by fire,” Father Slater told **America**. “Many farm sheds and much equipment has been destroyed. Much of the bush has been burnt, and much native wildlife has probably been killed as well as farm stock.”

But the community response has been overwhelming, Father Slater said. People have donated goods and money, so that local businesses can continue to operate.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge, the president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, called the bushfire crisis “an unprecedented calamity,” observing that “there is no end in sight to the horror which confronts us with our powerlessness before the devastating force of nature.” He called for “urgent action to care for our common home in order to prevent such calamities in the future.”

Some Australian Catholics have already started to



CNS photo/Dan Peled, AAP Image via Reuters

Sharnie Moren and her 18-month-old daughter, Charlotte, look on near Nana Glen, Australia, as thick smoke rises from bushfires on Nov. 12, 2019.

discuss the root ecological and political causes of the crisis. Experts say climate change has been a key contributing factor. Speaking from Sydney, Bernard Holland, director of Catholic Earthcare Australia, the ecological advisory agency to the church in Australia, told **America** that he “laments the scorched earth, upon which our unique fauna and flora have been extinguished by the millions.”

Australia is “a society where ‘the precautionary principle’—the basic tenet of caring for our common home, including human survival—has never been publicly discussed and certainly not implemented,” he said. He believes, however, that the Catholic Church can work in the community to address that failure. Mr. Holland said that his agency brings its message to “our schools, parishes and health sectors through ‘formation of the heart’ programs.”

“This is the hope we need,” he said, “hope for our future generations and hope for our civil and ecological environments.”

Ben Wilkie contributes from Western Victoria, Australia.
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CNS photo/Vatican Media

Francesca Di Giovanni in an undated photo with Pope Francis

GOODNEWS: Pope Francis appoints a woman to a senior Vatican role

For the first time in history, Pope Francis has appointed a woman to a senior managerial position in the Vatican’s Secretariat of State, naming Francesca Di Giovanni second under secretary of the secretariat’s Section for Relations With States. Ms. Di Giovanni will help coordinate Vatican relations with organizations like the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the International Monetary Fund and will work on issues like economic development, the environment and the status of women.

Born in Palermo, Sicily, in 1953, Ms. Di Giovanni graduated with a degree in law and worked at the International Center of the Opera di Maria (Work of Mary) of the Focolare Movement, of which she is a member. She has worked as an official in the Section for Relations With States of the Secretariat of State since September 1993, the Vatican said when it announced her appointment on Jan. 15.

Ms. Di Giovanni told Vatican media that she was “absolutely surprised” by Pope Francis’ decision to appoint her. “The Holy Father has taken an innovative decision, certainly, which—beyond my person—represents a sign of attention toward women,” she said.

She recalled that Pope Francis in his homily for the World Day of Peace on Jan. 1 of this year declared: “Women are givers and mediators of peace and should be fully included in decision-making processes. Because when women can share their gifts, the world finds itself more united, more peaceful.”

Ms. Di Giovanni added, “I would like to contribute so that this vision...may be realized, together with the other colleagues who work in this sector of the Secretariat of State, but also with other women—and they are many—who work to build fraternity also in this international dimension.”

Gerard O’Connell, Vatican correspondent.
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MOVING BEYOND THE RHYTHM METHOD

Catholic groups offer high-tech, effective options for couples seeking to use fertility awareness based methods of family planning. But first they need more access to them.

By Simcha Fisher

It is no secret: Natural family planning has its discontents. A number of studies have shown that few Catholics use it, and it is not hard to see why. N.F.P. can be difficult, it can be frustrating, and occasionally it is impossible. I am a discontent myself, albeit a stubbornly faithful one, which is why I wrote a whole book about how ordinary, non-saintly couples can learn to navigate the spiritual, emotional and marital problems that N.F.P. sometimes brings into sharp focus.

N.F.P. is worth learning well and sticking with, despite all the trials it can bring. When we were first married, my husband and I did not know how to communicate well. We did not understand what sex was really about. We had no clue about how God's will actually works in our lives. Sacrificial patience, generosity and transformative suffering were mysteries to us. They are not mysteries now but are daily practices, thanks in part to the rigors of N.F.P. I

wrote my book to let other struggling couples know they are not alone, and that their suffering does not have to be in vain.

But one thing my book did not cover was the logistical obstacles to using fertility awareness based methods of family planning successfully. (Most now shy away from the more colloquial label N.F.P.) These obstacles are not negligible. It was not long ago that we desperately wanted to switch to another fertility awareness based method that would work better with my body, but we simply did





not have the money; so we were stuck with an unsuitable method that caused frustration and confusion. Some struggling is inevitable and can bring about growth; but some is avoidable and causes only pain. A small cash grant would have made a world of difference for our family.

I wondered how common our experience was; so I designed some surveys and shared them on social media and on my personal website, targeting women who use or have used a wide range of different forms of fertility awareness methods. Nearly 700 women responded. Here is what I learned.

Some women love N.F.P. Some of them find it cheap and simple and empowering. Some of them find it pricey and labor intensive, but well worth the cost. Some of them say it healed their bodies, enriched their marriages and drew them closer to God.

But for others, N.F.P. brought one trial after another. The church teaches us to forgo birth control, and so they did, whether out of obedience, love of spouse or a desire to understand their own health better. But even if they were willing to take on the spiritual and psychological challeng-



You might think every parish and diocese would offer numerous, easily accessible, affordable ways to learn fertility awareness based family planning. You would be wrong. 🍷🍷

es of N.F.P., they found themselves stymied by logistical problems beyond their control—things that could easily be solved with something as mundane as money, or better marketing, or better organization or even something as simple as a babysitter.

Oddly enough, even as the church struggles to interest its flock in fertility awareness based methods for spiritual reasons, fertility awareness is having a moment in the secular world. *Cosmopolitan* gave N.F.P. some positive press, and so did *The New York Times*. The interest is fuelled partly by a slow but growing disenchantment with artificial contraception among women of a variety of backgrounds and faiths. There are now countless fertility awareness based methods (usually paired with targeted condom use in secular circles) on the market; and women, religious or not, are snapping them up. You can buy bluetooth-enabled super-thermometers for \$300 and compact fertility monitors straight out of *Star Trek* that smile at you when you are fertile. It is a far cry from the days of a scrap of graph paper, a thermometer and crossed fingers.

There are dozens of slick fertility apps, many free, some with millions of downloads. Women who have no idea that the church pioneered fertility awareness are turning to fertility awareness methods because they cannot seem to get pregnant or because they are thoroughly sick of birth control side-effects like migraines, blood clots or mood swings and wandering I.U.D.s; and they are ready for something else, something natural.

Here is the frustrating part. The church has something natural and effective to offer, and it is not some antiquated calendar system. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has approved a number of fertility awareness based methods: Marquette, Creighton, Billings, Sympto-Thermal,

Boston Cross Check and N.F.P.I. The church is, in theory, delighted when a couple want to manage their fertility naturally. And many of these methods offer some level of personal instruction, which greatly increases their effectiveness. But because they can also come with some psychological, cultural and logistical baggage, women who have powered through the judgment of the secular world find themselves facing obstacles from within the church itself.

What Women Want

Given the church's desire for couples to practice fertility awareness based methods, you might think every parish and diocese would offer numerous, easily accessible and affordable ways to learn these methods in order to use them consistently and reliably. You would be wrong.

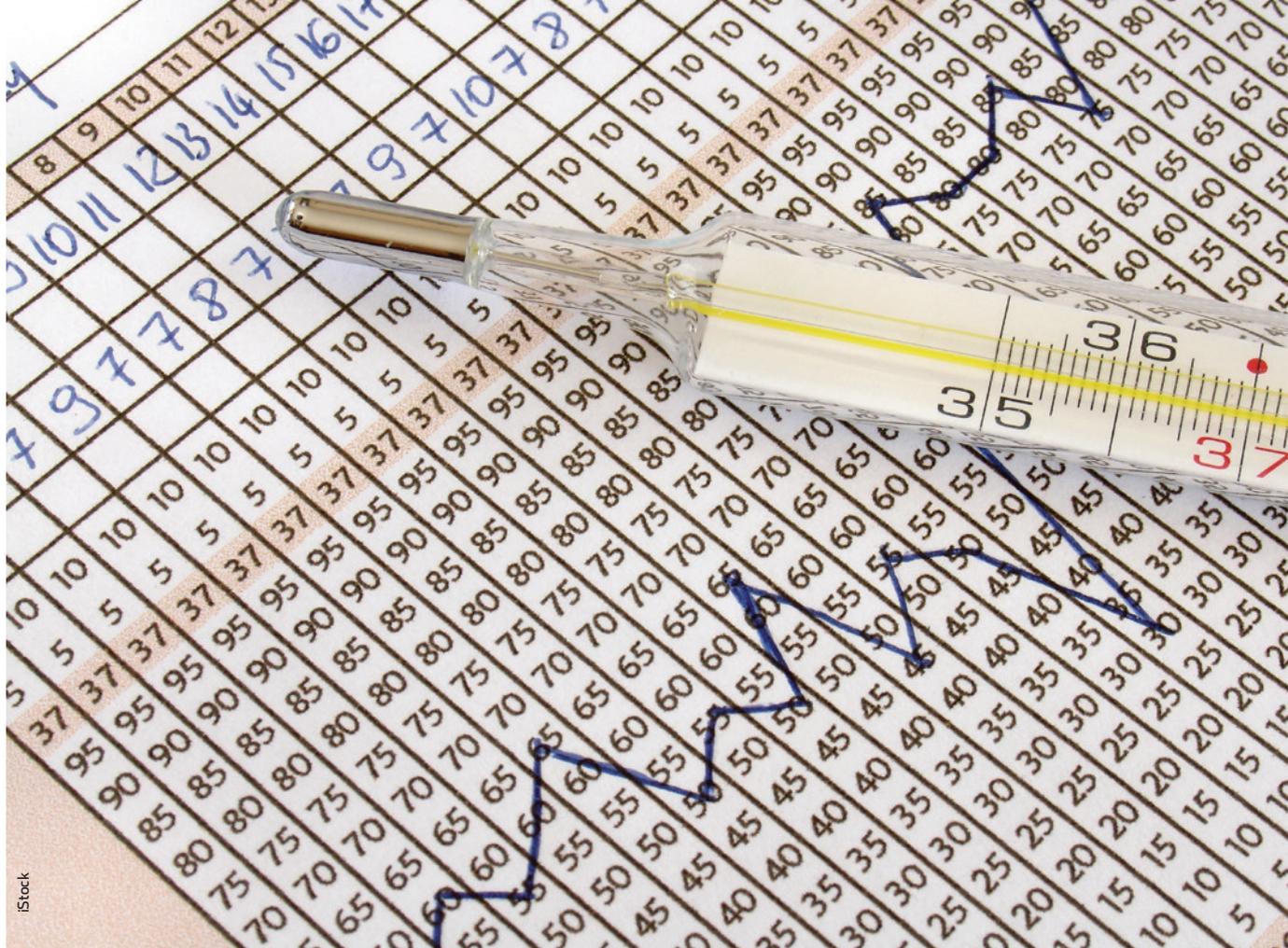
It is a long history, and it would be funny if it were not so maddening. Back in 1932, Leo Latz, M.D., of Loyola University Chicago wrote his slim volume *The Rhythm of Fertility and Sterility*, outlining the basic principles of calendar-based family planning, so couples could learn to chart their fertility cycles quickly, easily and cheaply. It sold 600,000 copies to a readership ravenous for information.

Dr. Latz, for his trouble, was booted out of the university, a decision some historians attribute to his attempt to put dangerous information in the hot hands of so many married Catholics who might make decisions without the blessing of a priest.

So much has changed since 1932. First came the pill; then came an onslaught of contraception, bringing with it the supposed promise of female sexual freedom, but also the all-too-common reality of hormonal mayhem, not to mention an intrinsic misogyny that treats the functioning female body as something in need of correction. The church has reformed its once forbidding attitude toward couples who wish to limit their family size. But there is much more work to be done.

One obvious problem is a simple shortage of instructors. While many couples have effectively taught themselves various methods of N.F.P., many more would be successful if they could find personal instruction, information and support from qualified professionals.

Of 290 N.F.P. users who responded to one of my surveys, 105 said distance from a qualified instructor made learning and using N.F.P. difficult, and nine said it made it impossible. Several women commented that they trained to become instructors themselves, simply because they



could not find anyone else to teach them. Distance training by email and video chat is becoming more popular, but that cannot turn one instructor into 50. Mikayla Dalton, a Boston Cross Check instructor, said she has clients on six continents.

