

America

MAY 25, 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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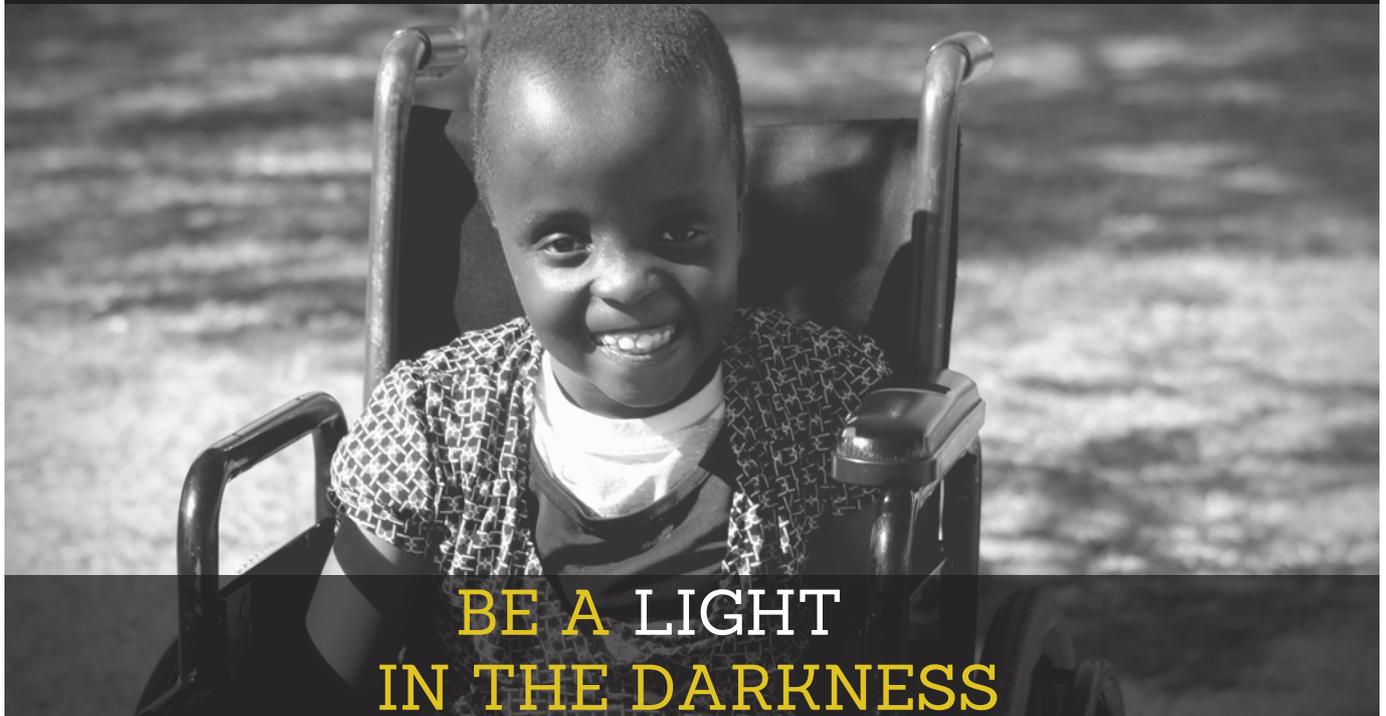
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It's Morning!

One of the few upsides of being in a prolonged quarantine is a free hour or two in each day, which would ordinarily be used for dressing or commuting or socializing, but that I am using now to revisit books and movies I love. What is interesting to me is how my perception of a book or a movie can change depending on my state in life or, perhaps more to the point, my stage of life. St. Thomas Aquinas articulated a metaphysical principle that expresses this experience of subjectivity: *Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*, or “whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver.”

The mode of this receiver has been a bit gloomy of late. It's only natural, of course, that I should feel that way after several weeks of forced isolation and increasingly dire news. It would be strange if I were not at least a little down. Still, my sullenness has bothered me enough that I've tried to take very deliberate steps to lift my spirits.

That's where “Singin' in the Rain” comes in, the 1952 MGM musical starring Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds. The whole thing is a pleasure to watch, but there is one moment that really grabs my heart. At about the halfway mark of the movie, the three stars, who have been up all night trying to work through their problem, find a solution at last, just as the dawn light breaks through the kitchen window. The musical number that follows, “Good Morning,” is not only an unqualified triumph of human artistry, but comes as close to capturing the essence of ecstatic joy as anything I've ever seen in film or on canvas. It leaves me breathless—and I'm only watching it.

My late mother also loved “Singin

in the Rain,” and that's probably one of the reasons I do. I feel some connection to her when I watch it, which got me thinking: Of all of the gifts my mom possessed, the greatest one, which she bequeathed to me, was her faith. What she handed down to me was not a history book, or a list of rules or pious platitudes. What my mom gave me was the joy her faith brought her, not a giddy cheeriness, though sometimes it was that, but really the deep consolation that comes from a heart inhabited by the risen Lord. Her joy was an Easter joy.

You might be wondering where I'm going with all this. What I'm stumbling toward is this: The world is an awfully tough place to call home right now. In addition to the economic and public health crises, there is the general desolation that pervades the public discourse. Every time we turn on the television, there is one group of people, who believe the world is ending, yelling at another group of people, who believe that it's just beginning.

But both groups of people have something in common: They are joyless. There is a serious joy deficit in both the church and the world these days. Some of the most visible Christians, for example, look as if they haven't had a joyful thought in 10 years. That's a big problem, for them certainly, but also because joy is what makes our witness truly credible, what changes the mode of the giver and the receiver. Joy is what makes our faith attractive, even what makes it intelligible. Without joy, to paraphrase St. Paul, we are just clanging cymbals.

To have Easter joy is to live each day in the knowledge that God broke into time and space; broke into our

house while we were sleeping and sprinkled every room with a dust of eternity. Then he rose and left through the front door, which remains open for us to follow. Easter joy gives us the eyes to see those hints of eternity in the here and now—glimpses of hope, if you will.

In other words, a heart filled with Easter joy knows that the world is ending and it is also just beginning. Both are happening all around us and within us. Easter joy gives us the faith to stand in our present, on the bedrock of the past, and face our future: a future of our choosing yet also chosen for us.

Easter joy gives us the courage, in the words of Maya Angelou,

*...to look up and out,
And into your sister's eyes, and
into
Your brother's face, your
country
And say simply
Very simply
With hope
Good morning.*

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



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AP Photo/Edmar Barros

Relatives gather around the body of Raimundo Costa do Nascimento, 86, who died of pneumonia amid the new coronavirus pandemic in Manaus, Brazil, April 30.

Cover: The ruins of Kirstall Abbey in Leeds, England (James Genchi/Unsplash)

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President Trump's conference call on Catholic education with U.S. bishops

On April 25, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, along with Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles, who is the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston, joined a conference call with President Trump that was supposed to be about Catholic education, Crux reported.

The reaction to that meeting, and to Cardinal Dolan's appearance on Fox News two days later, elicited many strong responses from **America's** readers. **America's** editor in chief, Matt Malone, S.J., took up the topic of the bishops' conference call with the president in his "Of Many Things" column for the issue of May 11, writing:

Some Catholics have criticized the bishops for how they conducted this call: for not stressing immigration and the administration's xenophobia; for allowing Mr. Trump to over-stress abortion; for being too chummy with a president whose performance we have abundant cause to criticize. But I think the bishops got it right here. Yes, it is unfortunate that Mr. Trump chose to politicize the call, which is his wont, and some of the pleasantries sounded hyperbolic and tone-deaf, but the bishops made a good tactical choice.

Below is a selection of reader comments and commentary in response to Father Malone's column.

Father Matt, I respectfully disagree with your one-sided view of our bishops. Sadly, our Catholic schools have been losing money long before the pandemic. As you are aware, the cost of tuition has outpaced the cost of living for many Catholic families—especially our poor Catholic brothers and sisters. From looking at past trends, it appears our pastors and school administrators continued to turn a blind eye; that is, in their efforts to find alternative financial methods such as grants, fundraising, etc., to ensure poorer communities have the opportunity to attend Catholic schools. Do you think that impacts the numbers in the pews? Frankly, I find it hard to believe that the bishops still cannot understand people are leaving the church. To justify the bishops' actions in selling out to this incompetent president, in my view, is short-sided.

Nancy Gonzales

We all sense President Trump's faults. The American people will soon have the opportunity to determine if he deserves a second term.

I won't judge Cardinal Dolan because I don't know what is in his heart. He is a pastor first. As such, if he believes he is encouraging the president to support Catholic values and education, I support the cardinal. Remember St. Teresa of Calcutta accepted donations from any source because she believed it would be used to do the work of God.

Lloyd William

While I too applaud any commitment to Catholic education, I think you are missing the point surrounding the criticism of Dolan's comments regarding the conference call with Trump, highlighted in his interview on FOX, which focused more on his relationship with Trump and how impressed he is with the president's response to the pandemic. He seems to be one of the very few who are impressed!

Gary Dowsey

Thank you, Father Malone, for your perspective. It rings true. The bishops have spoken out against Trump's policy on immigration. But as you note, he is the president. I would add that over 62 million Americans voted for Trump. To simply stand against him in everything makes no sense. He is not Hitler.

Rhett Segall

The bishops missed an opportunity to educate the president in the understanding of "pro-life" in its wider sense. What grated so much was the idea of lauding a man who has used anti-abortion as a political tool for votes, while demonstrating so many policies that are antilife, as well as his personal ongoing derogatory and aggressive attitudes to anyone who disagrees with him, or who could be considered the "other."

Bridget Taumoepeau

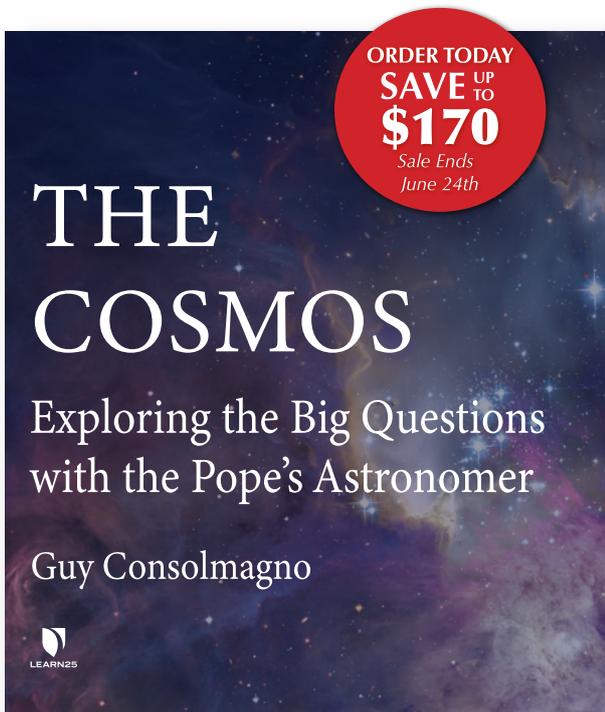
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The Role of the Pope Emeritus

Loud headlines in both the religious and secular press in the first week of May repeated a trope that has become familiar over the past few years: Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was speaking out in dramatic ways. Benedict was quoted as saying that the church is threatened by “a worldwide dictatorship of seemingly humanist ideologies,” using same-sex marriage, abortion and in-vitro fertilization as examples and linking them to the “spiritual power of the Antichrist.” His comments were far more extensive and nuanced, of course, but social media and news coverage often make it sound as if he has just held a press conference to denounce something—or someone.

Although upon his resignation from the papacy seven years ago, Benedict said he would remain “hidden from the world,” the latest comments, from a 2018 interview included in a new biography of him, follow a number of similar statements by the former pontiff in the past several years, most of them showing up in books or letters. He also penned an article in April 2019 on sexual abuse that was released shortly after a Vatican summit of the heads of the world’s bishops’ conferences on that subject.

Benedict is a distinguished theologian whose reputation for insightful scholarship and analysis was established long before he became pope. A *peritus* at Vatican II, a university professor and a bishop before his move to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Pope John Paul II, he has always had a formidable grasp of the church’s theological history. It is no surprise that he should have contributions to make to the contemporary ecclesial discourse or that Cath-

olics around the world should want to hear from him.

At the same time, it is impossible to separate such statements from the fact that he is the former pope and a powerful symbol in the imagination of Catholics worldwide. It is reasonable to ask, then, whether, in this new role as pope emeritus, Benedict’s public commentary is contributing to the life and unity of the church, especially when his comments touch on matters (including sexual abuse and priestly celibacy) that are challenging, hot-button issues for his successor and for Catholics in every parish.

We do not attribute unworthy motives to the pope emeritus. Benedict may not be aware of the way his comments can be described or misconstrued by individuals whose motives are not so trustworthy as his. Benedict’s words are regularly used as a cudgel by those who make no secret of their desire to hinder the reforms and pastoral emphases of Pope Francis. For example, Pope Francis said in 2013 that an overemphasis on church teachings regarding human sexuality runs the risk of enfeebling the church’s evangelical efforts. In this respect, breathless reporting of Benedict’s comments on social issues like gay marriage, abortion and celibacy depicts him as issuing a correction of his successor and taking sides in favor of a more hardline Catholicism.

We are, of course, in a unique historical situation: Never before has the church had to discern the proper role of a pope emeritus.

In another quotation from this week’s interview excerpts, Benedict said his friendship with Pope Francis had “not only endured but grown” in the seven years since Francis was

elected pope, an indication that neither Benedict nor Francis subscribes to the notion that Benedict is trying to undermine Francis. But we respectfully suggest that it would be a powerful outward sign of unity if the pope emeritus and those who advise him sought to avoid situations in which his public comments will be inevitably misused to suggest a division that Benedict has never wanted.

‘Undying Gratitude’

On April 16, 1945, President Harry S. Truman addressed a joint session of the United States Congress to eulogize his predecessor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and to address the much-anticipated end to the horrors of World War II. Just three weeks later, Germany would surrender, with Japan to follow four months after.

“Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid. They have earned our undying gratitude,” Mr. Truman said. “America will never forget their sacrifices. Because of these sacrifices, the dawn of justice and freedom throughout the world slowly casts its gleam across the horizon.”

For most of the world the conflict was still very much real: The ongoing struggle for Okinawa in the Pacific proved the bloodiest battle in that theater of war; the cities of Europe and much of Asia were churned to rubble; the Soviet Union was dealing with the loss of 26 million citizens; reports out of occupied Germany began to expose the scope and inhumanity of the Nazi concentration camps. In the United States, millions of families prayed for the safe return of loved ones and dreaded the arrival of a Western

Union telegram with more painful news.

This print issue of **America** is dated May 25—Memorial Day, seven and a half decades after the end of World War II. A look back over 75 years can give perspective on what has been gained and what was earned by the sacrifice of so many in that terrible war. Japan and Germany now both enjoy strong democratic institutions and material prosperity and are outspoken leaders in international peace initiatives. Another global war—including its apocalyptic nuclear implications—has been avoided, albeit narrowly at times. Billions have been lifted out of poverty. And while democracy is imperiled in more than a few places, it has slowly gained ground in many more.

On the religious front, just the past year has brought two developments unthinkable 75 years ago: the visit of Pope Francis to Japan, in 2019, and the invitation just this month from Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany to the pope to visit Germany as well. While we should not be naïve about the challenges ahead, it is also easy to see new signs of growth and progress.

Even as today the global community struggles to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, our greatest challenge since World War II, we can look to portents of hope amid the devastation—and resolve that the sacrifice of those we remember this month with “our undying gratitude” will not have been in vain.

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Around the world, democracy is at risk from the coronavirus

“When somebody is the president of the United States, the authority is total.”

President Trump uttered these words at a news conference on April 13. They were a seeming inversion of recent partisan politics as much as a false reading of the Constitution. Since when are Republicans for expansive national authority against states’ rights? But Mr. Trump may have spoken for many world leaders.

Around the world, governments are taking on new powers in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Elections have been postponed in at least 50 countries. Governments have won expanded surveillance powers to monitor infected individuals in China, South Korea, Singapore and Israel. And there are new limits on freedom of speech (ostensibly to stop “disinformation” about the pandemic) in places like Hungary and Thailand.

The temporary expansion of such powers can be necessary even in democracies. President Lincoln’s expansion of executive power and actions like the suspension of habeas corpus arguably saved the Union during the Civil War. But the violations of free speech and mass arrests by the federal government during the “red scares” after World War I and World War II seem less defensible in retrospect.

There is rarely a guarantee that new powers will be ceded after a crisis is over, and in some cases, the crisis may be used as a pretense for long-desired moves toward authoritarianism. The most-discussed example during the pandemic has been Hungary’s Viktor Orban. The Hungarian prime minister is now essentially ruling by decree, and some of the powers granted to him by the Assembly seem to have little to do

with the public health crisis.

Indeed, safety or public health crises are what social scientists call “critical junctures,” moments of fluidity and uncertainty when political actors can change institutions to their liking. In situations where the normal rules no longer seem to apply, the people in power can create their own rules. Carl Schmitt, a political theorist who supported the Nazi regime in Germany, is famous for his notion of a sovereign as “he who decides the exception.” This terse formula means that in moments of crisis, the true leader brushes aside the liberal trappings of separation of powers, parliamentary democracy and so forth. His will is not bound by the law; it is the law.

But this theory, often called “decisionist” because of its emphasis on the decisions of romanticized leaders, fetishizes the will to the exclusion of reason. It also normalizes apocalyptic thinking, framing a theory of governance based upon the most extreme circumstances.

National governments should do what they think best in crises. This does not necessarily mean suspending democratic norms. Germany, for example, has been expanding testing for the coronavirus and vigorously enforcing social-distancing rules without having to give more policy-making powers to Chancellor Angela Merkel. But when a crisis calls for giving a national leader wider latitude, oversight and electoral accountability are key.

Legislatures and courts should do what they can to supervise the executive’s use of expanded powers, such as imposing sunset provisions that require the regular reauthorization of such powers. Looking to the post-pandemic future, they should investigate

not only how those powers were used (or misused) but also how their countries can be better prepared for future pandemics.

But without such oversight, the truth of Mr. Trump’s statement will come out. As the political scientist Greg Weiner said on Twitter, “The thing is, his authority *is* empirically absolute if Congress or, here, governors decline to exercise countervailing power.” As Mr. Weiner implies, a federal political system works only if state governments fight against the centralization of power in Washington. So even if you disagree with some of the actions of, say, Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York, you should be grateful that he is offering a countervailing force to the national government.

That brings us to the most fundamental source of democratic accountability: voters. In nations with functioning democratic institutions, it will ultimately be up to voters to hold elected officials accountable for their use of power. They will need to debate the policies enacted in response to the pandemic and to ensure that democratic values are restored and respected.

Recent decades have not been kind to democracy, and the pandemic threatens another rollback. It should be a clarion call for citizens around the world to take a more active role in the shifting fortunes of democracy in their countries and for international actors to play a supporting role in places where the absence of effective civil rights and liberties prevent an active civil society.

Bill McCormick, S.J., is a contributing editor at *America* and a visiting assistant professor at Saint Louis University in the departments of political science and philosophy.

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Catholic parish life (as we knew it) is not coming back anytime soon

By Michael J. O'Loughlin

Across the country public Masses have been suspended for weeks because of the coronavirus pandemic. But by early May at least two U.S. dioceses had begun reopening churches, and others were in the planning phases, figuring out how to protect worshipers while offering Catholics access to the sacraments and a return to the parish community.

There are still many unanswered questions, but interviews with physicians, public health experts, priests and diocesan leaders all elicited at least one common refrain: Even when public Masses resume, parish life will not feel normal for a while.

Chicago, home to the nation's third largest archdiocese, has become a coronavirus hotspot. It reported more than 1,100 deaths and more than 27,000 cases by early May, and the city's lakefront bike path and beaches remained closed. A statewide stay-at-home order has been extended through the end of the month.

Auxiliary Bishop Ron Hicks, the archdiocese's vicar general, said a task force is considering ways parishes may reopen when state restrictions are eased but that public health comes first.

"Reopening will be gradual," Bishop Hicks told **America**. "It's not going to be that one day we're saying everything is closed and tomorrow it's open." When churches do open, parishes will implement a number of measures aimed at reducing the spread of the virus.

Dr. Renuga Vivekanandan is an epidemiologist at the Creighton University School of Medicine in Omaha. She said that it would be "unwise" to host large gatherings too quickly, especially in places where testing capacity is limited and the true scope of infection remains unknown. But when churches decide to open to the public, parishes should implement "a multi-prong system" to protect worshipers.

First, Dr. Vivekanandan said, the elderly and other vulnerable populations should continue to stay home until a vaccine or effective treatments are widely available. "This virus is not going to go away; it's going to be here for a while," she said.

As states ease stay-at-home orders, some churches will begin to offer Masses that are open to the public. Dr. Vivekanandan says pre-screening, social distancing and hand hygiene will be vital to keeping people safe.

"When somebody's entering the church, get their tem-



CNS photo/Karen Bonar, The Register

Bishop Gerald L. Vincke begins a Good Friday service on April 10 at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Salina that was livestreamed on the Diocese of Salina's social media networks.

perature and screen them for their symptoms,” she said. Ask if they have a cough, sore throat or shortness of breath. If they say yes, or if they have temperatures above 99.9, ask them to refrain from entering the church.

For those who are not sick, access to a hand-washing station or hand-sanitizing gel near the entrance is essential, she said. Everyone should wear a cloth mask and social distancing guidelines should be followed, with worshipers sitting six to eight feet apart. In addition, gatherings should start small, with fewer than 10 people. As the infection rate comes down and testing capability increases—which, Dr. Vivekanandan pointed out, will vary from place to place—the size of the congregation could increase.

“I do realize that things slowly need to reopen,” Dr. Vivekanandan said. “We have to get to the general population and let them know that if you’re sick, don’t come to work and other places where people can be infected.”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said in a statement to **America** that each bishop will decide when and how to reopen churches, “based on the circumstances of his diocese and taking into account the guidelines set by their local officials.”

“Each geographic area is different and the situations vary across the country in how communities have been dealing with the Covid-19 virus, and it is too early to make generalizations, but we are working to facilitate the sharing of responses to this unique and emerging situation,” the statement reads.

Still, some dioceses have already begun to reopen, at least partially.

In Idaho, which in May was under a statewide stay-at-home order, the Diocese of Boise was opening churches for private prayer. Parishes in the Diocese of Helena could begin hosting Masses with fewer than 10 people gathered.

And in Las Cruces, N.M., Bishop Peter Baldacchino sent a letter to priests saying he “strongly disagree[s]” with the state’s decision not to exempt churches from its ban on large gatherings and said that public Masses could continue “while maintaining all current health precautions set forth by the state and federal government.”

That means celebrating Masses in parking lots, with parishioners remaining in their cars, or in outdoor spaces like cemeteries, with worshipers staying six feet apart. The new rules issued by the diocese also allow priests to hold Masses inside churches with fewer than five people gathered (in compliance with state restrictions on large gatherings) and to offer other sacraments such as confession, anointing of the sick and weddings.