“I’m waiting for that one intrepid biologist lady in Antarctica to reach out to me, so I can say ‘every continent,’” Ms. Dalton said.

Meanwhile, the monitor-based Facebook group she moderates has over 10,000 members, and Marquette claims 11,000 registered users; but Marquette and Boston Cross Check combined have 100 instructors. Women can learn some methods without an instructor, but charting emergencies happen: A couple packing their bags for an anniversary getaway may need help figuring out just how likely they are to conceive that weekend, and they need someone they can call.

Language and cultural barriers also create obstacles for many women and, combined, tend to leave low-income Catholics in the cold. Studies of fertility awareness based methods in the West have typically surveyed white, prosperous, educated, married, English-speaking couples. Universities often draw from local populations for studies, and this population reflects those demographics. It also

reflects the fact that most instructors speak only English. Marquette, Creighton and Boston Cross-Check do have Spanish-language outreaches; but in general, fairly or not, N.F.P. in the United States is often perceived as a privileged spiritual lifestyle.

Considering the Cost

When couples want to use N.F.P., cost is often the biggest obstacle to success. Nearly a quarter of the women surveyed said cost was the primary reason they had chosen a method or changed methods, stayed with a method they are unhappy with, or quit or considered quitting N.F.P.

Many N.F.P. veterans scoff at the idea that charting one’s cycle is expensive. A thermometer costs maybe \$7, and surely we all have pen and paper at home. And they are correct. There are cheap and free methods of N.F.P.

There is Billings, which teaches women to track cervical mucus. There are temperature-only methods. There is sympto-thermal (available through Couple to Couple League and in the popular secular book *Taking Charge of Your Fertility*), which tracks basal body temperature, mucus and other fertility signs, like cervical position. These are cheap, and information is easy to find.

Cheap and accessible though these methods may be,

iStock



Nearly a quarter of the women surveyed said cost was the primary reason they had chosen a method or changed methods, stayed with a method they are unhappy with, or quit or considered quitting N.F.P.

however, their rules can be complex and overwhelming, especially during postpartum, weaning or coming off hormonal birth control.

And sometimes, like all methods of contraception, they do not work. A method is not cheap if it results in a method-failure pregnancy—one that occurs despite a couple following all the method's rules—that wrecks your finances and pushes your marriage over the edge. Several women surveyed highlighted the grim irony that couples who can least afford the most highly effective forms of N.F.P. can also least afford an unplanned pregnancy.

In a recent meta-analysis of effectiveness studies of fertility awareness based methods (co-authored by Chelsea Polis of the Guttmacher Institute), Marquette scored far and away the highest—so high that the C.D.C. was forced to change its effectiveness scoring of such methods in general from a 24 percent failure rate to a 2 percent to 23 percent failure rate, acknowledging that not all fertility awareness based methods are born equal.

Marquette and Boston Cross Check are rated among the most effective methods, but they, along with Creighton, are also more expensive. A couple using these methods can expect to spend about \$140 for the monitor, which is a one-time purchase; between \$5 and \$30 a month for test strips; and around \$300 or more for instruction. The monitor and test strips detect estrogen rise and a surge of luteinizing hormone surge in urine, which helps predict ovulation. A couple can also supplement with progesterone test strips to confirm that ovulation has occurred.

The Creighton Model does not appear at first to be expensive, since it measures only cervical fluid and thus needs no special devices or test strips. But it is more regimented than Billings, partly to increase effectiveness, and

partly because it is part of a larger world of women's health care called NaPro Technology—and so its instructors go through 6 months of training, and practitioners, who are trained to manage more complex gynecological and reproductive issues, complete 13 months of training; Creighton clients are required to attend follow-up classes and to buy special paper charts and stickers. All that specialization adds to the value of the program, but it can also mean a client may spend up to hundreds of dollars a year to follow the model.

For some families this cost is not a concern. Some women I surveyed said they went into debt to pay for a method that worked for them and considered it worth it. Some said they had to train themselves to think of effective fertility awareness as basic health care, rather than as a luxury. Some women said that they just could not get affordable N.F.P. to work, but they could not face going back to the emotional rollercoaster caused by the hormones of artificial contraception. So they stopped having sex altogether.

Many couples have argued that health insurance plans should cover the cost of fertility awareness based methods, and some of them do, especially if it is taught in a doctor's office by a health care professional, as Creighton and Marquette sometimes are. Some women use flexible spending accounts or health savings accounts to pay for monitors or other devices. But many insurance plans cover only a few methods of N.F.P. or none at all, and Catholics understandably chafe at the idea that their chosen method of family planning is financially out of reach, while 18 kinds of artificial contraception are available to the insured at no out-of-pocket cost, and most states offer free artificial contraception to Medicaid recipients.

And while the U.S.C.C.B. makes it clear that dioceses are obligated to provide high-quality N.F.P. services to their flocks, it does not specify who should pay for it. In many cases, the diocese or parish pays, at least for the initial instruction. They subsidize cheap or free lessons, materials and follow-up sessions to anyone who wants to learn. But couples rarely have a choice of methods.

Most often, a couple is shunted into whatever N.F.P. method has risen to the top in that particular diocese or parish. Even in diocesan offices dedicated to marriage and family, N.F.P. instruction and access is rarely a priority. Perhaps a couple who serves as an instructor team for the Couple to Couple League happens to attend the 10:30 a.m. Mass, or maybe a new fertility care practitioner has moved

into town and needs clients. The most accessible option becomes the default, both in terms of where couples are sent and what the church pays for.

But the method that is available and affordable is not always the right method for a particular couple. Of course, Catholics are free to use any form of fertility awareness based method, including secular-based methods not sponsored by the church. But often, the one they were sent to is the only one they know about; and if it results in too much abstinence, too much stress or a method failure, the couple may wrongly assume that N.F.P. in general does not work. In some cases, they know very well that another method would work better for them, but the money simply is not there.

Talking to Teachers

The researchers and teachers who develop and pass down information generally are not to blame for this financial pinch. They are well aware that it is hard to scrape together funding, as they have the same problem. While the secular world of technology surrounding medical care for women has an estimated \$1 billion to work with, Catholic-based researchers often find themselves scrambling for cash.

Dr. Richard Fehring, who invented the Marquette method, suggests poking around eBay for used fertility monitors. The Marquette Institute for N.F.P. also collects old monitors and dispenses them to couples in need when it can. Marquette also offers a mucus-only method, which is cheaper but less effective, as it monitors fewer symptoms.

Dr. Fehring, an ardent researcher, is an N.F.P. pioneer who welcomes collaboration and change. He spoke to me enthusiastically of his colleagues in Bangladesh who are developing satellite phones that double as hormone testers. He is often on the road, comparing notes with secular researchers and trying to drum up some money from the National Institutes of Health. He believes he would win more grants if he were not Catholic.

Rachel Amiri, a fertility care practitioner (the name for a highly trained Creighton instructor), is also a tireless worker in the fields of N.F.P., weeding out bad information and encouraging the weary. As a mother of young children, she, too, is well aware that it is hard to find the time, money, energy and child care to show up for instruction and follow-up meetings. She calls the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Mo., where she is located, something of a “NaPro mecca,” where instructors are abundant and the archdiocese is generous in offering financial assistance to couples. The

archdiocese’s N.F.P. office was established by one of the co-founders of the Creighton method; and as long as Ms. Amiri’s clients need that method, she is able to help them without saddling them with a big bill.

In other locations, it is possible that some parishes have money to help couples but do not understand the need or have not sufficiently advertised this fact, and cash-strapped couples do not know to ask. Of 671 women who responded to my survey, 366 said they did not know if their church covered all or part of the cost. More than one woman surveyed said she had offered money to her parish to subsidize another couple, but the money remained on the table, untaken.

Such person-to-person assistance, rather than institutional aid, is a very common stopgap. Boston Cross Check instructor fees have been set by the archdiocesan N.F.P. office; but some, like Ms. Dalton, allow clients to pay in installments, or they simply offer their services for free. Ms. Dalton and her husband also collect donations and disburse funds to couples who cannot afford monitors and test sticks. Marquette and Creighton instructors may set their own prices. One Marquette instructor has recorded an mp3 of herself teaching, which she offers free.

Complaints about the high cost of N.F.P. sting instructors, even as they ring true. One Creighton client said her friend teaches her over dinner, and the client repays her in margaritas. Another instructor said she has been paid in peach cobbler. Another said plaintively that she never entered the field to become rich, but is abashed to discover she is consistently losing money.

Not all instructors are willing to negotiate. One fertility care practitioner said simply that she deserves to be paid for her pricey education, expertise, time and materials. And she is correct. Even N.F.P. instructors have to eat.

But many N.F.P. consumers I surveyed also said their instructor’s attitude was a major stumbling block to their success, especially when teachers blur the lines between medicine, theology and lifestyle choices.

The ubiquitous guide *The Art of Natural Family Planning*, by John and Sheila Kippley, originally of the Couple to Couple League and now associated with N.F.P. International, drove away more than one otherwise willing couple surveyed, despite the low price tag of the method, because it blends information about follicles and fallopian tubes with censorious opinions on ecological breastfeeding and family beds. Some women who bottle fed their babies said the book made them feel like they were sinning. The ma-



While the U.S.C.C.B. makes it clear that dioceses are obligated to provide high quality N.F.P. services to their flocks, it does not specify who should pay for it. 💧💧

terials have since been revamped, but many of those judgmental attitudes that condemn people for amoral parenting and lifestyle issues linger in Catholic circles.

Ironically, when N.F.P. classes are offered for cheap or free, the low-rent setting that often comes with low-cost programs can itself be off-putting. A willing bride will not win her skeptical new husband over to N.F.P. if she drags him to talk about sex with a stranger in a church basement festooned with kindergarten catechesis posters, Ms. Amiri said. Sound medical science loses its clout when its presentation is perceived as dated or amateurish.

Digital technology can help bridge that gap. Secular fertility awareness methods have apps aplenty. They do an excellent job of making fertility awareness seem mainstream, professional, medically sound and accessible.

Billings and Marquette and the Couple to Couple League have apps tailored to their methods. These enable women to share their fertility status quickly, easily and discreetly with their husbands and their instructors.

In September 2019, after years of promising its clients an app, Creighton began to offer a mobile-friendly website to replace its cumbersome paper folders and stickers. But the site involves additional fees as well as five follow-ups with an instructor who must approve the couple's paper charting before they are given access to it.

Ms. Amiri says that an app was deemed too insecure and too apt to fall out of HIPAA compliance, which could leave clients walking around with sensitive medical information in their pockets. Sue Hilgers, one of the co-developers of the Creighton Model, said that their site is different from other fertility apps by design, because "the Creighton model can only be learned and used effectively with one on one teaching."

Marquette, while otherwise lauded for its accessibil-

ity and sensibleness, has also received criticism in some online forums. The unofficial Facebook support group for Marquette and Boston Cross Check users was designed to give a basic outline of monitor-based methods and quickly swelled to 10,000 members. However, the Marquette Institute for N.F.P. issued a letter threatening legal action unless the group changed its name and severely restricted the kind of material it shares. The group subsequently changed its name and now includes only basic information, and users are told to ask instructors (or to find an instructor) for more information. The Marquette site does have an official online forum on their site for subscribers, with access to teachers, which is currently under construction for an upgrade. Dr. Fehring disputes that Marquette is unnecessarily proprietary, noting that the basic instructions are available to all and that it is possible to learn and use the method without hiring an instructor.

In fairness, what is sometimes interpreted as paternalism and gatekeeping may really be genuine concern for medical ethics. N.F.P. professionals have the right to protect both their intellectual property and their reputations. If a woman who barely understands a method unintentionally gets pregnant, she may go around telling the world it was a method failure, when it was not. Even worse, if a poorly trained client brings a faulty Creighton chart to a NaPro doctor, the doctor will base decisions regarding treatment on bad information. N.F.P. professionals have a stake in making sure their clients know how to collect accurate information.

There is always a push and pull between accessibility and quality. Dr. Fehring calls the proliferation of secular fertility apps "the Wild West," full of unscrupulous investors looking for a cash grab, with little scientific oversight. The Catholic researchers who developed the models on which modern F.A.B.M.s are based got their mandate directly from Pope Paul VI, who called upon medical professionals to teach not only good science, but good morals.

Serious harm can be caused when researchers market fertility apps without that steady moral mandate. Wildly popular secular fertility awareness based systems like Natural Cycles and DAYSYS were both recently caught out making overinflated promises. Natural Cycles, the first app approved by the F.D.A. to be marketed as contraception, was forced to reword its advertising after consumer complaints. And DAYSYS claimed 99.9 percent effectiveness in achieving or avoiding pregnancy until someone took a second look at its studies and found this reliability was over-

stated. The scientific journal that published studies about these methods has retracted them.

But religious-based fertility awareness based methods can also be prone to overselling—although the urge may come less from a desire to profit and more from a desire to prove to a hostile secular world that they are legitimate. A defensive attitude can lead to exaggerated brand loyalty. Specialized instructors may not be as aware of the benefits of other methods or may be unwilling to acknowledge the flaws in their own, making them hesitant to refer frustrated clients to a more suitable method. Ms. Dalton herself was so incensed when a defensive instructor tried to blame her for a devastating method failure pregnancy that she went out and became an N.F.P. instructor herself, vowing that she, at least, would never treat a client that way.

Ms. Amiri also acknowledges that Catholics will send women to fertility awareness-friendly doctors with the promise that they will be treated with more respect and dignity than a mainstream fertility specialist can provide. Ever a realist, she admits that does not always happen.

“Just because they’re using bioidentical progesterone instead of the Pill doesn’t mean they’re going to listen to a woman’s concerns,” she said. But Ms. Amiri believes the new generations of instructors are more sensitive to women’s desire to be trusted and listened to.

Both women urge more transparency, more collaboration and more communication about natural family planning from the people who have lived it and know it best. Ms. Dalton especially enjoys the “nothing to report” threads that often crop up on N.F.P. support groups online. Wary new members can be jittery after seeing so many posts about questions and crises; so the silent majority who are doing well volunteer how many months or years they have been ticking along with “nothing to report”—i.e., no unexpected pregnancies.

There are countless unofficial support groups for every method; and a new, lay-led online membership community called Off the Charts offers advice, encouragement and practical resources, including access to instructors for charting help and priests for spiritual guidance. While this one-to-one, personal encouragement and support can be hugely helpful, a more centralized database, institutional leadership and funding from the church are still needed to help the many couples who seek assistance in learning about fertility awareness methods.

The U.S.C.C.B. site links to overviews of many methods, and the websites of individual methods list the names

of instructors, but these lists are often out of date. There is no accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive index of methods of fertility awareness based methods, of how much they cost, who teaches them and where to go to find out more.

Here is my wish list: The U.S.C.C.B. devotes money to N.F.P. research and app development. More Catholic universities incorporate fertility awareness education into their nursing programs. Dioceses incentivize parishes to subsidize classes and advertise financial aid. Individual methods hire tech-savvy people who understand social media. Priests and seminarians learn hard facts about various methods and about how N.F.P. plays out in real life. And someone gets paid a living wage to organize and maintain a comprehensive index of information about church-approved methods of N.F.P. It seems like a lot. But asking couples to use N.F.P. is asking a lot, and the church can and must do more to support them.

Years ago, when we were so cash poor we could not afford to switch methods, a friend gave me her used monitor. Our finances improved, and I passed along the monitor to someone else, who has since donated it to yet another couple. There is no substitute for person-to-person support in this most personal of endeavors. But there is also no reason the institutional church cannot do more to help.

Simcha Fisher is a speaker, freelance writer and author of The Sinner's Guide to Natural Family Planning. She blogs daily at simchafisher.com and weekly at The Catholic Weekly. She lives in New Hampshire.



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THE CATHOLIC HOSPITAL THAT PIONEERED AIDS CARE

Saint Vincent's made a habit of serving people on the margins

By Michael J. O'Loughlin

One fall afternoon, I stood on a small island of green located in the crosshairs of three hectic New York City streets. It was rush hour, the sun beginning to set. Harried New Yorkers hurried through the park on their way from work to happy hour. A gay couple sat holding hands on a bench. A few children screamed and laughed, running away from their exhausted-looking parents. It is possible many of the people in the New York City AIDS Memorial Park at St. Vincent's Triangle were unaware of its purpose, which is to memorialize two things: the more than 100,000 New

Yorkers who have died from AIDS-related complications since the early 1980s, and the hospital where many of those people spent their final days.

I walked around the perimeter and spotted a series of dark gray, circular medallions, about the size of manhole covers, embedded in the faded red pavers that circle the park. The discs form a series of concentric circles. On one, the outermost circle, in all capital letters, is printed, "FORMER SITE OF SAINT VINCENT'S HOSPITAL 1849-2010." The next ring reads, "THE SISTERS OF CHARITY



The New York City AIDS Memorial in Greenwich Village honors the more than 100,000 New Yorkers who have died of AIDS and commemorates the efforts of those who cared for them. The park sits on the former site of Saint Vincent's Hospital.

FOUNDED THE HOSPITAL TO CARE FOR THE POOR AND DISADVANTAGED.” An image of a woman appears in the middle, identifiable by her distinctive bonnet as a member of the Sisters of Charity. I kept walking and came across the marker I had been looking for. The center circle contains the image of a ribbon. Around it is printed “INTERNATIONAL AIDS EPIDEMIC 1980s” and around that “IN 1984 SAINT VINCENT’S OPENED THE FIRST AND LARGEST AIDS WARD ON THE EAST COAST.”

A Historic Refuge

Saint Vincent's Hospital served the poor and indigent for as long as it existed. In its earlier days, sisters took care of victims from a massive cholera epidemic. People who had been aboard the Titanic when it sank were taken here. Not far from the site of the twin towers of the World Trade Center, the hospital treated victims of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. But I was interested in learning more

about what happened here in the 1980s, when this Catholic hospital became synonymous with care for people with AIDS, especially lower-income gay men and drug users who could not afford fancier hospitals. Today it is not so easy to see that an iconic hospital once stood in this area. Most of the buildings that were once part of the hospital campus have been converted into multi-million dollar condominiums. Still, there are some small visual reminders of what this place once was. A sign above a doorway reads “Nurses Entrance,” with a sculpture of a Sister of Charity. “St Vincent's Hospital” is etched above the main entrance of another building.

‘They Were There’

As I walked around the campus with a couple of friends, carrying a microphone for recording interviews, a man with silver hair spotted us. He had something he wanted to say and walked over. Tom Bernarden introduced himself;

he said he had lived in the neighborhood for decades. We told him we were interested in the history of the hospital. He told us about his admiration for the Sisters of Charity of New York and why Saint Vincent's was so important to the L.G.B.T. community during the height of the H.I.V. and AIDS crisis.

"I lost all my friends, all right. You understand? I'm 24 when I move in here. I'm 70" today, he told us. When asked about the sisters, he paused for a moment. "They were there," he said, recalling how many other people turned their backs to a community in need. "They were there." Mr. Bernarden, a local tour guide who describes himself as the unofficial mayor of the park, had a few less complimentary things to say about the Catholic Church, mostly about money. But he also told complete strangers how much he admired the Catholic sisters who ran Saint Vincent's, praising them for caring for the sick when everyone else vanished.

Mr. Bernarden and I spoke for awhile. The things he told me prompted some questions. How did this Catholic hospital, which had already been run by sisters for more than a century, become a haven for gay men during the AIDS crisis? Part of the answer is geography. Saint Vincent's was located in an area where many gay men lived. But it goes beyond that. The iconic place of Saint Vincent's in the story of the AIDS crisis is due to pushing from activists who knew the hospital could do better, a pioneering gay doctor hired to open the hospital's AIDS clinic and a group of sisters who saw people and need and asked themselves, "What can we do to help?"

'A Cry for Help'

Seeking answers, I headed up to the Bronx, where the College of Mount Saint Vincent has sat overlooking the Hudson River since 1847. The leadership team of the Sisters of Charity of New York has offices on campus, and I was there to meet Sister Karen Helfenstein. She had trained at Saint Vincent's nursing school, rose through the ranks and eventually became a top hospital administrator. She served as the vice president for mission during the height of the H.I.V. and AIDS crisis. Sister Karen recalls that, early on, there was friction between the hospital and the gay community.

One September evening in 1989, a group of activists from the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, a radical protest group better known as ACT UP, took over the waiting area in the hospital's emergency room. Tensions had been rising in the gay community over the church's prohibition

The Story of 'Plague'

For the past few years, I have been on a pilgrimage of sorts. It began when a friend who is a priest told me about his ministry in the 1980s to people affected by the growing H.I.V. and AIDS crisis. When his bishop was made aware of that ministry, my friend, who was then a young priest, was called in for a meeting. The bishop expressed concern that the support group, which my friend had started and that met in the Catholic campus ministry center of a Toronto-area university, signaled church support for the gay community, which was bearing the brunt of this nascent epidemic. The bishop then asked the priest to shut down the group, but my friend made his case. People were dying, he said, and the group provided solace. (More than half a million Americans would die from AIDS-related complications.) The bishop dropped his objection, the group continued to meet, and it attracted dozens of students, professors and staff over the next few years.

As someone who was born in the 1980s, I am too young to remember much about the AIDS crisis generally, much less details about the role of the Catholic Church during this time. What I knew from popular culture was that the church was targeted by gay activists because of its opposition to condoms, which can slow the spread of H.I.V. in vulnerable populations. Intrigued by my friend's stories about gay men seeking spiritual support from the Catholic Church in the 1980s, I headed to the library at Loyola University Chicago. There I sought out the archives of the National Catholic AIDS Network, an association for Catholics working in H.I.V. and AIDS ministry that formed in 1986 and shut down in 2007. I perused news clippings and began making calls and sending emails.

Over the past three years, I have interviewed nearly 100 people about this period in history: priests who put their own vocations on the line to minister to gay and lesbian Catholics scared of the H.I.V. and AIDS crisis; lay activists who stormed Saint Patrick's Cathedral to protest the church; Catholic sisters who took care of dozens of gay men dying from AIDS. I have collected them to share with others; many are featured in "Plague: Untold Stories of AIDS and the Catholic Church," a new podcast from **America**. These stories showed me that the conflict between L.G.B.T. people and the church is not new. And they made me aware that my understanding of this time of great suffering was incomplete.

Michael J. O'Loughlin



How did this Catholic hospital, which had already been run by sisters for more than a century, become a haven for gay men during the AIDS crisis? ●●

against condoms. Doctors and public health officials had urged people at risk of acquiring H.I.V. to use condoms to lessen the risk. But Catholic hospitals in New York City were not allowed to distribute condoms because of the church's prohibition on artificial birth control. It appeared, at first, that the protest in the E.R. was about this issue; one of the activists had placed condoms on a statue of the risen Christ. Some hospital staff wanted to press charges because of that disrespectful act. But Sister Karen and the other Sisters of Charity took a step back. "I really wasn't angry. I knew those people were struggling," she said. "I felt it was a cry for help."

Saint Vincent's was a Catholic hospital, so it provided medical care that was in line with church teaching. Part of that is to care for the poor, which included gay men and drug users with H.I.V. and AIDS. It also meant following church teaching on sexual ethics, which did not permit condoms. Doctors could not give them out, and they could not counsel safe sex to gay men. But Sister Karen said that she and other hospital administrators worked with the medical team to ensure that patients had all the information they needed to protect themselves from this still little-understood disease.

"We talked to the nurses and doctors who believed that their professional responsibilities included fully educating a patient about what they could do to protect themselves and their partners," she said. Sister Karen said there was a relationship between the hospital, which provided information, and nearby pharmacies, which provided condoms.

Dr. Ramon Torres was the first director of the AIDS clinic at Saint Vincent's. He oversaw dozens of doctors and nurses, and he helped build the reputation that Saint Vincent's enjoyed as a premier site for AIDS health care. Gay himself, Dr. Torres helped his clinic become a place where L.G.B.T. people felt safe. He told me in a separate interview that if high-risk patients needed condoms, especially people who were homeless, he made sure they received them—even if that meant under the radar. This was not exactly a

secret. In 1993 an article appearing in *The New York Times* said, "One worker who works in St. Vincent's AIDS clinic said he has kept condoms hidden in an office to give out when necessary."

This is all to say that the protest in the waiting room was not, at its heart, really about condoms. Sister Karen intuited that pretty quickly. She and some other hospital administrators asked themselves, "What are we doing that's not enough for these people, and is it possible for us to find out what their further issue is?"

One of the organizers of the protest was Gerri Wells, a member of ACT UP who had been raised Catholic and whose brother had died from AIDS. Today she lives in Pennsylvania, and we tried a few times to speak, but we were not successful. But in an interview with an ACT UP oral history project in 2007, Ms. Wells explained why Saint Vincent's was targeted by protesters.