A poll from the Public Religion Research Institute found that most Americans, 77 percent, opposed exemptions from stay-at-home orders for religious groups and that even when exemptions were granted, most Americans were staying home anyway. In some states, like Georgia, political leaders are pressing to “reopen” even as public health experts warn that this policy risks a surge of infections.

But even in rapidly reopening states, the lifting of stay-at-home orders will not necessarily mean Masses will immediately resume. A letter from Georgia’s Catholic bishops on April 23 announced that Masses would continue to be suspended through the end of May, citing public health guidelines that suggest “waiting until June to shift social distancing strategies would be the best course of action” for the state.

For dioceses considering when to allow Catholics back to churches to pray or to attend Mass, Michael Rozier, S.J., who teaches health management and policy at St. Louis University, said “it would be a major mistake” to make decisions based on artificial deadlines.

He noted that even if governors choose to reopen their states against the advice of public health professionals, church leaders are under no obligation to follow along. Decisions about when to relax restrictions “need to be based on conditions” on the ground, he said, like local infection rates and hospital capacity.

But once a decision is made to allow public Masses, Father Rozier said, the behavior unique to worship should be evaluated for safety. Whatever elements of Mass are deemed not essential and could pose a health risk should be eliminated.



AP Photo/Kin Cheung

With world attention on Covid-19, China clamps down on Hong Kong

The pro-democracy activist and former lawmaker Martin Lee leaves a police station in Hong Kong on April 18.

Mass protests that had roiled Hong Kong since June 2019, now largely subsided because of the Covid-19 pandemic, may return, local political analysts warn, because of recent gestures by Beijing to tighten control over the former British colony.

On April 18, Hong Kong police arrested 15 prominent pro-democracy activists, including Martin Lee, 81, a senior barrister and the founder of the Democratic Party, and the media tycoon Jimmy Lai, 71, both Catholics. They were accused of organizing or taking part in unapproved protests last year and were arrested on charges of illegal assembly. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong condemned the arrests as “political persecution” and urged the authorities to respect freedom of assembly.

Once trusted by Beijing as one of the drafters of the Basic Law, the document governing the relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland, Mr. Lee is often called the Father of Democracy in Hong Kong. In an interview with **America**, he worried that fresh confrontations between the authorities and protesters will lead to violent crackdowns.

According to Mr. Lee, the Joint Declaration signed by Britain and China in 1984—a legally binding treaty registered with the United Nations—and the Basic Law were designed to boost confidence in Hong Kong and to stem talent and capital flight before the handover in 1997.

He lamented now that Beijing has “completely broken its promise,” not only with Hong Kong but also with the international community. “It’s their fault, but they’re punishing Hong Kong people,” Mr. Lee said. “The international community has a moral obligation to speak out.”

“I see a calculation in Beijing that this is now the perfect time to take a hard line on Hong Kong and get it subdued when the Western democracies are too preoccupied with Covid-19,” said Steve Tsang, the director of the Uni-

versity of London’s SOAS China Institute.

Analysts believe that China will tighten its control of Hong Kong and will likely push the city to pass the controversial Article 23 security law before the September legislative election, as authorities fear widespread dissatisfaction with the government may result in pro-democracy politicians winning a majority. Kenneth Chan, a political scientist at the Hong Kong Baptist University, said laws legislated under Article 23 would “give the authorities new powers to persecute and purge the pro-democracy leaders and activists before the election in September.”

China’s reliance on Hong Kong as an economic engine has lessened markedly over the past three decades. Beijing leaders may believe any economic impact in Hong Kong would be “a price China can pay” for the sake of bringing the former British colony more completely under its control, Mr. Tsang said.

But China’s interventions could badly hurt Hong Kong’s economy and dampen investor confidence, Mr. Chan warned. “It is foolhardy to suggest Hong Kong’s trade, economic and financial status will emerge unscathed from Beijing’s blatant interventions,” he said. He also warned that China’s plan may backfire. Many ordinary Hong Kong citizens have told local media they would rejoin antigovernment protests if the antismuggling legislation goes ahead.

Mr. Lee told local media that his arrest made him “feel proud to walk the road of democracy with the outstanding youths in Hong Kong.” Mr. Lee said he “would not give up” on his fight for democracy.

“This has strengthened my will,” he said.

Verna Yu contributes from Hong Kong.



Hunger begins to replace Covid-19 as existential fear in South Africa

As South Africa entered the second month of a national lockdown intended to thwart the spread of the coronavirus, many have begun to critically assess its human costs. The lockdown has suppressed some major types of crime and inspired a surge in some others. But above all, it has translated into a sharp increase in national levels of poverty and malnutrition. Because of that emerging suffering, some are already beginning to wonder if the nationwide restrictions are doing more harm than good.

There is some good news to report. Compared with the same period in 2019, violent crimes have dropped sharply across South Africa. Similarly, car and truck hijacking and business and house robberies have dropped; and deaths from road accidents over the Easter weekend diminished 82 percent. Unfortunately, gender-based violence has comparatively increased during the lockdown, accompanied by a spike in burglaries of unoccupied buildings.

Behind these developments a great specter looms: hunger. The wealthy and the middle class can tap into savings to buy necessities, but the vast majority of South Africans have no income now because of the lockdown and no reserves to reach into to buy food. Those who work in casual employ-

ment or in the informal sector are now unemployed.

South Africa already had a high unemployment rate at 29 percent in early 2020. Now even larger numbers are unable to provide for themselves and their families.

In conversations among priests from various parts of South Africa, a doleful reality is described: People are starting to starve. The normal channels for getting food to the hungry are, of course, seriously hampered by lockdown restrictions. Charitable individuals who tried to deliver food during the lockdown have been harassed by police; religious communities on lockdown themselves struggle to keep in contact with each other, let alone coordinate charitable works.

In some places food protests have erupted in defiance of lockdown orders, leading to looting and clashes with security forces. These tensions and the uneven response of the government to the problem of poverty during this crisis may lead to a widening social crisis.

South Africa's president, Cyril Ramaphosa, announced on April 21 an "extraordinary budget" of \$500 billion rand (\$26 billion in U.S. dollars) to address the huge socioeconomic effects of the coronavirus pandemic, saying that "our country and the world we live in will never be the same again."



AP Photo/Jerome Delay

A South African military patrol after pushing residents back into their homes following a food protest on the outskirts of Johannesburg on April 20

In a national address, he said the “historic” amount is roughly 10 percent of South Africa’s gross domestic product, adding that the top priorities for the relief package are combating the virus and relieving “hunger and social distress.”

Although opposition parties are pulling with the president at the moment, by the next elections his handling of the crisis will surely come under scrutiny. The opposition may use any flaws in managing the current situation to draw working-class and unemployed votes. It is possible that Mr. Ramaphosa, who has become a “poster president” for the World Health Organization, may succeed in overcoming the pandemic only to find himself in a position similar to Britain’s Winston Churchill after World War II—voted out of office.

The lockdown may be working to flatten the curve of Covid-19 infection, but the immediate human cost has been immense. Many South Africans have begun to ask if it is better to die of Covid-19 than of hunger.

Anthony Egan, S.J., *Johannesburg correspondent.*



CNS photo/Nick Oxford, Reuters

A chaplain speaks with a patient at SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital in Shawnee, Okla., on April 23.

GOODNEWS: In Minnesota, putting a team together for anointing coronavirus patients

With local hospitals tightening restrictions for entering the rooms of patients with Covid-19, Auxiliary Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of St. Paul and Minneapolis is addressing an important pastoral need—administering the sacrament of the anointing of the sick to those who are ill, especially those who are in danger of dying.

Chaplains at many local hospitals are now prohibited from entering rooms to see patients and instead must minister by phone or video camera. Bishop Cozzens is putting together a team of about a dozen priests to anoint patients with sacramental oil.

Bishop Cozzens said on April 28 that the team, called the Anointing Corps, would be trained by medical professionals who would outline safety procedures and protocols before they will be put on call to visit patients in their homes, at local hospitals and in nursing homes. All priests serving in this ministry are under 50 and most are parochial vicars, meaning they are not serving as pastors. More than 30 stepped forward to volunteer.

As they move forward in this ministry, the priests will quarantine themselves, either alone or with other priests on the team, and will pull back from parish ministry. In some cases, they will temporarily change residences.

“It’s certainly true that one of the most painful things about this disease is that people who have it get isolated, and some of them are dying alone,” he said. “If it’s possible that our priests could come and alleviate that and bring the presence of Jesus so that people know they’re not alone, that would be a really important thing, because we certainly want these people to know they are not alone. None of us are alone at the time of death.”

Dave Hrbacek, *Catholic News Service.*

OUR CRISIS OF CITIZENSHIP

Can we unite around shared commitments to freedom, human dignity and truth?

By Rachel Lu

This is a hard time to be an American voter. In just a few months, we will go to the polls to select a president. It would be nice to feel excited, or at least a bit hopeful, but that may not be possible. Even if we recognize that participation in the political process is a privilege, sometimes the ballot box feels like a heavy burden.

We are facing not only a health crisis and an economic crisis in the United States but also a crisis of citizenship. The United States is home to more than 300 million individuals today, and we may have almost as many different ideas about what it means to be an American. How can we work toward a better future when we seem to share so little?

Many Catholics feel politically homeless in the present landscape. Both of our major political parties have serious defects, going well beyond matters of policy. For one, it feels as though our political leaders have an inadequate appreciation of human dignity. No matter where one looks on the political spectrum, whole classes of persons seem to be marginalized and dismissed. Our most basic moral commitments seem to be up for debate.

Catholics are not the only people who feel this way. Across our nation, and indeed the whole world, we see a kind of existential crisis emerging, as citizens debate fundamental questions about human nature and the nature of society itself. Thus far, no political movement has proved itself able to address the deep anxieties that haunt us. It





Crowds await the arrival of Pope Francis on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington on Sept. 23, 2015. Many Catholics feel politically homeless in the present landscape.

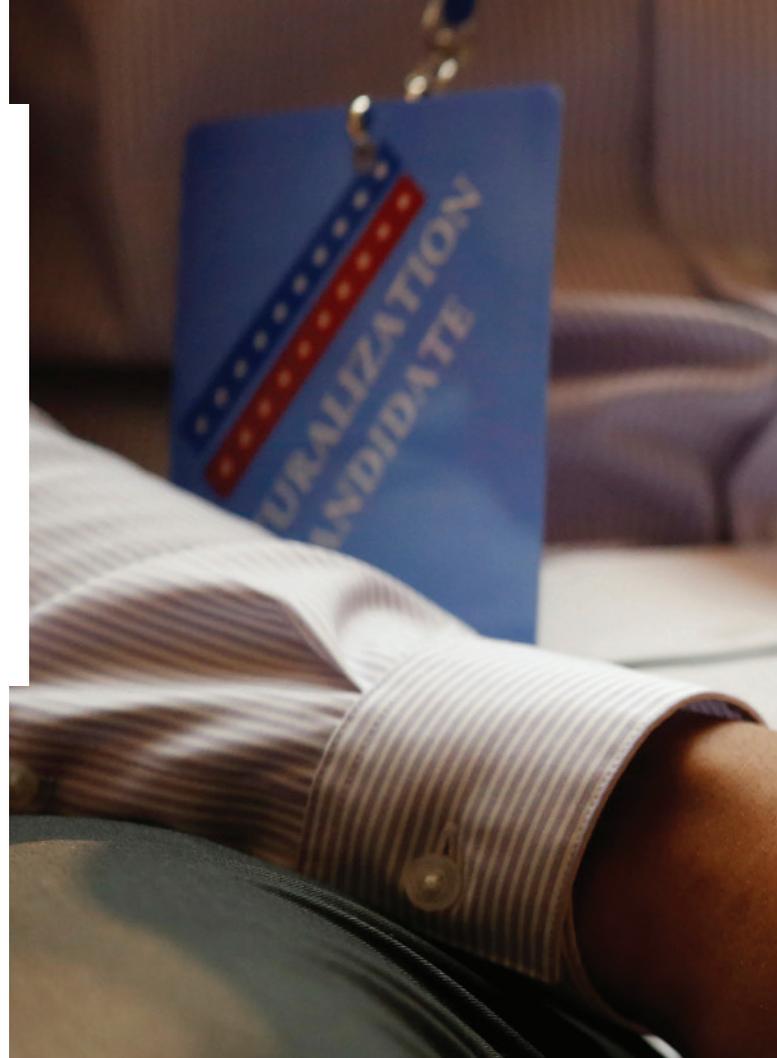
One of the strengths of the confessional state was that it helped to define citizenship in a robust and meaningful way.

is strange, in some ways, that our age should be so demoralized, given that we still enjoy historically high levels of health, wealth and security. Nevertheless, civilization feels suddenly fragile. Our social fabric is fraying. Long-smoldering culture wars are being stoked into a raging bonfire.