"We were hearing a lot of ugly stories coming out, of people's lovers dying, or very sick, and then not letting in their lovers to see them. Security guards would be abusive towards gay people," Ms. Wells said. The impetus of the protest seemed to be an episode over Labor Day weekend when several gay men were attacked at a drag festival. One of the victims was taken to Saint Vincent's. He was dressed in drag and he said some of the hospital staff referred to him as a "prostitute." Others called him a "faggot." His partner wasn't allowed to accompany him into the E.R. That seemed to be the final straw for Gerri.

Ms. Wells said that protest seemed to work. She talked about a series of meetings with some of the Sisters of Charity that resulted in L.G.B.T. patients feeling more respected when they entered the hospital. "We would meet with them every couple of weeks. And we worked on changing the rules at Saint Vincent's Hospital," she said. "We got what we wanted. You know, we worked hard on that."

Informed by Faith

Many people I spoke to about the legacy of Saint Vincent's said the hospital reflected on how to serve the gay community better—not in spite of being Catholic but because it was Catholic. That is, the sisters and other hospital administrators took seriously their mandate to serve those in need. Joan Blanchfield is a retired nurse who is now in her 80s. She recalled connecting her work to her faith with the help of a particular image of Jesus. People afflicted with AIDS often developed on their skin dark purple lesions, a couple of inches wide, associated with Kaposi sarcoma. Ms. Blanchfield, who trained as a nurse at

Saint Vincent's, recalls her patients trying in vain to cover the lesions with makeup. She said her heart broke when she heard of the discrimination they faced when the lesions appeared on their arms and faces. She told me a depiction of Jesus as someone suffering from AIDS by the Rev. William Hart McNichols [see cover image of this issue], an artist and H.I.V. and AIDS activist, challenged her.

"It was very moving because I had a patient with Kaposi's and I could see him suffering as Christ suffered," Ms. Blanchfield told me.

Dr. Christopher Mills was a surgeon at Saint Vincent's Hospital. He said that early on, when AIDS was less understood, it would not be uncommon to hear other straight doctors making light of H.I.V., invoking jokes about a topic that was popular even among stand-up comics. But as the crisis progressed, he said the medical staff became more sensitive to the gay community. Part of that culture shift, he said, was driven by a critical number of gay colleagues on staff who helped to lead the shift. And that meant the hospital staff was not immune to the crisis. Dr. Mills, who died in 2019 in the months following our interview, recalled having to place an intravenous line in one of his colleague's arms after he became sick. His colleague warned Dr. Mills to be especially careful with blood, a coded way of acknowledging that he had H.I.V. Dr. Mills said that quick exchange still haunted him decades later, describing the feeling of hopelessness he felt as "simply overwhelming." Later, in the hospital chapel, he gave a eulogy for his young colleague, an experience he described as "sad as it could possibly be."

According to many people we interviewed, Saint Vincent's struggled early on when it came to its response to the H.I.V. and AIDS epidemic. Homophobia was present among some of the staff, and the fear that permeated society in general about H.I.V. and AIDS made its way into the hospital as well. But rather than retreat, hospital staff members like Sister Karen and Dr. Torres, whose worlds and life experiences in many ways could not have been further apart, worked together to ensure that patients from the neighborhood could be served with dignity and respect. It was through this commitment that a Catholic institution became perhaps the most iconic hospital in the history of H.I.V. and AIDS care in the United States.

Changes in health care would eventually lead to the demise of Saint Vincent's, which was shuttered in 2010, leaving the neighborhood without a full-service facility. A series of mergers with other hospitals, billions of dollars of debt and a report from state public health officials that



Protests against the Catholic Church by H.I.V. and AIDS activists were not uncommon in the 1980s and '90s. In this photo from December 1989, a priest steps over a protester who deliberately fell to the floor in front of him as he was distributing Communion at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City.

said the Greenwich Village neighborhood did not need an acute-care facility spelled the end for Saint Vincent's. As my colleague Kevin Clarke reported in *America* in 2010, Sister Jane Iannucelli, a board member at the time, described the closure like this: "I think this is a big end of a cycle, of an era for the Sisters of Charity."

Back in the park, Mr. Bernarden mourned the closure of the hospital—nearly a decade later. But he said the legacy of Saint Vincent's continues because of the sisters who asked how they could do better and provide the care that they knew their patients deserved. "The only people to stay behind and take care of the dying and the sick at that epidemic were the Sisters of Charity, following their Christian mission," he said.

Michael J. O'Loughlin is a national correspondent for *America* and the host of *America's* podcast "Plague: Untold Stories of AIDS and the Catholic Church."

 Listen to "PLAGUE" at www.americamagazine.org/plague.

NEWMAN AND THE NONES

ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN CAN HELP US UNDERSTAND WHY CATHOLICS ARE LEAVING THE CHURCH

By David Paternostro

American Christianity is shrinking. Many scholars and religious thinkers have probably had this sense for a while, but numbers were recently published that back this up. Last October, the Pew Research Center released a study that confirmed the continued demographic shift away from Christianity in the United States. In the wake of these findings, many solutions have been put forward by those troubled by the church's decline.

Most of the proposals have been fairly standard: better liturgy, better catechesis, more focus on social justice. Depending on one's doctrinal stance, either recommitting ourselves as a church to certain positions to show our distinct identity or abandoning them altogether to show our openness to the world have been suggested yet again. The suggestions usually say more about the pet interests of the one suggesting and perhaps generate more heat than light.

Stephen Bullivant's recent book *Mass Exodus*, which looks at the phenomenon of ex-Catholics in the United States and Great Britain, can help us make sense of all this. Bullivant's work has already sparked excellent conversations. Reviewing the book for **America**, Timothy P. O'Malley concurs with Bullivant that "disaffiliation is rarely a single moment in the life of a Catholic. Instead, it is a process in which one no longer identifies as a Catholic."

The Grammar of Assent

For someone like the newly canonized St. John Henry Newman, this conclusion would come as no surprise. Newman's whole life was dedicated to pondering how we may know the truth, especially in matters of religion. The answer he came back to time and again: It is complicated. Nor is this complexity



CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemnitz



restricted to matters of religion. Belief of any sort is a complicated matter.

Among Newman's chief intellectual foes were Enlightenment thinkers who attempted to make human knowledge a matter of geometric logic. Newman railed against the Enlightenment doubt championed by René Descartes and turned into brutal skepticism by David Hume. We may want humans to be algorithm-following belief machines, taking one logical strain from beginning to end and believing or not based on the conclusion, but this is not how humans actually work.

Regarding mental functions like doubt and certitude, Newman declared in his *Grammar of Assent* that “our duty is, not to abstain from the exercise of any function of our nature, but to do what is in itself right rightly.” Sometimes we doubt, and sometimes we are certain; both can be good.

Newman is not interested in how Enlightenment thinkers believe human beings ought to know things but rather in how we actually know. The reality is far messier than the ideal. We do not follow a clear and distinct logical chain from beginning to end, from premise to conclusion. We take in a whole world at once and make our decisions based on this experience.

The Messiness of Reality

Bullivant's observations track quite well with Newman's. Bullivant observes that while there may be one or two reasons expressed for leaving Catholicism, the reality is usually far messier. This is not to say that the reasons or experiences people give for their departure are not the most important ones, just that they are far from the only ones.

Embodied reality is complex, and so is our way of knowing. This is one of Newman's key points. It is true of how we believe (or doubt) claims in general, and it is true of how we believe or doubt religious claims. What Newman refuses to do as he explores the ways in which we believe or doubt a religious claim is to treat it as a form of belief altogether different from any other.

Religious belief is, in many respects, like belief in any other class of knowledge. That is to say, our motives for belief or doubt in the religious sphere have a strong family resemblance to our motives in other spheres of life. *What* we are saying “I believe” or

Newman's whole life was dedicated to pondering how we may know the truth, especially in matters of religion.

It was the cumulative effect of evidence and experience that brought Newman into the Catholic Church.

“I doubt” to is different, but *why* we say it is generally the same. The process itself is the same.

Newman was not the first person to observe that we believe in religion for the same reasons we believe in other areas of life. He was, however, among the most forceful advocates of this idea. Moreover, because he was surrounded by the cultural legacy of the Enlightenment (like all of us in the West today), Newman had to defend his theories about belief against Enlightenment objections.

Knowledge and Belief

Among the strongest Enlightenment objections that Newman tried to answer is that the best knowledge is abstract. Beginning with Descartes, thinkers had tried to know and believe rightly by removing themselves from the world. If we remove ourselves from the world and structure our thoughts according to mathematical logic, they argued, we will believe only truth.

Newman would have none of this. We know from being immersed in the world, he insisted, not removed from it. We are not all mathematicians, and while logic may clarify our thinking, “logic is open at both ends.” What counts as evidence for analysis and how the conclusions will be applied are not part of the logical chain itself. There is more to belief and doubt than a single argument, no matter how well constructed it may be.

As O’Malley reminds us at the start of his review of Bullivant’s book, leaving Catholicism is a process. Newman’s ideas of knowledge and belief help us to understand why this is the case. No one thing convinces us. It is a series of arguments and experiences that eventually have a cumulative effect.

It was the cumulative effect of evidence and experience that brought Newman himself into the Catholic Church. His experiences of his conscience, his observations of history, his doctrinal concerns, his own experience of Catholics—all of these things together, in addition to a whole host

of other elements, came together for Newman until one day they could no longer be ignored.

The process by which Newman came to Catholicism is in many ways the reverse of the process that Bullivant gives us of so many who have left the church. Newman might have articulated a few key reasons why he became Catholic, but he would be the first to say there was far more to it than that. Those who cease to be Catholic (or Christian in general) may articulate a few key reasons for their departure, but there is almost always more to the story.

Belief is complicated. This is Newman’s central point in linking our knowledge so closely to reality: Reality, unlike theoretical constructs, is complex and gives our minds the complexity they need to believe. Theory and logic help us to make sense of things, but it is reality, with all its complexity, that seizes the mind and incites belief.

Both/And

If belief (and unbelief) is complex, then so is evangelization. The Pew report has sparked all the usual discussions about the “silver bullet,” *the* solution to the problem of lapsed and former believers. What Bullivant’s data and Newman’s insights tell us, however, is that there is no silver bullet. Anyone who claims to have a silver bullet for evangelization is selling something.

Christ has called us to evangelize and make disciples of all nations. But evangelization cannot happen by focusing on a few pet topics. We need a “broad front” strategy for evangelization. The issue with most proposals for evangelization is not that they are wrong but that they are not enough.

What Newman can remind us about evangelization and what Bullivant shows us about people leaving Catholicism is that there is never just one thing at stake. This means that our idea for evangelization is probably at least partly right but only if it is not to the exclusion of others’ ideas. We need all these ideas together, woven into the complex and marvelous tapestry that is Catholicism, to truly capture a heart. We need the famed “Catholic both/and” as we evangelize: liturgy *and* social justice *and* abuse reform *and* catechesis *and*....

No one project can win out. To evangelize is to show people the whole world of Jesus Christ, with all its complexity and messiness and beauty. Only the cumulative weight of it all can touch the whole person and foster religious belief in our modern world.

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Not Built to Belong

Coping with loneliness at a Jesuit college

By Gabriella Jeakle

So far, college has been lonely. It is the loneliest I have ever been, in fact. Lonely in a “what if I’m always lonely” or “I don’t think I’m cut out for this” way. My mom was the first in her family to graduate from college, and I have found that when going to college is not the norm in your house, it is hard. I cannot imagine what it must have been like for my mother or for first-generation college students today—to have that drive and to know that this is a small step toward elevating your family, your culture and yourself.

I was the friendly girl in high school. The girl who knew everyone’s name. The girl who did not really have a friend group, but it didn’t matter because I was always smiling. I entered college with one of my very best friends from high school, so I figured I was set. Even in the worst case scenario, I would go all four years with her as my best friend.

But it was selfish of me to assume she would be at my beck and call. After a difficult day of texting her constantly

and receiving few responses, I realized that she needed her own space to grow and settle. It has been three days since I have talked to her, which does not seem like much, but when you are just a five-minute walk away, it feels like an eternity. And yet I am indescribably proud of her.

I am constantly told that “everyone is having a hard time,” but I don’t believe it. I see kids from orientation at parties and spending time in each other’s dorms, and I admire their confidence and ability to acclimate. I do not believe that everyone cries in their room every day. I believe some people are built to belong immediately. And I believe that some are not.