THREE NECESSARY SOCIETIES

The meaning of citizenship has always been a fraught issue for human societies. Catholic social teaching sheds some light on this through its discussion of the “three necessary societies” mentioned by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 in his encyclical “Rerum Novarum,” with further commentary from Pope Pius XI 40 years later. Human beings, Pope Leo told us, belong properly to three different but interrelated societies. The family orders relationships among people who are connected by blood and marriage. The Catholic Church is a society of baptized Christians. Political communities, meanwhile, order temporal affairs, supplying us with a community that is bigger than a family but smaller than the whole human race. Within the civil polity we should be able to enjoy security and the rule of law and have access to schools, hospitals, marketplaces and cultural events.

The three necessary societies correspond to our different needs as human beings. The family provides us with intimate human companions, while the church illuminates the path back to God. Within civil society, justice and the common good are the central concerns. A healthy political order should enable us to live in community with other human beings without exploiting them or neglecting serious needs. Ideally, each one of us should live simultaneously in all three of these spheres, which support and uphold one another without trying to subsume one another’s natural functions.



If we examine civil society alongside family and church, we may notice that the latter two are both ordered around a pre-existing human connection. Families are related by blood, and the faithful by baptism. Polities, by contrast, do not have a single natural commonality that defines them. Because we need a political order, we tend to go looking for the shared interests that might help us to form one, but this takes some initiative.

Different societies may embrace different strategies to address questions of membership. Geography is one obvious component, but that alone is not sufficient to distinguish unique political societies. Why should Russia be so big and Djibouti so small? Why does Ireland grant citizenship to immigrants so readily while Switzerland is far more reluctant? These questions are worked out in the course of history; and in the process of explaining those connections, we inevitably end up examining many other criteria: race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, class, cultural background, place of birth, place of ancestors’ births, etc. Who belongs? Who does not?

Historically, citizenship has often been used, quite unapologetically, as a method of protecting privilege. Naturally,



CNS photo/Shannon Stapleton, Reuters

As familial and religious bonds weaken, many Americans find themselves demanding more and more from their political communities.

the wealthy and powerful tend to favor social arrangements that preserve their existing advantages. So in the ancient Mediterranean world, it was common to have whole classes of people living within the borders of a particular polity without enjoying the common and ordinary benefits of citizenship. Citizens assumed certain duties, including maintaining the government and assuming high-ranking military posts. They were rewarded with rights and privileges not granted to slaves or the laboring underclass.

Thus, Spartan warriors were served by noncitizen helots, and Athenians by the slaves and noncitizen laborers who remained in Athens at the pleasure of the local government. The Romans offered different grades of citizenship to the inhabitants of their various incorporated territories, with each “grade” enjoying different trade rights and varied levels of access to the political process and justice system. Full Roman citizenship began as a fairly exclusive privilege. Over time it became less so, as political leaders struggled to balance the interests of aristocrats against the demands of the mostly agrarian commoners who served as the soldiers for Rome’s never-ending wars.

CHRISTIAN INTERVENTION

In modern times, we tend to see these “tiered” arrangements as unjust. If all people have intrinsic worth, why should anyone be born into slavery or second-class citizenship? This view, though commonplace today, owes much to Christianity, which upended a pagan world by insisting that all human beings possess intrinsic dignity. As Christianity spread across much of the world, societies under its influence became far less comfortable with political arrangements that explicitly relegated whole classes of people to misery and servitude.

This is not to say that Christian societies have been consistently just. As Americans, we can hardly forget how Christian citizens of our own nation pulled spurious justifications for slavery from the Bible itself. Even where Christian slavery has existed, though, it has generated deep controversy and a moral angst that ancient pagans, in general, may not have felt.

This might seem like a strange claim to make about a nation that once held nearly four million people in involuntary servitude. Of the first dozen American presidents, only the Adamses (both John and John Quincy) refused



John Courtney Murray, S.J., grappled with the challenges of being faithfully Catholic in a pluralist society.

on principle to hold slaves. More than 300 people were enslaved at George Washington's Mount Vernon, while Thomas Jefferson had an extended sexual relationship with Sally Hemings, a woman he legally owned. Can we really believe, given this record, that our nation's founders felt deep qualms about the practice of slavery?

The historical record strongly indicates that they did. In some cases this position was reached only gradually after a period of deliberation. Benjamin Franklin, for instance, held slaves in his early life, but in his later years became more and more convinced that slavery was radically in tension with the fledgling nation's foundational principles. He wrote and published several abolitionist missives, and he petitioned the first Congress to find a way to abolish the abhorrent practice as speedily as possible.

Washington piously declared that "there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do" to see slavery

abolished. This did not prevent him from pursuing his own escaped slaves with some zeal. Jefferson referred to slavery as a "hideous blot" on the soul of the nation, but he bought and sold slaves throughout his life and freed only seven (two of whom were his own sons). No adequate excuse can be given for the man who literally penned the words, "All men are created equal."

Hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. Jefferson, Washington and other influential men of our founding era are especially guilty because they did clearly know better than to perpetuate such a terrible evil. Still, the lip service they paid to the necessity of (eventual) abolition demonstrates that they understood the moral implications of human enslavement in a way the Spartans did not. Their words made clear, even when their actions did not, that they did truly understand that all humans have intrinsic worth.

THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

Given our unique political history, it should come as no surprise that American Catholics rarely feel much nostalgia for the confessional state—a polity with an official established religion determined by the monarch or established in the state constitution. And it is truly a blessing in many ways to have a Catholic culture that has never relied on official state sanction to fulfill its function. But one strength of the confessional state was that it helped to define citizenship in a robust and meaningful way. Christian rulers were tasked with preserving the culture, customs and institutions that enabled their citizens to live for God. Some took these responsibilities quite seriously, while others exploited their power for personal gain. Despite its many shortcomings, however, the confessional state enjoyed the benefit of a sturdy framework within which civic life had a shape and a well-defined purpose.

For modern societies, that shared sense of purpose is more elusive, and this can become a serious problem when social challenges need to be addressed. Whether the issue at hand is the relief of poverty, dignified labor, family formation, education, health care or social justice more broadly, the conversation must be rooted in some shared understanding of who we are as a nation. Without that shared identity and purpose, there is no effective way to work for shared goals.

Civil society remains, as in Pope Leo's time, a necessary society. Indeed, as familial and religious bonds weaken, we find ourselves demanding more and more from our political communities. The challenges of citizenship are partic-

ularly hard for us as Christians because we must still hold firmly to our conviction that all people, regardless of birth or circumstance, have intrinsic worth. At the same time, we must recognize the need for real social membership, which implies a significant set of both rights and obligations. This is an enormously challenging problem, one that neither of our political parties has yet been able to resolve.

WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS

Faced with new questions about citizenship, Catholics might benefit from a renewed look at the work of John Courtney Murray, S.J., the great political theorist whose ideas influenced the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council. Originally published in 1960, Father Murray's most famous work is *We Hold These Truths*, a collection of essays on Catholic philosophy and American political life. Although the book was widely celebrated, it is oddly underappreciated today. Few thinkers have grasped as keenly as Father Murray did the challenges of being faithfully Catholic in a pluralist society. He understood the grief that many European Catholics felt over the disappearance of the confessional state, which truly was, in some senses, a loss.

Despite that, he firmly maintained that there was a deep harmony between the Catholic tradition and the political experiment of the United States. He wanted American Catholics to affirm the best elements of our older political tradition, in hopes of inspiring and edifying our fellow citizens. By drawing our compatriots' attention to the truths that we collectively hold, we might help them to unite around a shared identity that is both distinctive and humane.

What are those truths? First and most important, Father Murray saw the American experiment as grounded in a shared understanding that we are "one nation under God." This phrase may cause some to bristle today, but it need not be understood in an explicitly biblical sense. What is crucial about the founders' vision is the frank acknowledgement that the state is not the sole or ultimate authority in every area of life. It is not the only necessary society.

At times, the polity must demand our obedience, and in extreme cases we may even be required to give our lives for it. But we can also have serious obligations to God, family, tradition or the truth itself. A tyrannical state will try to stamp out these other allegiances in an effort to arrogate all power to itself. Here in the United States, we have a long tradition of respecting the seriousness of these other obligations, allowing our citizens the freedom to discharge

them honorably. This allows us to live "under God," whether or not our neighbors actively believe in God.

Americans also believe in the principle of consent. "The people are governed because they consent to be governed," Father Murray writes. "And in a true sense they consent to be governed because they govern themselves."

FREEDOM AND HUMAN DIGNITY

As inhabitants of a nation born in revolution, Americans have always valued freedom very highly, but we are not always in agreement about what freedom means. Father Murray sees this disagreement itself as an ongoing element of the American conversation, with potentially instructive consequences. Correctly understood, freedom must be more than just the right to do and say whatever we please. But this empty, libertarian view of freedom as an absence of constraint has been present in American thought from its earliest days.

We can see its influence in the work of our founding fathers, which is why Father Murray famously argued that they "built better than they knew" in framing and ratifying a constitution that ultimately looked beyond the rationalist ideals that motivated the bloody excesses of the French Revolution. Our founders were somewhat tempted to place humanity above God, but in the end their English and Christian sensibilities won the day. They produced a document that was restrained, practical, pious and properly submissive to realities higher than themselves.

As the fruit of that accomplishment, U.S. citizens across the centuries have enjoyed a freedom that encompasses much more than 10,000 television channels or 50 pizza toppings. We have been free for the pursuit of wisdom and beauty. We are free to give loving service to family and community. We have been free for virtue and free for God.

Obviously there are glaring exceptions. We cannot forget the horrors of slavery, the plight of the unborn, atrocities like the My Lai massacre or the suffering endured by indigenous people along the Trail of Tears. But despite these hypocrisies, our commitment to ordered freedom is an authentic part of our tradition. This is why Catholics have been able to live and thrive as a minority here in a way that seemed incredible to European Catholics in previous centuries.

Beyond our commitment to freedom, Father Murray believed, Americans across the centuries have shared a commitment to human dignity that is ultimately rooted in natural law. Even as we acknowledge those times when



By drawing our compatriots' attention to the truths that we collectively hold, we might help them to unite around a shared identity that is both distinctive and humane.

we have fallen short in that commitment, we should not allow them to define us as a people. As fallen human beings, our founders made serious mistakes, but as inheritors of a Christian heritage, they still understood implicitly that it was obligatory to respect and value all members of society. Catholics are not just able to affirm those truths; we can also help our compatriots make sense of them by drawing on our own tradition.