I am not built to belong. I do not say this as a sad sentiment—truly, belonging is not my gift. If it were, I would have probably gone to college back home where most of the kids from my high school went. I would stay close to my family. Belonging makes life easier. I truly believe some people belong everywhere they go. What a beautiful gift that is.



On Sunday morning of my first week at school, I walked. I walked because I could not stand to be in my room anymore. When I came upon the chapel, I sat there and cried. I cried for two hours. I could not clear my mind, but I sat there until I could clear my eyes. I prayed, and then I walked back. I tried reaching out to a few friends, but I was not surprised that they were busy.

The next day, I decided to go to morning Mass. Five elderly women, all of whom were religious sisters, were the only other people in attendance. I cried all throughout Mass, feeling absolutely mortified. Afterward, one of the women, Sister Evelyn, hugged me and asked what was wrong. The easiest way I could sum it up was that “I’m just a little homesick.”

“Homesick is good, love. It means you have a good heart,” she says.

And I am homesick. For foggy mornings, for my parents, for a sense of purpose. For the people who know my name and the people who know my soul. I am homesick for the days when I fantasized about what college would be like.

My grandmother called the following day. Coming from a Mexican background, we have always believed strongly in faith and patience: Good things take time, and God has a plan for you. This was the last thing I wanted to hear. Having grown up struggling with anxiety, I wanted answers and a plan. Until now, I have generally been able to come up with something—some remedy in the face of the unknown—but here I feel stuck.

My grandmother asks if I am all right.

“I’m just homesick,” I tell her.

“This is what you need to do,” she says. “This is how you grow.” I know my grandmother wants more than anything for me to be home with her.

“Up. Always up, *mija*,” she says.

Some of my older friends encouraged me to give it two weeks. Others swore that come Halloween, I would be settled. A few told me the whole first semester was rough and some the whole first year. One friend even told me that you might never feel settled, but one day you will get your degree and remember why you pushed through all those lonely days.

I have gathered that college is just as much about learning to be alone as it is about making friends. Learning to rely on yourself but knowing your limits and when to ask

for help and, better yet, who to ask for help. College is about learning what it means to belong.

For now, I feel like I do not belong here. Maybe a few more months will confirm this. Maybe my place is somewhere else, or maybe not. My fear is that “my place” is not anywhere. But my faith is my ally. I will keep my faith and remind myself that I am here to work hard, get a degree and make the world a better place. I am here because my great-grandparents were strong enough to leave their country, my grandmother was strong enough to learn English and my mother was strong enough to go to college. Every morning I wake up and tell myself in prayer: “It will get better.” I leave my dorm. It is pretty empty here in the morning. I walk and tell myself I am here to build upon the legacy my family has left. I am here to make it that much easier for my kids to go to college. I am here to make the world more just.

Up. Always up.

Gabriella Jeakle is a freshman at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, Calif.



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IN THE PALM OF SOMEONE ELSE'S HAND

My prayer at Mass with cerebral palsy

By Matthew BeDugnis

“Let us join hands and pray as the Lord taught us.”

That sentence should not cause me dread, but it does. As soon as I hear the first four words spill out of Father Jim's mouth, a bolt of panic strikes my mind. My fight-or-flight reflex is triggered as I desperately begin seeking the best course of action. But the speed of human reaction is unforgiving, and my time to think is over in an instant. I silently scold myself: *You should have sat on the end—where no one would be beside you.* It is an embarrassment I have felt too many times before, when I have momentarily forgotten my cerebral palsy as I slide into a pew before Mass. The condition causes weakness, spasticity and a lack of control throughout the left side of my body and has shaped my life since birth.

There is nothing I can do to avoid the dreaded moment now. I work in communications at Boston College High

School, and at a crowded all-school Mass like this, I am going to be stuck between two people anyway.

My boss, Colleen, is to my left, and I cannot tell who reaches out first. My hand finds hers, through a hazy mixture of unconscious muscle memory and vigorous focus. I know where my hand should be, but I must devote serious brain power to get it there. I barely pay attention to my right side, where my fingers have already found the unthinking safety of a coworker's palm. But my left hand, crippled and contorted, has tensely wrapped itself around Colleen's. I bristle at my clammy grip, wondering what she must be thinking. She is well aware of my cerebral palsy but seems to be paying it no mind, focusing on the prayer and reciting it in unison with the 200 other faculty and staff members in our high school's small chapel.

Meanwhile, I fumble over sentences I have said thou-





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sands of times, my mind vacantly guiding my lips over sacred words. My face tingles as sweat beads on my forehead and a blaze of self-conscious terror spreads up my spine. Every morsel of my attention is focused on that hand. Focused and fearful that at any moment it could spasm and awkwardly crush Colleen's fingers in a tight grasp. I concentrate on my wrist joint—painfully articulated and locked downward. Colleen is holding my hand from underneath while I stand there pleading with it, praying to avoid further contortion.

Whenever my hand is tensely wrapped around the palm of a colleague or fellow parishioner, I spend an eternity locked in my mind as the words of the Lord's Prayer ring out around me. I rock back on my heels and let my vision blur. When the prayer is finished, I decouple as soon as possible and avoid the person's gaze at the sign of peace.

A heavy awkwardness hangs in the air, even if the embarrassment is only on my part. In joining hands, we give up our personal space and let our walls come down. My right hand does it as easily and mindlessly as I suspect anyone's might. But my left hand requires excruciating effort that forces me to confront my brokenness. I must put my flaws in the palm of someone else's hand—the flaws I always try to keep locked away, tucked tightly into a ball in my jacket or pants pocket.

I have often wondered why I don't simply lean over to the person to my left and tell them I am uncomfortable. Is it a compulsion toward the ritual or deference to the idea that suffering in silence is a path of less resistance? Maybe.

But on that day, Colleen lifts my hand up at the conclusion of the prayer. She turns to me during the sign of peace and gives me a hug. We do not need to speak; I know from her expression that I am accepted entirely. There is not a trace of awkwardness in the pew. As she turns smiling to a teacher in the row behind us, I know I am among family. I understand in that moment just why we join hands during the Lord's Prayer: to stand before our Father as one family, truly and literally.

As the sign of peace comes to a close, my mind drifts back to the homily. Father Jim mentioned the importance of recognizing ourselves as loved sinners. "You need to have the feeling," Father Jim said, "from Jesus' baptism when God told the world, 'This is my beloved.'" He asked us if we had ever experienced that feeling. I think of Colleen. Through her kindness and acceptance of me, I felt God dismissing my brokenness, my fears of inadequacy to say, "This is my beloved, in whom I delight."

I know that I will still receive the call to join hands with trepidation. But I also know that this moment has bolstered my confidence. It has reminded me of our universal human need to lay down our weakness. My flaws and fears are manifest in that hand. When Colleen lifted it up to God, she helped carry that burden, if just for a moment. I will always be scared to share my weakness with other people. But if I retain some fragment of the grace I felt that day, it will always inspire me to put myself in the palm of someone else's hand.

Matthew BeDugnis is the assistant director of communications at Boston College High School. He is a graduate of Boston College.



When Audrey Hepburn Entered the Convent

By Nadra Nittle

One of Audrey Hepburn's most compelling films—1959's "The Nun's Story," directed by Fred Zinnemann—is also one of her most overlooked. In an Oscar-nominated performance, Hepburn plays Gabrielle van der Mal, a young woman who joins an order of nuns in 1930s Belgium to fulfill her dream of becoming a nurse in the Congo. Inspired by the true story of Marie Louise Habets, fictionalized

in the 1956 novel of the same name, "The Nun's Story" features a Hepburn without the haute couture seen in films like 1954's "Sabrina" or 1957's "Funny Face." Sans the luxurious clothes, expertly applied makeup and elegant hairstyles, she uses only her face to express anguish, fear, disappointment and exhaustion.

Hepburn's breakthrough role as Princess Ann in 1953's "Roman Holi-

day" led to her becoming widely known for her charm and gamine appearance, a stark contrast to bombshells like Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor. Because of her waifish look, she was often relegated to portraying likable and quirky young women, giving rise to the idea that she owed her career more to a winning combination of charisma and cuteness than to her acting prowess. Since her death in

"It is not easy to be a nun," the mother superior tells Audrey Hepburn's character in "The Nun's Story." "It is not a life of refuge from the world. It is a life of sacrifice."

1993, doubts about Hepburn's acting abilities have persisted.

In 2015, Hepburn's son, Luca Dotti, revealed that his mother felt insecure about her acting ability. Five years earlier, the two-time Oscar winner Emma Thompson sparked a public backlash when she described Hepburn's acting as "mimsy-mumsy sweetness without any kind of bite.... She can't sing and she can't really act, I'm afraid." The Guardian's film critic, Peter Bradshaw, declared that Thompson "ha[d] a point," citing a 2001 essay about Hepburn by the feminist critic Joan Smith, which described her as a "child-woman" whose characters were "the product of a series of male constructions."

In "The Nun's Story," however, Hepburn does not rely on her signature charm to woo filmgoers. Often she comes across as unlikeable, and the other characters in the film tell her as much. Her Gabrielle van der Mal is ambitious, prideful and a perfectionist, qualities that cause her distress in the convent.

While Hepburn's characters undergo stunning makeovers in "Sabrina" and "Funny Face" and a delightful makeunder in "Roman Holiday," the transition of her character from civilian to sister in "The Nun's Story" is agonizing. Those who have reduced Hepburn's legacy to her twee-ness would be wise to watch this film, in which she is stripped of her cutesy demeanor to inhabit a character constantly in turmoil.

Beyond showing that Hepburn could act, "The Nun's Story" is a film about the intersection of faith and the world. It examines the toll one woman's effort to balance these factors has on her well-being. Today, when a quarter of Americans describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious" and a growing number say they are stressed and worried about the state of their country, the film remains relevant. It is partly set during World War II and chronicles the activities of the anti-fascist Belgian Resistance. It raises questions about race and imperialism, as it covers Belgium's occupation of what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. But at its core, "The Nun's Story" is a "women's picture," one of the many Hollywood films released between 1930 and 1960 that explored a (white) woman's psyche during a key chapter in her life. In these films, women are depicted as their own person rather than as accessories to men. For Gabrielle van der Mal, it is precisely this quality—this sense of her individuality—that makes her a poor fit for the convent.

A Misfit From the Start

"The Nun's Story" is not a subtle film, and it is clear from the outset that Gabrielle, the daughter of a world-renowned surgeon, is not convent material. She has inherited her father's knack for medicine and joins a religious order because it will give her the opportunity to travel the world treating the sick and the poor. Her medical ambitions are so strong that she has broken off an engagement to enter the convent. A quiet life as a homemaker was never going to fulfill this driven young woman—but neither was life in the convent. Her father, Dr.

Hubert van der Mal, suggests as much when he warns one of his daughter's superiors about her "stubbornness." He also tells Gabrielle that he will support her should she leave the convent and return home, a remark he makes as much because he will miss her as because he senses she has chosen the wrong vocation.

During her six-month postulancy, she and the other postulants are told how important it is that they practice humility, but Gabrielle keeps drawing attention to herself. She fidgets with her veil, races down the convent halls, speaks during the grand silence and raises her head to look around when she should be lying prostrate. "Pride has not been burned out of me," she tells a postulant named Simone, who leaves the convent before taking her vows. "When I succeed in obeying the rule, I fail at the same time by having pride in obeying."

She is a woman used to excelling in her endeavors and assumes she will quickly be the perfect nun. But her mother superior points out how wrong-headed such an expectation is. "It is not easy to be a nun," she says. "It is not a life of refuge from the world. It is a life of sacrifice. In a way, it is life against nature. It is a never-ending struggle for self-perfection. Poverty, obedience, chastity are extremely difficult."

But a slip of the tongue reveals that Gabrielle's difficulties in the convent go beyond the ordinary difficulties any postulant would have during her adjustment to sisterhood. When the reverend mother informs her that Dr. Van der Mal has asked when she will get the opportunity to practice medicine in the Congo, Gabrielle behaves as if she has no such ambition so early in her career.

‘The Nun’s Story’ is not a subtle film, and it is clear from the outset that Gabrielle is not convent material. 💧💧

“I just want to become a good nurse and a good nun and to do God’s work wherever I am sent,” she says. To which the reverend mother replies, “First, become a good nun.”

The retort reveals that Gabrielle’s ambitions are out of whack. She mentioned her desire to be a good nurse before mentioning her desire to be a good nun. To succeed in the convent, her priorities must shift, but they never do. When her six-month postulancy ends and she commits herself to being a nun—she is given the name Sister Luke—she remains singularly focused on practicing health care in the Congo.

When she is sent to the School of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, Sister Luke is hopeful that her chance to head to Africa has finally arrived. In class, she wins the praise of her teacher, an admirer of her father, but this makes one of the students jealous. Sister Luke turns to her superior for guidance about the matter. Instead of giving her any sort of sensible advice, Mother Marcella asks her to intentionally fail the qualifying exam for the Congo to soothe her classmate’s wounded ego. It is an act of humility that is too great for an anguished yet ambitious Sister Luke. She ultimately earns the fourth-highest score on the test but is not rewarded with a trip to the Congo for her efforts. Rather, she is ordered to serve patients in a Belgian mental institution. In the asylum, her pride costs her again when she ignores advice not to deal with certain

inmates without assistance. When a patient who believes herself to be the Archangel Gabriel begs her for a drink of water, Sister Luke opens her cell without asking for backup, and the woman viciously attacks her.

Bruised, bloodied and furious, Sister Luke chastises herself: “Pride. Pride and disobedience.

Always disobedience!”

Mother Christophe, her superior at the institution tells her: “You must learn to bend a little or you’ll break.... You must have patience with yourself. Unhappy saints are lost from the beginning.”

It is advice Sister Luke cannot quite bring herself to take.

Nursing in the Congo

When at long last Sister Luke is assigned to the Congo, she appears truly joyful for the first time. But even this happiness is fleeting. She is crushed upon discovering that she must work in the European hospital instead of the Congolese one. “The Nun’s Story” never explains why working with Africans is so important to her. One gets the sense she feels that this is where the true adventure lies, in a country so unlike her native Belgium with people so different from the elite Europeans with whom she grew up. In this way, this woman’s picture differs little from white male fantasies of Africa like Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, also set in the Congo.

The scenes in the Congo make the

film feel dated. Black men are routinely referred to as “boys,” and the black women who are shown do little more than smile as Sister Luke and the other nuns handle their babies without permission. Despite the atrocities King Leopold II of Belgium carried out in the Congo Free State, the Congolese people generally welcome the European newcomers. The exception is a gullible black man who kills a nun, Sister Aurelie, under the misguided influence of a “witch doctor.” After the nun’s murder, a black medical assistant named Ilunga, who has held onto his traditional religion, converts to Catholicism, Aurelie’s greatest hope for him before her demise. With his conversion, any resistance to European rule vanishes.

For the most part, black people are used as props in “The Nun’s Story.” Sister Luke’s main focus during this portion of the film is Dr. Fortunati (Peter Finch), her supervisor at the European hospital. An excellent surgeon, Dr. Fortunati is a man of contradictions—a nonbeliever who is well versed in Catholicism. During their first meeting, he calls out Sister Luke for boasting about who her father is and, later, intuits that she is too independent for the convent. He sees through her in a way no other character does, a fact that has led film scholars to view their strictly professional relationship as one rife with sexual tension.

When Sister Luke contracts tuberculosis, Dr. Fortunati tells her: “You’re not in the mold, Sister. You never will be. You’re what’s called a worldly nun. Ideal for the public. Ideal for the patients. But you see things your own way.... You will never be the kind of nun that your convent expects you to be. That’s your illness, and TB is the byproduct.”

At this point, Sister Luke has already been gently reprimanded by her superior, Mother Mathilde, for implementing new protocols at the hospital without telling her first. She is undoubtedly a woman who “sticks to her own ideas” and continues to do so when she lets Dr. Fortunati conceal her TB diagnosis to avoid being sent back to Europe. Her tuberculosis is not advanced, and Dr. Fortunati is confident he can help her recover, ordering her to relax and recuperate in a treehouse with a pet monkey for company. It is here where we see glimpses of a playful Audrey Hepburn. As she is recovering, we see a shift in her, from a woman who was constantly hard on herself to one who begins to finally embrace herself as a nonconformist and independent thinker.

When she eventually heads back to the motherhouse in Belgium, Sister Luke struggles to forget the Congo. After World War II begins, Sister Luke cannot simply live her life “as if nothing has happened,” as she is told to do. When Germans kill her father while he is treating refugees, she knows the time has come for her to leave the convent because she will not forgive the enemy. Her inability to forgive is just one of her faults, she admits, cementing her decision to return to secular life. She is asked to reconsider her decision, but Sister Luke knows that she is “no longer a nun.” Of course, she never really was. This isn’t news to the reverend mother, who tells her she had been aware of her struggle. But it is the first time that Sister Luke is willing to admit that she has been suffering all along.

“I think I’ve been struggling all these years, Reverend Mother,” she says. “In the beginning, each struggle seemed different from the one before

it. But then they began to repeat, and I saw they all had the same core: obedience without question, without inner murmuring.”

That is the crux of Sister Luke’s struggle. Medicine was more of a religion to her than Catholicism ever was. Had she been born during a time when women had more options, it is unlikely that Gabrielle van der Wal would have entered the convent at all. Hence, her central conflict is not with the church but with a society that limits women’s potential. Not content with the prospect of becoming a wife and mother, Gabrielle enters the convent in hopes of achieving her dreams, only to wrestle with the realization that her love of medicine must come second as a nun. Too worldly for the convent, she leaves the institution, putting her medical skills, the viewer is led to believe, to use in the Belgian Resistance.

The Impact of ‘The Nun’s Story’

Although “The Nun’s Story” was one of Audrey Hepburn’s most commercially successful films—earning \$12.8 million off a budget of \$3.5 million—it is hardly the movie most associated with the actress. That honor goes to 1961’s “Breakfast at Tiffany’s,” which has cemented the image in the public consciousness of Hepburn in pearls, a black cocktail dress and a beehive hairdo. The popularity of her Holly Golightly party girl role may be why some critics easily dismiss Hepburn as a “child-woman” and style icon who lacked depth as an actress.

“The Nun’s Story” proves them wrong. It is not just that she gives “quite possibly the finest [performance] of her entire career,” as Warner Brothers described it in its 60th-anniversary commemoration of the film; it is that “The Nun’s Story” is

very much a feminist work. Maureen Sabine, the author of *Veiled Desires: Intimate Portrayals of Nuns in Post-war Anglo-American Film*, argues that more feminist cultural critics should take an interest in the film:

It honors the feminist protagonist’s point of view,” she states. “It reflects [director] Zinnemann’s admiration for intelligent, ardent, and strong-willed women characters; it is sensitive to how hard they have to work to come within reach of their professional goals; it recognizes that failure is a risk inherent in aspiration; and it is respectful of the nun’s hidden life of striving, struggle, suffering, and sacrifice.

Audrey Hepburn’s filmography shows an actress drawn to roles focused on reinvention. In “The Nun’s Story,” her character undergoes a series of reinventions, but the most important is the shift Gabrielle van der Mal makes from being a woman at war with herself to one accepts who she really is. Only then does her suffering end.

Nadra Nittle is a Los Angeles-based writer. She has written for a number of news organizations, including KCET, ThinkProgress, The Atlantic and Outreach Magazine.



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Pigeon Fable

By Brian Patrick Heston

A pigeon perches on a power line.

Little Double-Dutch girls chant
“birdie, birdie sittin’ on a wire—”

The last sun alights on the houses.

The pigeon and the girls become
the song whispered by the alder trees.

Friends, I say this in the lowdown
of the evening, when the day reckons

and dark swells over the street

like a mushroom cloud. In this fable
the bird is a newly crowned king,
clutching tight to its thin throne.

The girls then split my heart
into flower; the pigeon spreads
its wondrous wings. Somewhere in this story
is you, sitting in your own evening,

trying to fend off the night
or, at the very least, survive it.

Even when the Double-Dutch girls
are called away and the bird rises

beyond human sight, even though
the trees are ripped into the air
by the terrible mind’s eye, we all
find our way back to skin and bone.

Brian Patrick Heston’s poetry has appeared in *Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner* and *North American Review* among other publications. His first book, *If You Find Yourself*, won the *Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award*. He is also the author of the chapbook, *Latchkey Kids*. He teaches literature at Rowan University in Glassboro, N.J.

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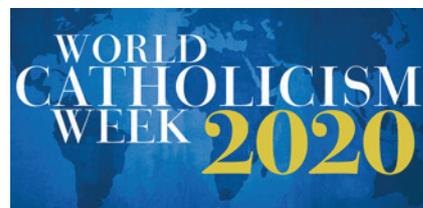
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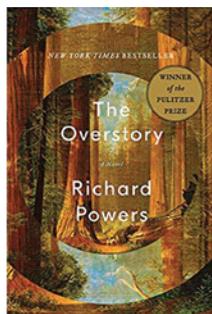
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A novel for the age of ‘Laudato Si’

By Brianne Jacobs



The Overstory
By Richard Powers
W. W. Norton &
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Grief is a theme that guides my academic research. Grief is the loss of another experienced as the loss of an integral part of oneself. Christianity is shot through with grief. Our fundamental act as Christians is to keep alive our grief over Christ, and the unjust death of a man whose ministry we (strive to) make the backbone of our identity. Grief is also an act of wild hope. It holds within it the belief that the future can be marked and changed by the value of the lost. The resurrection tells us we do not hope in vain.

A question I return to in my work again and again is: Whom do we grieve? Further, what circumscribes where we see Christ? How can we expand our grief, the stories we tell about ourselves, to include more?

Pope Francis and other theologians encourage us to see that our circle of grief is not yet wide enough, that our understanding of grace is limited by anthropocentrism: “The Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures” (“Laudato Si’,” No. 68). The *Catholic Catechism*, too, calls us away from a human-centered notion of Grace: “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection.... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness.”

Elizabeth Johnson has asked us to see ourselves not as the pre-Galileo centers of the universe but, with

Darwin, as part of a wide and beautiful expanding web of ecological diversity that includes all life. We share common ancestors and a quarter of our genetic material with trees. We are not the apex of creation but a mere strand. Can we experience that ecological web not as our resource, or even our (necessary) habitat, but as our kin? Richard Powers’s brilliant novel *The Overstory*, which won the the 2019 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction, is a story about people who do this, challenging us to feel that kinship with that web.

Like the depiction of small-town Victorian life in Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, or the shifting national identity in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, *The Overstory*’s breadth offers more than plot. It offers a grand and compelling view, detailed and wide-lensed, of our interdependence. In *The Overstory*, trees that span generations and plotlines provide the wide scope. More than a framing device, trees become a part of the story

We share a quarter of our genetic material with trees.
In Richard Powers's *The Overstory*, they are an essential part of the narrative.

and live in a way that I have never before encountered in literature.

Powers masterfully brings the story together, structuring the narrative as a tree itself: roots that stretch out, the trunk that brings them all together, a crowning flourish and seeds that disperse.

A taste of the protagonists: Patricia is a dendrologist who discovers the mechanisms by which trees communicate; Mimi is an engineer who leaves her corporate life to protest deforestation; Neelay is a Silicon Valley coder whose lucrative game, *Mastery*, allows players infinite resources to create their own worlds; Nicholas is an artist equal parts Banksy and Andy Goldsworthy; Ray is a property rights lawyer with a mischievous wife, Dorothy; Adam is a professor of psychology who becomes entangled in his research subjects' activism; Doug is a wounded Vietnam veteran; and Olivia is a college student whose mystical visions lead her to live 10 months atop a Northern California giant, hoping to save it.

The Overstory gives us the generations-deep story of each character. All of them come to see and ultimately give their lives to the bigger story, which moves so slowly, which is so grand and so still, that it is nearly impossible to see in a single human life. "You can watch the hour hand," Powers writes. "Hold your eyes on it all around the circle of the clock, and never once see it move."

I heard once that trees talk to each other, and I laughed it off immediately as clickbait science. But the truth, which *The Overstory* shows through elegant narrative, is: They do. They heal one another, sending targeted

nutrients and medicine and water through their massive root systems. They make the air, and they grow with it. (Plant a tree in a pot of 50 pounds of soil, come back in 15 years; you will find 50 pounds of soil and a 100-pound tree.) With air they aid and warn each other. Forests even, over time too extended for us take in, migrate in response to their environments.

I had often assented to the notion that the human brain is the most complex organ in the universe, a forest, regenerating, communicating, growing in a billion directions—with trees over 20 centuries old—surviving and adapting. How could I have ever taken a bite from such an apple? "There are a hundred thousand species of love," Powers writes, "separately invented, each more ingenious than the last, and every one of them keeps making things." Forests are clearly complex, resilient and beautiful systems, things we hardly understand but that created us and on which we remain integrally dependent.