In the chaos of our present political moment, Father Murray's prescription may sound too good to be useful. Do Americans still hold the truths that he articulates? Can we, even today, unite around shared commitments to freedom, human dignity and truth? This is difficult to say, but at least we should note that Father Murray himself was not blinded by optimism. In 1960, he found this question difficult, and it certainly has not become easier over the past half-century. As we survey our raging culture wars, we might reasonably wonder whether Americans are still willing to allow one another sufficient freedom to discharge our sacred obligations. Populists left and right seem disturbingly attracted to authoritarian models of government, seemingly oblivious to the ample historical evidence that an unrestrained state can quickly become the enemy of all people of conscience.

Meanwhile, as we watch the unfolding debates over

abortion, immigration and health care, we may seriously doubt whether our nation can still come together around a shared commitment to human dignity. Father Murray's synthesis of Catholic and American principles was brilliant and inspiring, but unless it enjoys some level of civic support, it cannot solve our crisis of citizenship.

At least Father Murray may help us to understand that our present struggles are not really new. As he frankly acknowledged, our founding fathers themselves flirted with the same Enlightenment ideologies that led the French Jacobins to reject divine sovereignty in favor of boundless human autonomy. Those demons are still with us, and across our nation's history we have seen them surface and resurface in different guises: greed, intolerance, tribalism and callous indifference. Thus far, our society has endured. There is never any guarantee that we are fit for the next set of challenges, but at least we might draw some solace from the realization that it is always a struggle to draw out the better angels in our political sphere. We have succeeded in the past. It may be possible to do so again.

Looking over our civil conflicts with a more generous eye, we can find evidence that Americans still recognize these foundational truths. We argue about our relative obligations to immigrants, the poor, the elderly and the unborn, but no one seriously suggests that any of these groups are simply worthless or appropriate objects of unbridled scorn. We quibble about the limits of free trade, appropriate family policy and the correct response to racism and sexual harassment. But Americans do still seem to agree that racism and harassment are bad, that opportunity is good and that we want all of our citizens to come together around common goals.

If we can rearticulate Father Murray's truths in terms that our compatriots recognize, perhaps Catholics can help their fellow Americans realize that we are, in fact, one people.

Rachel Lu is a freelance writer and instructor of philosophy. She lives in St. Paul, Minn.



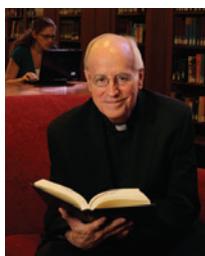
IMPORTANT NEWS

from The Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies



The Board of Trustees of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies (IACS) is pleased to announce the appointment of **Fr. Dorian Llywelyn, S. J.**, as the second president of the Institute. Educated in England, Spain and the United States, as well as in his native Wales, Fr. Llywelyn comes from Santa Clara University where he directed the Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education and served as the University's mission officer.

At the Ignatian Center, he strengthened its connections with a range of publics, led a strategic planning process, strengthened its Board, built its endowment, and hosted innovative interdisciplinary projects, most recently one on human flourishing and technology. Fr. Llywelyn speaks eight languages, has published in multiple journals, and brings to the Institute a unique range of scholarly and international experiences. His particular intellectual interests include nationalism and religion, and the theology of popular religiosity. Before his appointment at Santa Clara, he taught systematic theology at Heythrop College, University of London, and served for thirteen years in the department of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University, where he was also the first director of the Huffington Ecumenical Institute. IACS is looking forward to making use of Fr. Llywelyn's advocacy and commitment to the development and dissemination of the Catholic intellectual tradition through highest-level interdisciplinarity, interfaith and ecumenical research and encounter, and print and new media publication. Fr. Llywelyn will begin serving as president at the end of July.



The Board of Trustees wants to acknowledge the tremendous work by **Fr. James L. Heft, S.M.** Fr. Heft understood the crucial importance of the Catholic intellectual tradition to 21st-century scholarship and conceived of the Institute to foster that scholarship while chancellor at the University of Dayton. He worked with the University of Southern California to locate the Institute on their campus, where the Institute has found a home since 2006. IACS has flourished under his guidance: 17 books have been published; research seminars have been founded; and countless scholars have benefited from the time and resources the Institute has made available for their academic work and spiritual enrichment.

The board has named Fr. Heft as President Emeritus and Founder of the Institute. Fr. Heft will help with the transition to the new president, and will retain an important role overseeing several projects that he has started, including advancing the establishment of a residential research center. He will also continue at USC as the Alton Brooks Professor of Religion.

The Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies (www.ifacs.com) is specially designed to meet the two great challenges of our time: exploring the unity of faith and reason in new ways, and rejuvenating Catholic thought and life through sustained conversation with other religious believers and secular thinkers. The Institute holds itself to the best standards of research and thought in every discipline, including humility in the face of truth, correction in the face of error, imagination and awe in the face of mystery, and civility and community in the face of divergent views.

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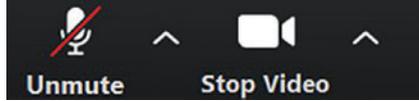


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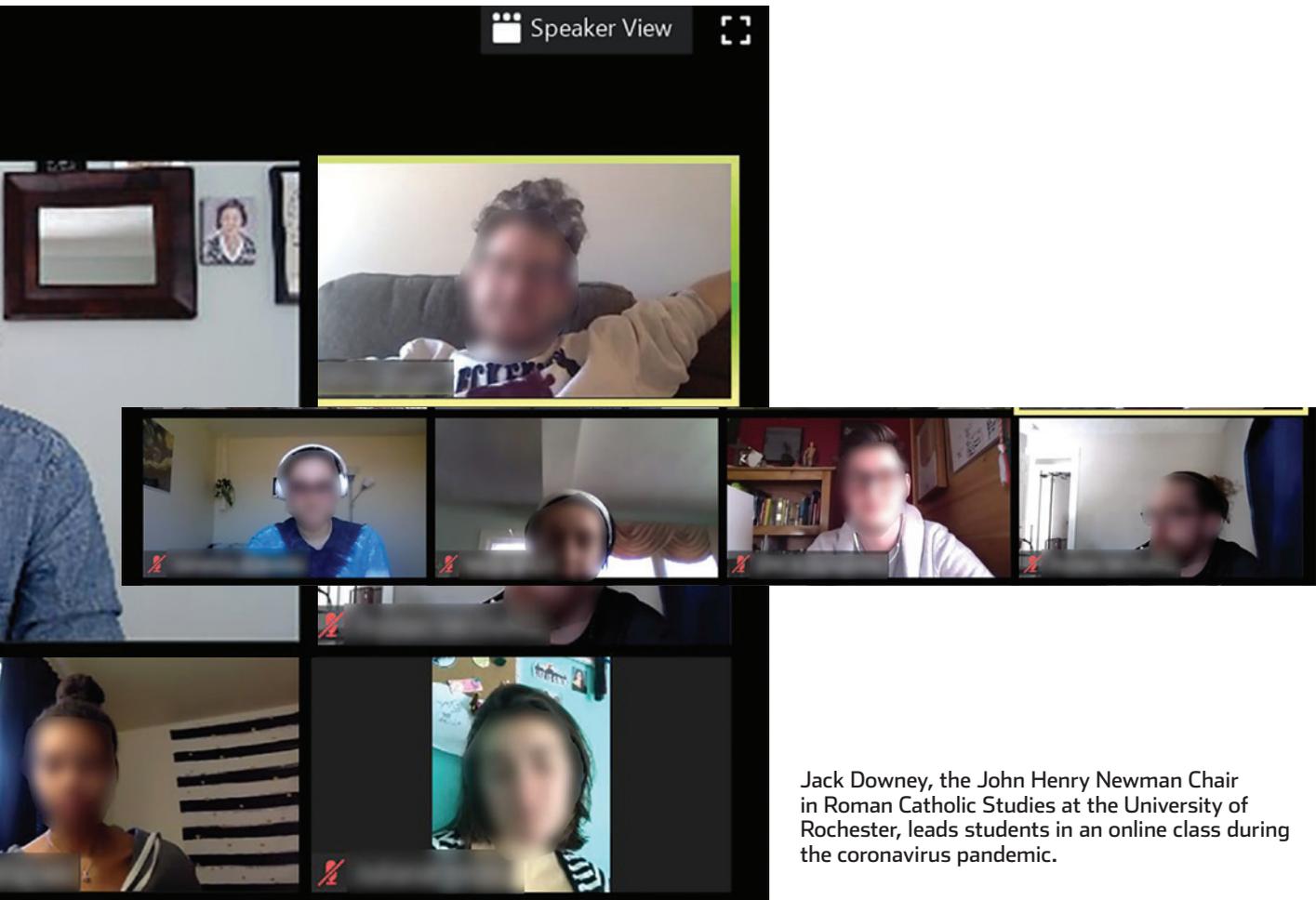
Photo courtesy of Jack Downey



HELPING STUDENTS LEARN IN A TIME OF CRISIS

Teaching at a Catholic university during the coronavirus pandemic

By Mara Brecht



Jack Downey, the John Henry Newman Chair in Roman Catholic Studies at the University of Rochester, leads students in an online class during the coronavirus pandemic.

Catholic colleges and universities pride themselves on the Catholic identity of their courses and programs. Their websites are usually steeped in talk of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Faculty and staff are implored to ensure mission is at work in classes and student activities. Even school crests often proclaim a faithful Catholic heritage. But testing whether Catholic mission truly permeates the marrow of an institution and manifests in its practices of teaching and learning is another matter.

The coronavirus crisis offers Catholic institutions an unusual opening to do just that, forcing the very premise of Catholic education into a crucible. We now have a real-world laboratory to evaluate how we make practical the too-often merely conceptual talk about Catholic identity. What is being tested is whether our pedagogies give students what we say they will—a truly distinctive way of being, a way of knowing and a way of responding to life’s most difficult problems.

Overrun hospitals, a halted world economy and a pervasive aura of fear and anxiety turn abstractions about mission and identity into reality. In this moment, need becomes nakedly apparent: our own existential and economic needs, the need of people who are sick and suffering for compassion and care, and the desperate needs of the poor and vulnerable among us. Responding to need, in its wide range and many manifestations, must become our starting point for assessing the distinctively Catholic nature of our institutions.

Our distinctiveness does not mean we can just direct students to the closest chapel to ask for answers; that is too simple. It means that, through teaching, we make alive in them a humane and thoughtful capacity to respond to need and pursue good, and to develop the dispositions of mind and heart to sustain those pursuits. It does not mean students have to be Catholic; it means they live with a Catholic orientation.



THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS FORCES A 'GUT-CHECK.' DO WE OR DO WE NOT LIVE BY OUR PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES? ARE THEY OR ARE THEY NOT FOUNDED ON THE VALUES OF CHRISTIAN FAITH?



Asking Questions From Below

Rather than begin from above with the question “How are we as an institution distinctively Catholic?”, we should begin from below—with questions like: How does our distinctive Catholic culture help our students navigate this shared world crisis? What resources are they drawing on? What assets, practices and frameworks are they using? And what are they lacking? Where are they coming up short? These are questions that every faculty member in every disciplinary area can and should ask.

At many Catholic schools, mission and identity offices are charged with upholding an institution’s historic roots. That work often takes the form of preservation: helping faculty and staff know and appreciate the school’s mission, its place in the story of American and world Catholicism and its connection to the broader Catholic intellectual tradition. Yet if mission is to be more than a relic or a motto chiseled on a plaque, it must be integral to the daily life of the school, particularly and most essentially with regard to what and how students learn. Because the faculty is responsible for creating student learning, it is faculty members who often must be the primary arbiters of mission and identity. A university, a wise mentor once told me, stands or falls by what happens between teacher and student.