And yet we have destroyed nearly half of all forest area in recorded history, and continue to harvest 15 billion trees a year. We replant some, clones in rows. If I tore apart every word in the Gospel of Mark, then lined each back up neatly in alphabetical order, would you still call it the good news? Carbon excess in our atmosphere and the heat it traps fell trees and species we have not yet even reached in our knowledge. Powers is right: "Things are going lost that have not yet been found."

Four billion years of evolution, the infinite web of life on which we are but one dependent strand, and over

a few short decades we are cashing it all in. As I finished *The Overstory*, I imagined this cash-out, all done in the quest to keep the sun rotating around us, to square and submit every plant and inch of the earth, to imagine our brains the zenith of reality—gods of convenience, ownership and mastery. We have, in slow motion, been picking the apple from the tree all that time, with the reckless shortsightedness of Adam and Eve. It feels now that there is little we can do to stop it. Our economies are forcing a mass suicide of people affected with bystander apathy. We are at the gate.

The corollary to all this is that perhaps we could have been in Eden this whole time, if only we had been still and humble enough to experience it. I have long known the facts of climate change. But reading *The Overstory*, I felt the loss of trees and forests not as a loss of resources or even the loss of my human home—though I fear and despair over that. I experienced the destruction for the first time as a loss of an integral part of myself, as a creature who participates in the glory of being alive on Earth. Like the Fall itself, the truest sin, I experienced the destruction as a break with my maker and kin. *The Overstory* accomplished its goal: I grieved.

Brianne Jacobs is an assistant professor of theology and religious studies at Emmanuel College in Boston, Mass.



The #MeToo Reckoning
Facing the Church's Complicity in Sexual Abuse and Misconduct
By Ruth Everhart
Intervarsity Press
264p \$17

A safe harbor for victims

I remember when my Old Testament professor—also a pastor and activist—invited one of his undocumented parishioners to class. She was a middle-aged Latina who told us through tears about the gang life she escaped, the multiple rapes she had endured and her fear of being detained and deported back to her enemies. We students sat, squirming in our seats, having just analyzed the story of Tamar (2 Sam 13) not a half-hour earlier. The juxtaposition of the biblical “text of terror” and this undocumented woman’s story was stark, and no doubt memorable, as I reflect on it 7 years later.

In her new book, *The #MeToo Reckoning: Facing the Church's Complicity in Sexual Abuse and Misconduct*, the Presbyterian pastor and award-winning memoirist Ruth Everhart offers the same striking juxtaposition of biblical stories, parables and teachings with present-day experiences of sexual abuse in the church. Everhart shows that #MeToo is consistent with the Christian call to care for the vulnerable and to resist injustice. “I believe that Jesus is part of the #MeToo movement, whether or not the church is at his side,” she writes.

Everhart interweaves the nar-

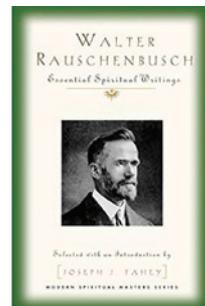
rative with the most recent research on sexual violence, including the roles of churches in their complicity and collusion with perpetrators, but she does so without burdening her readers with statistics and footnotes. The few endnotes she includes point toward practical and scholarly resources like those from FaithTrust Institute.

Everhart narrates the ways in which individual churches and denominations, often unwittingly, side with perpetrators. She tells of the irksome process of her bringing a disciplinary case to the presbytery against the pastor who assaulted her. The slow progress toward justice was illuminated by the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). The actions of the widow encouraged Everhart to keep seeking justice, even when the odds were against her, even as she was accused of using up “the denomination’s valuable resources.”

Ultimately, the hope Everhart has for her readers, and for the church at large, is for public lament. Everhart hopes that the church can become a safe harbor for victims as it grieves its own complicity in sexual abuse.

This book is a valuable resource for congregants and lay leaders who may be suspicious of the #MeToo movement and whether it is compatible with the Christian message—one hopes they will be convinced otherwise.

Lauren D. Sawyer is a doctoral student at Drew Theological School in Madison, N.J.



Walter Rauschenbusch
Essential Spiritual Writings
By Joseph J. Fahey, ed.
Orbis Books
104p \$24

The prophet of Hell's Kitchen

Fifty years after his death in 1918, the Baptist minister Walter Rauschenbusch taught revolution.

His key work, *Christianity Revolutionary*, written near the end of the 19th century but not published until 1968, connects Jesus Christ with the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, whom Rauschenbusch identified as “dreamers of Utopias.”

For Rauschenbusch, who preached for 11 years among the poor and disenfranchised in the Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood of New York City, what society needed was a revolution of faith, “a collision, an upheaval, a revolutionary movement” that would bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

His surprisingly modern ideas are given new life in *Walter Rauschenbusch: Essential Spiritual Writings*, edited and featuring an introduction by Joseph J. Fahey, co-founder of Pax Christi USA. These selected writings reveal Rauschenbusch’s intense focus on the “Reign of God,” as well as the promotion of the social gospel, his lasting theological contribution.

A philosophical influence on the government programs of the New Deal era, the social gospel extends the boundaries of theological inquiry, drawing Christianity into di-

alogue with psychology, history and sociology. Fahey wisely includes the first chapter of *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, a major work published in 1917. “If theology stops growing or is unable to adjust itself to its modern environment and to meet its present tasks, it will die,” writes Rauschenbusch in a prophetic foreshadowing of the objectives of the Second Vatican Council.

The real strength of this volume is how easily these writings relate to our current moment. Fahey uses excerpts from *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. In this work, he defends laborers amid unjust working conditions and excoriates the capitalist system, advocating instead for socialism, which will “close the fatal chasm which has separated the employing class from the working class since the introduction of power machinery.”

Detractors would undoubtedly label Rauschenbusch an idealist, but for him an essential part of Christian belief is the drive toward perfection. He understood the kingdom of God not exclusively as a destination in the afterlife, but that which “stands for the sum of all divine and righteous forces on earth.” These sentiments were echoed in the public ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., an intellectual heir of Rauschenbusch.

Distinguished by scriptural insights and theological rigor, this book reminds the reader of the defining features of the kingdom of God for Rauschenbusch: “the perils of wealth,” universality, nonviolence and love.

Ryan Di Corpo, *Joseph A. O’Hare fellow.*



Olive, Again
By Elizabeth Strout
Random House
304p \$27

Of honesty and empathy

When I read the title *Olive, Again*, the sequel to Elizabeth Strout’s Pulitzer-winning novel *Olive Kitteridge*, I found myself reading it in a sarcastic tone: *Why again?*

Olive Kitteridge was introduced to readers a decade ago as a retired school teacher who kept her husband at arm’s length and was puzzled by her adult son’s resentment. She grappled with the drama of daily life in her coastal Maine town with the mannerisms of a stoic, cranky New Englander—never revealing vulnerability or emotion to those around her who so desperately wanted it.

Olive, Again brings the reader back to shortly after the end of its predecessor novel, which left Olive dazed to find herself widowed by her husband and not needed by her son. Now, she finds the clarity of her loneliness overwhelming:

Olive did not understand why age had brought with it a kind of hard-heartedness toward her husband. But it was something that she had seemed unable to help, as though the stone wall that had rambled along between them during the course of their long marriage—a stone wall that separated them but

also provided unexpected dips of moss-covered warm spots where sunshine would flicker between them in a sudden laugh of understanding—had become tall and unyielding, and not providing flowers in its crannies but some ice storm frozen along it instead.

Olive’s marriage to another septuagenarian widower in town, Jack Kennison, becomes a study in how to do things better—or try to—when you have a second chance. Both Olive and Jack seek atonement for both their differences and their pasts, things mitigated by compassion and vulnerability we do not see them share with many others.

Strout examines the human condition in a quiet setting where introspection cannot be escaped. Strout has a remarkable ability to draw out issues like poverty in rural New England, the fear of aging, discrimination and political discord and immigration without alienating readers. This younger reader cannot recall if I have ever followed a novel’s protagonist aging into her 80s, much less one who invites me to understand her so intimately. Olive’s honesty and empathy are in short supply in our world and can threaten to shake a reader out of her own self-righteousness. The answer to *Why again?* is just that: We all need more Olive before she slips away.

Mary Gibbons is a public defender based in Brooklyn, N.Y.



A composer brings a note of hope to the abuse crisis

By Maggi Van Dorn

Craig Shepard and I have something in common: We have been laboring with the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church and have made it the focal point of our creative work. Craig since 2014, me since 2018. He's a composer, I'm a podcast producer. I first heard about Mr. Shepard's musical meditation "Broken Silence" in the oppressive heat of August, but now, on a cold, dark and blustery afternoon in December, we finally meet in a coffee shop in Brooklyn to discuss this project, five years in the making.

"Broken Silence" is a 75-minute musical contemplation that "support[s] listeners to engage with text drawn from court testimony connected with the ongoing scandal in the Catholic Church." More specifically, the steel-string acoustic guitar and saxophone ensemble is composed around Margaret Gallant's 1982 letter to Cardinal Humberto Medeiros.

In that four-page, handwritten letter, we hear Ms. Gallant reprimanding the cardinal for failing to take action against Father John Geoghan, the priest who molested seven boys in Ms. Gallant's extended family and, as The Boston Globe's Spotlight team later uncovered, 150 children in total.

Ms. Gallant writes as a devout Catholic, struggling to balance her love for the church with the personal agony her family has experienced and an obligation to protect other children. The sense of betrayal, anger and heartbreak in this letter is palpable. And the problems Ms. Gallant underscores remain with us today: the damage of remaining silent, the failure of some church leadership to take clear and decisive action, the persistence of clericalism and the need for co-responsibility in the church.

Now Mr. Shepard presents the letter as a sacred text for us to contem-

plate: "The text on its own is gorgeous. I think it's an inspired text."

Craig Shepard is no stranger to sacred texts. While studying at Northwestern University, he was required to do a composition in Renaissance counterpoint and sacred songs. "If you think of old-time Catholic Masses, which are sung with multiple voices, counterpoint just means there's more than one melody going on at the same time," he explains.

At first, Mr. Shepard really disliked the idea of training with Renaissance choral music because it meant trying to create within someone else's rules. But by his own admission, those rules also produce "some of the most beautiful examples of music anywhere." And if you give the works of Palestrina a listen, you will realize you have heard counterpoint, and it can be an utterly transcendent experience.

In "Broken Silence," Ms. Gal-

“Broken Silence,” from the composer Craig Shepard, is a musical meditation intended to confront our demons.

lant’s letter is read at a slow, contemplative pace by Mr. Shepard and accompanied by five musicians gathered in a circle: Erin Rogers (tenor saxophone), Kristen McKeon (alto saxophone) and Dan Joseph, Dev Ray and Alex Lahoski (EBow steel string guitars). The music is sparse, swelling in and out to support the words spoken. A single tone is introduced and passed between the musicians; then, like counterpoint, different tones come together to create a striking resonance.

And yet, for all its musical beauty, you might ask, why would anyone want to sit and contemplate such a painful letter? It is a question not unlike the one I heard when making *Deliver Us*.

“You first have to hear what happened before you can move through it,” Mr. Shepard explains. This is true not only for the Catholic Church but for any government or institution that has had to reckon with a history of violence and corruption. And it is true for each of us. We cannot move through this crisis without first hearing what happened.

The second great insight Mr. Shepard shared was that, “When we come together, we can do what none of us can do on our own.” He means this both in a mystical and a scientific way. In the spiritual sense, he turns to the Gospel of Matthew: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20). In this concentrated gathering of hearts and minds, which holds space for the anguish of Margaret Gallant’s words,

something more becomes possible.

The other way Mr. Shepard looks at what’s happening is through the lens of somatic experience therapy (S.E.). I ask him for a quick tutorial.

“Somatic experiencing therapy is a modality founded by Dr. Peter Levine. And it’s effective for all forms of trauma. He has this idea that trauma is not in the event, it’s in the nervous system, and that each nervous system has the capacity to heal.”

In short, when forces are too great (like car accidents or military combat) or when the nervous system isn’t fully developed (as with children who suffer abuse), “the body gets stuck and unable to complete the natural response to trauma and come back to normal functioning.” With the help of a trained somatic experience practitioner, a person can fully process or “complete the trauma,” and then symptoms like anxiety, depression or P.T.S.D. will often go away.

Mr. Shepard makes it clear that “Broken Silence” is not therapy. However, after three years of S.E. training, he says it has informed the musical composition.

Let’s take the concert space itself. The musicians, all of whom are highly trained on their instruments and have some kind of spiritual practice, are seated in a circle at the center. The audience surrounds this circle, and throughout the audience are people who have already meditated on this letter several times before and have developed a capacity to sit with it. They arrive a half-hour before doors open to “warm the room.” The practice is borrowed from Quaker worship, but is also supported by the idea of resonance developed in somatic ex-

periencing. Resonance is the concept that our nervous systems can start to sync with those around us. So add 10 nervous systems in the room that have already spent time sitting with the material, and you have created a different environment within which to hear this letter.

As for Mr. Shepard, he is conducting more than words and music. He is constantly scanning the room, noticing how audience members are responding and adapting the speed of the music to better support what is happening around him.

It is clear to me that “Broken Silence” is more than a concert. It is a musical meditation on an inspired text that plunges straight to the heart of our collective trauma and increases our own capacity to move through it.

Mr. Shepard doesn’t need to sell me on the value of contemplating hard things. In fact, just sitting with him and talking about our shared struggle with the abuse crisis, I am comforted. Not because everything is solved, but because I can begin to see pathways to healing, where before there was only darkness.

Here is something Craig Shepard and I have figured out: When we disengage, or attempt to silence our trauma, it only becomes worse. Whereas when we carve out time and space to contemplate our pain and confront our demons in community with others, we emerge with an enduring sense of hope.

It’s just like Mr. Shepard says: “When we come together, we can do what none of us can do on our own.”

Maggi Van Dorn is the creator and executive producer of “*Deliver Us*,” a podcast about the sexual abuse crisis produced by America Media and SiriusXM.

Action Required

Readings: Is 58:7-10; Ps 112; 1 Cor 2:1-5; Mt 5:13-16

Today's first reading and Gospel passage speak profoundly about the importance of caring for people in need and being an example for others. These readings call on us to offer support and inspire others to do the same.

The reading from Isaiah comes from a period after the Israelites' return from exile in Babylon. The audience appears to be people who are financially and physically able to care for their own needs. These people are called on to care for others: share bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless, clothe the naked and welcome people in need (Is 58:7). These actions, which are echoed in the corporal works of mercy, speak of perennial human needs. In Isaiah 58, the prophet links worship of God with care for people in need. He critiques false religiosity and insists that true worship requires a change in one's mindset and behavior.

In today's society, in which so many people are poor, suffering, vulnerable and disenfranchised, we must heed Isaiah's call to action. Praying for people is a good thing to do but is insufficient by itself. Isaiah suggests tangible actions we should be taking. Importantly, Isaiah connects caring for one another with God's care (Is 58:8-9). By fostering societies in which people support one another, we emulate God, who cares for all of us.

The first reading concludes with additional commands and promises that are relevant today. Isaiah tells his community to remove oppression and malicious speech, bestow bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted. When people do these things, a just society can emerge, and light rises from the darkness (Is 58:9-10). In a world that is too often filled with hate and disregard, we can promote Isaiah's vision by condemning hateful speech and serving people in need.

The Gospel reading from Matthew is an excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount that elaborates on the need for people to act in the world. As in the reading from Isaiah, Matthew uses the metaphor of light to represent goodness and justice in society. Jesus calls his disciples to be the

You are the light of the world.
(Mt 5:14)



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Am I living out Jesus' command to be the light of the world?

What can I do to remove oppression and malicious speech?

What can I do to help create a just society?

light of the world. Moreover, their positive actions cannot be hidden; rather, they must be an example for others. "Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Mt 5:16). Like Isaiah, Matthew calls on his community to act openly in a way that is like God's action and will be an example for others to follow.

Between these two readings, we hear a short proclamation from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Paul describes his divinely ordained mission and highlights the importance of faith in God's actions and power. Paul's emphasis on God's power can help us as we reflect on the readings from Isaiah and Matthew. All of today's readings urge us to act in the face of poverty, hatred and injustice, and they challenge us to put the needs of others on the same level as our own. We should remember that our faith in God requires us to act. Our treatment of all people in society is a reflection of our relationship with God.

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The Power of Interpretation

Readings: Sir 15:15-20; Ps 119; 1 Cor 2:6-10; Mt 5:17-37

The Gospel reading today is from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-7:29). Matthew depicts Jesus ascending a mountain to interpret Jewish laws. There are obvious parallels to Moses receiving and proclaiming laws at Mount Sinai. Today's excerpt focuses on murder, adultery, divorce and the taking of oaths.

Matthew includes unique source material, cites passages from Mark and incorporates traditions from the Q source, a hypothetical collection of writings that accounts for elements in Matthew and Luke that are not in Mark. Given the length and content of some of the verses, a shorter option is available that might be preferable for liturgical use. The shorter reading truncates the commentaries and eliminates Matthew's statements on divorce.

The law and the prophets (Mt 5:17-20): Matthew shows Jesus' connection to Judaism by affirming the importance of the law and prophets. He frames Jesus' teachings as interpretations, expansions and nuances to the laws and the prophets, not as contradictions of them (Mt 5:17).

Murder (Mt 5:21-26): Matthew depicts Jesus expanding the range of the prohibition against murder (Ex 20:13, Dt 5:17). The commandment would have originally prohibited premeditated murder in a narrow sense, not the taking of life in contexts like war, punishment or self-defense.

'I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.' (Mt 5:17)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What can you do to promote harmonious relationships?

Do you treat people with dignity and respect?

How does learning about the ancient context of the Bible help you to interpret the Bible today?

Jesus expands its meaning to prohibit anger and animosity and calls for reconciliation of damaged relationships.

Adultery (Mt 5:27-30): Matthew also shows Jesus expanding the prohibition against adultery (Ex 20:14, Dt 5:18). The commandment would originally have been a narrow prohibition against a man having sexual relations with a married woman. Jesus expands this command to include lustful actions. Following this expansion, Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out...if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off" (Mt 5:29-30). The shorter lectionary reading skips these verses, which seem to suggest self-mutilation. It is highly unlikely that Jesus (or Matthew) intended these statements to be taken literally. Instead, these verses should be taken as hyperbolic statements that exaggerate in order to assert the significance of this injunction.

Divorce (Mt 5:31-32): Matthew describes Jesus interpreting a Jewish law concerning divorce (Dt 24:1-4). Jesus narrows the possible grounds for divorce and equates marrying a divorced woman with committing adultery. Unfortunately, both the law and Jesus' interpretation address only the men, reflecting a historical view of marriage rooted in inequality between men and women. While we should not promote an unequal model of marriage, we can recognize Jesus' critiques of divorce and be inspired to address these complexities in our own context.

Oaths (Mt 5:33-37): Matthew recounts Jesus prohibiting the swearing of oaths, which does not have a clear Old Testament parallel, although the Letter of James has an almost identical prohibition (Jas 5:12). The attention to this topic may show concern about people making false oaths, an issue which Matthew addresses later in his Gospel (Mt 23:16-22).

In these reinterpretations of laws, Jesus calls on his followers to live good lives. The Gospel requires us to carefully evaluate and glean the elements that are most helpful for fostering positive relationships with one another and with God.

Jaime L. Waters teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies.

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The Decent Thing

We need grown-ups to teach us how to grieve

By James K. A. Smith



There is a poignant scene in Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead* that I think about a lot. The Rev. John Ames recalls a childhood memory in which sadness and gratitude are intertwined, a paradoxical joy that can emerge in a community that survives something.

The scene is the charred ruins of a church on the plains. A lightning strike to the steeple has ignited the building in the night. Only the pulpit remains, standing in the warm rain as the entire community has come to clean up. "It was like a camp meeting and a picnic," Ames recalls. As men and boys "clamber over the ruins, searching out Bibles and hymnals," older women sing hymns. "In those days no grown woman ever let herself be seen with her hair undone, but that day even the grand old women had their hair falling down their backs like schoolgirls. It was so joyful and sad."

But what most impressed the young John Ames was that in the face of this disaster, the adults knew what to do. When all the singed Bibles and hymn books had been recovered, they made two graves for them, putting the Bibles in one and the hymnals in the other as the minister said a prayer over them. "I was always amazed, watching grownups, at the way they seemed to know what was to be done in any situation, to know the decent thing."

I think about this a lot because, approaching 50, I know I am supposed

to be one of these grown-ups. But I am still awed by that mysterious know-how adults seem to possess, intelligence about what a moment requires of us, what "the decent thing" is. Who could have known to bury the Bibles and hymn books? Whence such visceral, liturgical wisdom? Was this a bequeathed ritual or an improvisation that looked to the young John Ames like an ancient tradition?

I am still fascinated and humbled at the way people know what to do in the face of loss. At times of death, for example, the machinery of a parish's collective wisdom whirs to life and surrounds the bereaved. People step into roles that seem natural.

Maybe we are all just muddling through, mimicking, pretending to know, improvising on the unconscious inheritance of those who have gone before. What looks like a script inherited from time immemorial may be just a faithful invention in the moment.

A number of years ago one of my dearest friends was in a serious accident that changed everything for him. An active, athletic man, he was laid up in a hospital bed coming to grips with the fact that he was going to lose a way of life. I didn't know what to do. I knew, of course, to be present. But I wasn't sure what to say or how to pray, if I am honest. What is the script for such a situation?

On my way to the hospital, I

stopped by the grocery store and bought some crackers and juice. In the hospital room, I pulled the juice and crackers out of the crinkled paper bag, and my friend and I fell into a script we both knew by heart: "On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and giving thanks, he broke it." Awkwardness gave way to tears as we repeated to one another, "The body of Christ, given for you." "The blood of Christ, shed for you."

Would a child watching this imagine that grown-ups know to stage rogue Eucharists in the face of loss? Perhaps. Maybe only we know that we are making it up as we go. "So be it," says the narrator in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. "When you've nothing else, construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them."

But even our improvisations draw on what we have inherited, what has been bequeathed to us. Perhaps the reason I think about this episode from *Gilead* so often is that I am worried about whether we are the grown-ups who know the decent thing. What are we bequeathing to the young who are watching us?

James K. A. Smith teaches philosophy at Calvin University and is the editor in chief of *Image* journal. His most recent book is *On the Road With Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts*.

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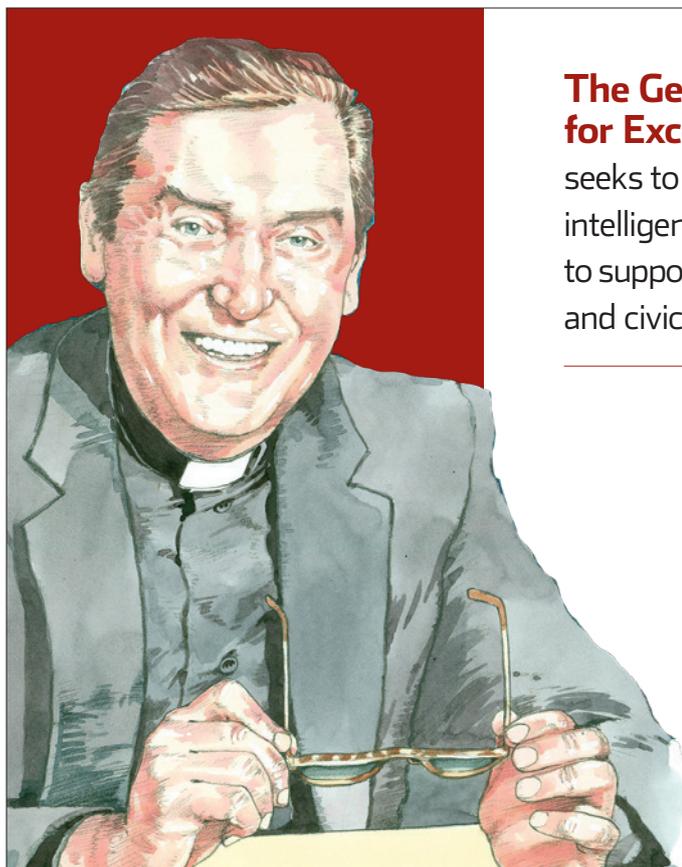
WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT LAY PEOPLE ARE NOT TO BE REGARDED ESSENTIALLY AS "COLLABORATORS" WITH THE CLERGY, BUT THAT ALL THE BAPTIZED ARE "CO-RESPONSIBLE" TOGETHER FOR THE CHURCH'S MISSION?

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