Faculty members at Benedictine University in Lisle, Ill., provide a good example of what it means to take up the project of keeping a Catholic culture alive on campus. As with so many other Catholic schools, their work takes into account a religiously diverse student body, including a sizable minority who identify as Muslim (nearly 20 percent) alongside a student body that is not even mostly Catholic (45 percent). A religiously diverse student population does not mean Benedictine or any other school leaves behind its identity as a Catholic institution, but that it instead embraces and communicates it in new ways.

Like so many schools, Benedictine University moved classes online during the Covid-19 crisis. Susan Mikula, a history professor who laughingly calls herself a digital Ne-

anderthal, said she has been working hard to adjust to this new online reality. While she is experimenting with different formats and activities for her classes, she has remained consistent about a few fundamentals of her pedagogy, chief among them her deep care for students. So she did what she instinctively knew to be appropriate once classes moved online: She offered phone calls to every one of her students. Unsurprised that none of her Gen-Z students, notorious for their phobia about using a phone for talking, took her up on the offer, Ms. Mikula said many students nevertheless wrote to her to acknowledge the impact of that caring offer.

Thus, for her it is not just a question of how content will translate or the format will change in this moment, but rather a matter of how to bring Benedictine hospitality and the practice of “listening with the ear of the heart” across the digital divide. For her the crisis is putting mission-informed values to the test. “The crisis will reveal to us if what we talk about doing...is really what we do,” Ms. Mikula reflected, “There will either be a ‘yes’ or a ‘no.’”

A good friend of mine put it another way—the coronavirus crisis forces a “gut-check.” Do we or do we not live by our pedagogical principles? Are they or are they not founded on the values of Christian faith?

The Blind Leading the Blind?

A few years ago, I facilitated a series of workshops at Benedictine, when I first met Ms. Mikula. The workshops were designed to help faculty members across disciplines to incorporate mission into their daily teaching to a population of students often unfamiliar with and detached from that mission. The workshop’s subtitle: “The Blind Leading the Blind.”

It should be no great surprise that students at Catholic schools are often blind to theology, to the Catholic tradition or to religion generally. And why wouldn’t they be, given our culture’s waning relationship with religious traditions? We live in an age of widespread disaffiliation. Those who attend Christian churches in the United States are getting older. As membership ages and churches fail to attract new, younger members, they shrink, according to studies by the Pew Research Center. Despite modest growth in some Catholic communities, like Latinx churches, the Catholic Church has experienced significant decline even in just the past decade. Because of the trend toward disaffiliation, the

student pool from which Catholic institutions historically draw is quickly drying up.

But the story is not all bad. Research shows that as millennial and Gen-Z students turn away from traditional religious groups, they join a growing cohort called the “nones” or “spiritual but not religious.” While most millennials are beyond college age, the newest studies show that these trends continue among Gen Z. They often do not claim membership in traditionally organized groups and do not express religious convictions along conventional lines, yet they maintain interest in religious matters and continue to hold traditional religious beliefs—for example, a belief in God.

This dynamic of “believing without belonging” gives Catholic colleges and universities the ability to creatively seize on students’ religious curiosity and introduce them to the richness of Catholic traditions that goes far beyond reciting creeds and doctrines. Yet it also means that faculty members cannot depend on students’ having foundational theological knowledge. Most significantly, Catholic institutions cannot bet on students spontaneously finding value in the school’s “faith-based” identifier.

Like students, faculty members can also be blind. This label is not meant to malign them but instead to capture a simple fact. Faculties across all disciplinary fields and in all areas of colleges and universities are expected to carry forward their institution’s Catholic mission, but they are often asked to do so without theological training and often without any developed, personal experience with Catholic belief and practice. Still, schools regularly turn to “blind” faculty to uphold the institutional mission. They cannot afford not to.

Distinctively Catholic

The 2008 financial collapse put all institutions of higher learning on notice, but especially private schools grounded in the liberal arts tradition. Colleges and universities now must defend the ever-growing costs of tuition and articulate educational value in economic terms. On top of all that, Catholic colleges and universities have to convince students that there is something about our way of educating that sets us apart and makes us distinctive and thereby worthwhile. It is likely that these challenges will only be exacerbated by the financial downturn expected in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is difficult to make the case that Catholic schools

are distinctively Catholic because of the presence of bona fide Catholics on faculty and staff. Consider the dramatic changes to religious vocations in the past 50 years. According to Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, between 1970 and 2015, the number of men entering training for the priesthood dropped 30 percent. The number of men joining religious orders fell twice as much: 58 percent. And women’s orders experienced the most dramatic changes of all. Between 1965 and 2014, vocations to religious life among Catholic women fell by over 70 percent.

Though the research does not track what these patterns mean for college and university life in particular, they report on the myriad ways religious orders have drawn back—or withdrawn altogether—from their traditionally sponsored ministries, including educational ministries. To state it bluntly: There are hardly any religious men and women left in visible roles in higher education.

To be sure, it would be far too narrow an understanding of Catholic identity to put only those in a Roman collar or religious habit in the category. More to the point, it would be anti-apostolic. If the mission of Catholic colleges and universities is to remain alive, it will only be because of the efforts of lay people. The facts about our cultural and church situation support no other conclusion. The way forward, then, is to welcome fully even “blind” faculty into the mission project.

The Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education has issued guidance on the relationship between consecrated and lay educators. While consecrated persons will always play the irreplaceable role of sign and witness (“Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools,” No. 20), lay people fully cooperate in the mission of Catholic schools and even have a “special grasp” of the wider culture and the signs of the times (“Educating Together in Catholic Schools,” No. 15). In other words, the church’s magisterium recognizes the particular significance of the lay contribution to Catholic education, and it is on this conviction that leaders in Catholic education should build.

Why is this important now? Because all questions about mission, identity and how both are carried forward become more immediate—and more answerable—amid the coronavirus crisis. Just as data and bench scientists’ work has become imminently practical as they gather disparate information in hopes of giving us useable answers, Catholic colleges and universities can pay attention to



College professors are preparing for the likelihood that they will continue to be online educators through the fall.

the deluge of data—ephemeral and seemingly insignificant pieces of information that ordinarily pass by without our notice—to ask how our students navigate this shared world crisis. This material, interpreted carefully, will tell us what—if anything—makes our institutions, our work, and ultimately us ourselves, distinctively Catholic. Professors have to prepare for the likelihood they’ll continue to be online educators at a time of pandemic through the fall, keeping this endeavor relevant.

Assessment of Mission Impact

Basic assessment strategies will allow us to accomplish this job. Teachers collect information about what happens in and outside their classes to understand how their students learn. This feedback comes in a variety of forms. The most obvious is “gradable” material. Lab reports give a biology professor feedback about whether students have learned to use a microscope. A theater professor reviews a performance to judge the students’ grasp of dramaturgy.

But what we use to measure student learning goes far beyond the byproducts of learning. All the events and activities that orbit around and grow out of the learning process can provide data points as well—for example, student logs of time spent on reading assignments, records on the dura-

tion and depth of in-class discussions, or self-reflections on learning. We can collect information from students about what they are doing to tell us how we are doing.

The possibilities here are manifold. Students might be assigned to log how they use their time each day, what they thought about even prosaic questions like whether it was safe to go to a corner store for a candy bar, and what embodied or mindful practices they turned to that bring them calm. Students might find a news item and write one sentence on how it relates to something they learned in class, maybe even something that in normal times would seem incongruous. Students can be asked to list all the needs and vulnerabilities that coronavirus makes apparent and hypothesize about how their studies enable them to respond.

The same can be done for mission-related ideas students have heard around campus. Teachers can pay attention to how students relate to each other during synchronous video conference meetings. What feelings are being openly expressed? Taking note of their chatter before the meeting starts is often helpful in this respect. They can also survey students about how something they heard about in the “real world” further sparked their interest in ideas from class. What follow-up research, reading or thinking did they take up in response?



WE NEED A THEOLOGY OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY THAT EMERGES FROM ON-THE-GROUND OBSERVATIONS AND INTERACTIONS.



Gabriel Benois/Unsplash

What Do Our Students Yearn for?

Possibly the most important strategy may be to survey students about what they yearn for most in this time of crisis. What missed experience of campus life do they find themselves thinking back to most often? What daily rituals do they miss the most? And do they feel they have the tools to manage their own self-care in these extraordinary moments?

Faculty members can also pay close attention to what students communicate, directly and indirectly, in their emails. What questions and concerns do they express? What kinds of answers do they want? For faculty advisors, what courses and electives are in demand? What classes and programs do students wish were available? The right approach can gather unfiltered responses to these prompts quickly and regularly and can provide significant data points over time. None of them have to be mission-specific, but they can all be analyzed in terms of mission and identity.

Teachers can also give students direct opportunities to bring together disciplinary areas, the coronavirus crisis and mission and identity, perhaps for a final assignment. This current academic calendar is like none we have ever experienced, and we should recognize that and even embrace it. Likely, many faculty already planned on shifting this semester's final assignments in such a direction, at least in part. But rather than use this work to measure only student learning for a particular class, it can provide feedback on larger questions about student learning and mission and identity.

Faculty members (even "blind" ones) can take responsibility for generating this data—data that can be used to evaluate whether we are accomplishing what Catholic schools are first and foremost committed to, as stated by the Congregation for Catholic Education: "guiding its students to knowing themselves, their attitudes and their interior resources, [and] educating them in spending their lives responsibly as a daily response to God's call" ("Educating

Together," No. 40). The process of interpreting the data and asking the questions may even result in new vision.

For decades now, Catholic institutions have functioned with a diminished presence of men and women religious and with an ever-contracting population of Catholic (and even "Catholic-affiliated") students. We are only now adjusting to these realities. In this moment, let us put aside boilerplate descriptions of Catholic identity and lay to rest abstractions about how our scholarship intersects with institutional mission. Let us look instead at what happens in routine interactions with and among our students, and how those interactions propel students forward toward the world and its needs.

We need a theology of the Catholic college and university that emerges from on-the-ground observations and interactions. And we need a philosophy of education that will prove effective for teaching in a time of crisis. If we find that what we teach fails to turn our students outward to the needs of the world, if we find that how we teach does not nurture deep relationships or the inner dispositions to weather today's storms, then we know that as Catholic educators we need to rethink our Catholic identity.

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The Most Endangered Victims of the Covid-19 Crisis

Strategies for including the poor and refugees in the global common good

By David Hollenbach





CNS photo/Elias Marcou, Reuters

Migrants at the port of Mytilene, on the island of Lesbos, wait to board a ferry to mainland Greece on March 20.

The Covid-19 crisis reveals the full force of unjust structures that place refugees and very poor people at great risk. It also shows the dangers of political discourse that emphasizes national interests to the exclusion of the world's most vulnerable people. International responses to the Covid-19 crisis should prioritize greater social inclusion of very poor people and those who have been forcibly displaced.

The crisis also indicates that our obligations to the citizens of our own country must not negate our duties to global humanity. Active support for the poor and the displaced will be essential in longer-term efforts for a more just, more inclusive and healthier post-crisis world.

A 'Coronavirus Catastrophe'?

The pandemic caused by the coronavirus has thus far had the greatest impact in Europe, North America and China. A high death toll has been accompanied by severe economic setbacks, including surging unemployment, sharp declines in income and the collapse of businesses. As the pandemic spreads to less-developed countries, its effects on the global poor (and in particular on refugees and other displaced peoples) will likely be even greater.

Today there are over 735 million people in the world living in extreme poverty. They are very vulnerable to the effects of the coronavirus. Refugees and other forcibly displaced people are the most vulnerable of all. Of the more

than 70 million refugees and other forcibly displaced people in the world today, 84 percent are in developing countries and 33 percent are in the world's poorest countries. These people are facing the possibility of a "coronavirus catastrophe" that could cause millions of deaths.

Extreme poverty or being a refugee makes a person especially vulnerable to the virus for several reasons:

- Many very poor and displaced people live in cramped informal settlements or camps that make social distancing impossible.
- They face malnutrition and other deprivations that make the virus more dangerous.
- They have minimal access to social services, including health care.
- Their access to reliable information about the disease and its spread is limited.
- The plight of children and the threat of gender-based violence are particular concerns among the poor and displaced.
- Humanitarian efforts are being disrupted both by the effects of the disease on agency workers and by the political instability and economic consequences of the pandemic.
- Some existing international support systems for the extremely poor and for forced migrants are being diverted to those affected by the pandemic in developed countries.

The governments of richer countries need to take strong action to prevent the Covid-19 crisis from increasing the suffering already caused by extreme poverty.

In light of these threats, the governments of richer countries and international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund need to take strong action to prevent the Covid-19 crisis from increasing the suffering already caused by extreme poverty. Targeted assistance for refugees and the forcibly displaced is a high priority, as urgent appeals from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and international nongovernmental organizations indicate. Leading Catholic organizations, including Caritas Internationalis and Jesuit Refugee Service, are already acting and have called for additional assistance.

A Human Family in a Common Home

Support for the very poor, including refugees and people forcibly displaced amid the Covid-19 crisis, is both a global moral imperative and in the self-interest of better-off countries. Despite their responsibilities to their own citizens, developed countries have obligations to displaced people and the poor countries that host them.

There is also a practical element to assisting these vulnerable populations of the very poor and refugees. The virus does not recognize national borders. Extensive spread of the pandemic among the displaced and the very poor is very likely to accelerate its worldwide increase. By providing assistance to those who are especially vulnerable, wealthy countries will also be protecting themselves.

Catholic social thought, with its orientation to the common good both nationally and globally and its insistence that we share a common home across the earth, provides a persuasive way to combine legitimate national con-

cerns with the imperative of global solidarity.

To be sure, each country has special responsibilities to its own citizens. The principle of subsidiarity affirms genuine duties to more proximate communities. But as early as 1931, Pope Pius XI stated in “*Quadragesimo Anno*” that when there is serious need at a greater distance and those nearby are unable to respond effectively, larger communities have a duty to take action.

In “*Pacem in Terris*” in 1963, Pope John XXIII further developed this line of thought, noting that “the fact that one is a citizen of a particular State does not detract in any way from his membership in the human family as a whole, nor from his citizenship in the world community.”

The unity of the human family relativizes the moral significance of national borders. At the Second Vatican Council in 1965, “*Gaudium et Spes*” emphasized this principle’s relevance for our obligations to poor countries and to refugees. In light of “the increasingly close ties of mutual dependence today between all the inhabitants and peoples of the earth,” the council called on the international community to “promote the general improvement of developing countries” and “to alleviate the distressing conditions in which refugees dispersed throughout the world find themselves.”

In his 2019 message on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis stressed the importance of global solidarity with the poor and marginalized, especially with forcibly displaced people. He also made a powerful moral case against policies that lead wealthy countries to neglect and exclude refugees. The pope warned against a “globalization of indifference” toward the most vulnerable people. In his words, “migrants, refugees, displaced persons and victims of trafficking have become emblems of exclusion.” He continued: “In addition to the hardships that their condition entails, they are often looked down upon and considered the source of all society’s ills. That attitude is an alarm bell warning of the moral decline we will face if we continue to give ground to the throwaway culture.”

In the context of our common home, the way we treat migrants, refugees, the forcibly displaced and the very poor—at home and around the world—is a critical indicator of how committed we are to building just and inclusive societies.

By exposing the special vulnerability of the displaced and the very poor to health and humanitarian catastrophe (the consequences of which would not spare the wealthiest countries), the Covid-19 crisis has underscored the importance of global humanity as a moral frame of reference.

The Way Forward

The church can and should provide leadership in responding to the needs of refugees and very poor people who are facing the Covid-19 crisis. The Christian community is already responding to their needs through the important work of Catholic Relief Services, Jesuit Refugee Service, the broader Caritas Internationalis network and other agencies. These efforts need to be expanded, and increased financial support will be required to make this possible. Leadership by Catholic bishops, pastors and educators will also be essential. Such moral leadership could provide indispensable guidance on how to reconcile obligations to the citizens of one's own country with obligations to global humanity. The church's contribution could include providing guidance on how to address short-, medium- and long-term dimensions of the crisis.

Short term. Developed countries and international organizations should provide funds to enable developing countries and humanitarian organizations to acquire the medical supplies needed to treat those infected by the virus and to prevent the spread of infection to vulnerable displaced people and to others in extreme poverty. These supplies should include test equipment and personal protective equipment for medical staff. The response should address the growing hunger and even starvation that is rising in poor countries due to the loss of jobs and the restricted movement brought by the pandemic. In developed countries like the United States, Covid-19 testing and treatment should be available at no cost to the poor and the displaced regardless of their immigration status. Asylum seekers should be treated in ways that reduce their vulnerability to the coronavirus and provide them with screening and with treatment when needed.

Medium term. A major effort should be made to develop a vaccine against the virus and to finance its wide distribution in the poorer countries that host the majority of displaced people. Such a vaccine will be essential to preventing very large numbers of deaths due to the spread of Covid-19 among refugees and in both poorer and better-off countries. When a vaccine becomes available, it should be made fully available to poor and displaced people. Christians should support efforts to relieve the burden of the debts carried by poor countries so these countries can deal with the pandemic more effectively. They should also back the U.N. secretary general's appeal for a worldwide cessation of conflict so that war does not further impede efforts to treat and prevent the spread of Covid-19, both in poor countries suffering from war and among persons forcibly displaced by conflict.

Long term. The Holy See and national bishops' conferences should advocate a strong response by international agencies like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Food Program, and by national governments in the developed world, to the needs that make very poor countries especially vulnerable to the virus. They should call for strengthening the global refugee and migration regime and the wider humanitarian system that are in danger of being weakened by the economic and political consequences of the pandemic.

The virus affects both those living in their own homes and those displaced as refugees or forced migrants. It endangers rich people in the Northern Hemisphere and those who are very poor in Southern regions; it is a shared harm, a "common bad" that threatens the entire human family. Alleviating this threat and preventing further harm will bring a common good—a good that is shared both within countries and globally across borders. The Catholic tradition has a deep conviction that the common good is central to the justice that should shape social life.

The Christian community should be a vigorous advocate for the global common good in the face of Covid-19's severe threats to the poor and displaced. It should work to ensure that in the post-crisis future, poor people and refugees have a more just share in the common good than they do today.

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WE'RE ALL MONKS NOW

Eusebio Soria poses behind a glass door at the entrance of his home as he recovers from the new coronavirus in Cabrejas del Pinar, Spain, on April 28.



I was not spiritually prepared to live in isolation. So I turned to the Trappists.

By Gregory Hillis

The Cistercian monks at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky chant Psalm 91 every evening at Compline, a psalm that contains the following lines:

You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the plague that prowls in the darkness,
nor the scourge that lays waste at noon.

Paul Quenon, O.C.S.O., a monk at Gethsemani, has been praying this psalm nightly for decades, but only in the last month have the words hit home: “I never thought the threat of plague would pertain to us or specifically to me.”

The Cistercians of the Strict Observance, also known as the Trappists, is a contemplative religious order. Cistercian monastic life is characterized by work, silence and prayer in obedience to an exacting interpretation (hence the “Strict Observance”) of the sixth-century Rule of St. Benedict for monasteries.

It is a life lived in community behind the enclosure of



We can take this opportunity to recognize that ‘our happiness depends largely on living in communion with those our lives are naturally intertwined.’ 

monastic walls, separated from the world.

Because of Covid-19, many of us are living, in a way, like monks, enclosed and isolated in our homes. But unlike the monks, we did not ask for or want this situation, nor it is one for which many of us were spiritually prepared.

It is, however, a situation from which we can perhaps learn something by turning to monks for guidance, so I corresponded with three Cistercians, two from Gethsemani and one who is the abbot of a Trappist monastery in the Midwest, to ask them about what the monastic life could teach us as individuals and families during this unique time in quarantine.

Without diminishing the catastrophic loss of life and jobs caused by the pandemic, Michael Casagram, O.C.S.O., at Gethsemani said that perhaps Covid-19 is “a divinely disguised moment for human breakthrough.” Our society revolves around the notion that power and wealth give meaning to existence, that they allow us to take control of our lives. But, Father Casagram continued, “power and wealth create an illusion of meaning and purpose while undermining our spiritual destiny.” We think they give us some measure of control, but in reality they “close the door to grace.”

When we are busy with our daily routines and tasks—and most of us would admit that we are too busy—it is easy to feel as if we are in control and that the life we are pursuing bestows ultimate meaning. Yet our pursuit of meaning through power and wealth leaves us spiritually

impoverished as we scurry about, consumed by the busyness of life.

Covid-19 cannot but remind us of our mortality and fragility, and so it can help us to rethink our priorities. “All life is lived in the shadow of death,” said Brother Quenon, “and we forget that.”

In a talk he gave to novices at Gethsemani in 1965, the Trappist writer Thomas Merton said that life in this world is designed to distract us from thinking about questions of ultimate importance and particularly from thinking about our mortality. Forced isolation, on the other hand, “is making us face our own thoughts, deal with our own feelings,” said Father Casagram. “We can run from these or we can learn from what they are telling us, both good and bad.”

Quarantine can thus lead us inward if we allow it. Brother Quenon described quarantine as “a chance to get over the fear of solitude and find the actual comfort in being with something that transcends a life scurrying from this to that. You must return to yourself to find that which transcends yourself, however you name it.”

Father Casagram suggested that the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* is worth cultivating during this time of quarantine. *Lectio divina* is a form of contemplative reading mandated in the Rule of St. Benedict that involves spending time in silence, away from all distractions, meditatively reading a short passage from Scripture or a classic of Christian spirituality. Finding the time for such discipline is difficult when we are preoccupied with our regular duties, and although we are not moving about physically as much during quarantine, we still find ourselves distracted in seemingly innumerable ways.

“So much depends on persons simply taking the time to read,” said Father Casagram. “I feel God is speaking to us through all kinds of circumstances if we are present, attentive with our heart to his loving presence.” And it is through being present to our thoughts and feelings as well as to God’s loving presence that we can become more fully present to those with whom we are living in isolation.

Those of us who are spending our quarantine with other people are especially aware of the complexities involved in being in the same space with the same people for weeks on end. These complexities revolve in no small part around our individualistic propensity to elevate ourselves above others. We are, according to Father Casagram, “alienated from ourselves in the world of to-

day because of the pursuit of self-interests, caring only for what pleases me instead of being open and responsive to the needs of others.”

It is for this reason that the longest chapter in St. Benedict’s Rule is the seventh chapter, on humility; and, indeed, the whole Rule revolves around the necessity of developing humility in community. To be humble is not to put one’s self down for the sake of another but rather, according to Father Casagram, to “make room for one another” to create a “climate of love and caring.” This climate is fostered and maintained by “attentiveness to one another and a readiness to make space for intimate listening” in such a way that each person feels accepted and loved despite their weaknesses and faults.

But such attentiveness to another requires us to be present to our own thoughts and feelings—and to the ways in which we are so often focused on ourselves to the exclusion of others. Father Casagram pointed out that in a society dominated by individualism and distraction, “isolation and enclosure can sharpen our awareness of how relational, how interdependent our lives really are.” We can take this opportunity to recognize that “our happiness depends largely on living in communion with those our lives are naturally intertwined.”

Moreover, growth in this conception of community and the common good in our families can lead to a deeper understanding of the common good more generally. “In the Catholic mind and certainly in the monastic mind, the community—the common good—takes precedence over the individual,” said Father Mark, the abbot of a Midwestern Cistercian monastery, who preferred to give only his first name. The coronavirus cannot but remind us of our common fragility as human beings and therefore our common humanity.

“Awareness of how we are one, especially one in our fragility,” said Brother Quenon, “is the ground from which we build community.” If we can imitate monastic life by being present and attentive to one another in our temporary cloisters during quarantine, we can emerge from this time more attentive to the needs of those in our society.

The monks have a great deal to teach us about living in community in our temporary enclosures, but it is admittedly difficult to focus on the spiritual life in the midst of the anxiety so many of us feel right now. The monks I spoke with acknowledged this, but at the same time they suggested that we can use this moment to live into and be freed by the realization that there is much we cannot control. So

much of our anxiety revolves around wanting to control the uncontrollable, and the pandemic can teach us the futility of this.

According to Father Mark, we need to be attentive to the present moment and so focus on that which we can control: “If I can concentrate on being in control of that very small circle of reality that is entrusted to me and in some sense depends on me—how I use my time, how I take care of myself, how I care for my family and friends, how I daily and hourly turn my concerns over to God—then my anxiety diminishes.”

This is “a great opportunity to yield control of our lives, to let ourselves truly trust in the goodness and providence of God amidst all that is happening,” said Father Casagram. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are “living in the presence of a living, caring and loving God,” and we can use this time of quarantine to develop, alone or with those with whom we live, a sense of this divine presence.

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A compilation of short stories filled with laughter and inspiration.

“Rejoicing in the Lord is your strength.” Taking a clue from Nehemiah (8:10) and aiming to elicit laughter in the heart of the reader, the author relates eleven humorous experiences he has had in his ministry as a priest.

Purchase: Amazon Books

The Nuns Who Wrote Poems

By Nick Ripatrazone

“Modern poets are talking about their digestive systems, their empty skulls, and of the refuse of humanity.” Quite the literary jab in 1962—from a nun, no less. But Mary Madeleva Wolff, C.S.C., was not speaking from the sidelines; she was a poet herself, whose *Collected Poems* were praised by *The New York Times* as having “melodic skill.” Despite their “orthodox piety,” the reviewer wrote, her “appeal is a popular one.”

Sister Wolff was not alone in her poetic prowess. Mary Bernetta Quinn, O.S.F., a critic and poet, was acclaimed by Flannery O’Connor and kept long correspondences with many of the best poets of her generation, including Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams and Denise Levertov. In the mid-20th century, several nuns like Sister Wolff and Sister Quinn were writing ambitious poems and publishing them in renowned magazines and newspapers. Their writing garnered awards and accolades. These women were not the first literary nuns—Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, O.S.H., a 17th-century Mexican nun, is famous for her iconic verses—but something of a minor literary renaissance happened in mid-century America and abroad. Although literary nuns tend to be overshadowed by poetic priests like Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., and Robert Southwell, S.J., these women deserve attention.

(Although often used interchangeably, the terms “nun” and “sister” connote different religious lives. Nuns are



In the mid-20th century, several women religious were writing and publishing ambitious poetry. Pictured from left: Mary Madeleva Wolff, C.S.C., Jessica Powers (Sister Miriam of the Holy Spirit) and Madeline DeFrees (Mary Gilbert, S.N.J.M.).



Courtesy of Saint Mary's College archives



Photo courtesy of Madeindefrees.com



Wikipedia/Carmel of the Mother of God



Mary Gilbert entered the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary in 1936. ‘Everybody wrote poems in the novitiate,’ she joked. 💧💧

typically cloistered; sisters profess simple vows and live apostolic lives out in the world. Of the women religious depicted in this story, Jessica Powers fits the traditional description of a nun, living a cloistered life.)

Best known for administrative accomplishments—she served as president of Saint Mary’s College for 27 years and founded the School of Sacred Theology there in 1943, the first graduate theology school for lay persons—Sister Mary Madeleva Wolff was also a dedicated poet. Born in 1887, she studied medieval literature at Oxford at the same time as C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, and earned her doctorate in English from the University of California at Berkeley. “I wrote at least one poem a month over a period of 15 or 20 years, every one of which I sent out at once to earn its living by publication in some magazine,” Sister Wolff said—her work appearing in *The New Republic*, *Commonweal* and elsewhere.

In “The Light,” from *American Twelfth Night, and other poems* (1955), the narrator longs for God: “You do not know, you cannot, cannot guess/ Across what burning sands I come to you;/ Over what difficult seas, upon what new/ Hard ways of exile, ways

of loneliness.” Sister Wolff thought of poetry “as a distillation requiring undistracted time in large quantities. This no sister that I know of has ever had. What one doesn’t have one must make, naturally or supernaturally.” She would steal time, even while “walking to and from class, holding every fraction of quiet for milling these thoughts into lyric form. The process has been continuous and almost more secret than my conscience.”

She corresponded with Thomas Merton, O.C.S.O., a mutual admirer, for 15 years—although she could be blunt in her criticism of his work: “It takes a whole field of flowers to make a gram of perfume.”

Someone who would appreciate that metaphor was Sister Miriam of the Holy Spirit, a Carmelite nun who published under her birth name, Jessica Powers. Her sister and father died when Powers was young; the central Wisconsin farm of her youth likely provided fodder for many of her natural descriptions and the elegiac tone of many of her poems.

Powers did not leave her childhood farm until she was 31, when she moved to New York City; she said the city was a place she “could revel in, but not love.” While there, she wrote po-

etry that appeared regularly in *Poetry* magazine, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Harper’s*, *Chicago Tribune* and **America**.

The Lantern Burns, her first book, was published two years before she joined the Carmelites. That was followed by *The Place of Splendor* (1946) and other books, including *Mountain Sparrow* (1972), *Journey to Bethlehem* (1980) and *The House at Rest* (1984). Powers’s poems range from the softly devotional to the spiritually complex. “Like Kildeers Crying,” an early poem, is written in the tradition in which devotion to God is spoken of metaphorically as romantic love. “Tonight I lost my heart’s whole sense of you—/ I could not find you any way I turned./ Even your swift impetuous words, that burned/ Into my mind, were cold and palely blue.” The lovelorn narrator is surprised when a bird “lifted from a glassy pond,” and she watches it “Flying and crying with a wild despair.// I lost you then.” She ends the poem: “The dusk held nothing save their lonely crying./ And nothing mattered—neither love nor you.”

“Parasceve,” another poem of desire for God, is set on Good Friday: “Life has become for me a Par-

asceve/ To the earth's wood and to my own harsh being/ The Christ has nailed Himself to hang and grieve." Powers concludes the poem on a note of hope: "Yet even here, in gravities of sorrow,/ My soul rehearses underneath its breath/ The jubilant *Alleluias* of tomorrow."

"The Little Nation," published in 1941, shortly after she entered the Carmelites, is a terse poem of peace. The first stanza begins:

*Having no gift of strategy, no arms,
No secret weapon and no walled defense,
I shall become a citizen of love,
That little nation with the blood-stained sod
Where even the slain have power, the only country
That sends forth an ambassador to God.*

She also occasionally wrote personal verse, as in "Siesta in Color":

*I remember how rainbows had addressed me as a child
how light and color made their language heard.
Though I was not yet judge or analyst,
something secure as given, kept; I held,
as with my grandmother's warm bursts of Gaelic,
sweet words that had no meaning but were there.*

Sister Wolff and Powers wrote traditional poetry that appeared in secular publications. Yet they were joined by poet-nuns who pushed the boundaries of form and subject matter. Sister

Mary Gilbert, S.N.J.M., born Madeline DeFrees, entered the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary in 1936 at age 16. "Everybody wrote poems in the novitiate," she once joked.

"I think nuns might be more reluctant than laymen to write religious poetry," Sister Gilbert said in a report by the Associated Press that appeared in numerous regional newspapers in 1965. "I find, for instance, that many of the symbols that are meaningful to me don't communicate to other people. Also, if you are using this material you have to be very good or you will really fall flat." Sister Gilbert was very good, and very prolific. Her early poems, including "Recession," had pastoral settings. On a cold morning, fruit falls "between the orchard rows" in "a late warning/ Of what the lean branch knows." Similar imagery returns in "Early Winter": "The harvest burden bent the crusted branch/ Serenely to the earth until it brushed/ The snow with color, and reluctance rushed/ To free its treasure in an avalanche." Unsurprisingly for a Wisconsinite, Sister Gilbert often returned to imagery of snow and silence, as in "Signals":

*Strung on magnetic frequencies
In aureoles of dance,
The incandescent snowflakes
Suffuse our small pretense.*

Then later:

*Bewilderingly simple
And born to last a breath,
They range the tall uncertainties
To how sublime a death.*

Sister Gilbert began turning her

poetic gaze inward—toward the walls of her convent. "Some people seem to think that being a member of a religious order would be restrictive as to writing," she said. "But I don't feel this as far as poetry is concerned. I feel more free than I would be otherwise." She wrote two memoirs about convent life and also wrote poetry about religious life. Her first book of poems, *From the Darkroom* (1964), was lauded in *The New York Times*: "her lines deliver the laconic music that reassembles reality in a smiting chord."

"Requiem Mass: Convent Cemetery," from that book, is a moving, funereal piece. "Life shrinks to a pair of names/ (born into one, the other worn with the veil)." She writes that the "solitary, single hearts" of the sisters were "quickened by the same Love/ in a million guises." She ends with a wonderful final stanza: "Disguises, rather, for we seldom see/ from above the tombstones. Only now and then/ between the Introit and the last Amen,/ here in the cemetery,/ we look and gauge our place and look away."

Sister Gilbert continues her solemn touches in "Matinal." The narrator wakes at 4:30 in the morning during a "soggy May." "Unbreakable as doom/ five street lamps watch me come/ to keep my tryst." The lamps are "Nailed each to a man-made cross." The light "hooding our early brightness in a cloud/ tempers the shock/ and orders lonely emanations/ by a clock." Her final end rhyme, the only one in the poem, nicely punctuates the piece.

She also wrote fiction, including a story, "The Model Chapel," that appeared in *Best American Short Stories* for 1962 and perfectly encapsulates the minutiae of religious life. A nun,

Sister Constance, is asked to “write a little poem” to put on plastic piggy banks, strategically placed throughout the convent house during a fundraiser. She escapes the job, but “cringed at the sight” of the hokey typewritten messages taped to the banks: “A fervent prayer/ An extra penny/ For our new chapel/ To sanctify many.”

When Sister Constance enters the chapel, and sees a “dressed-up doll with a crown of gilt and pearls,” she says a “prayer of atonement and not of petition.” As a young nun, “she might have felt obliged to muffle her distaste for cheap religious art. Now she knew that God does not demand suspension of the critical faculties; that obedience and intelligence, taste even, can be reconciled without compromise.”

The story captures the worry that devotional writing can become trite. For this reason, Sister Gilbert’s poems tend to be less outwardly steeped in divine praise than those of her peer nun-poets—yet they are still distinctly Catholic. In “Mexican Crucifix” she writes, “the body is its own cross.” She describes Christ’s body in tight, visceral language: “the bent knees, relaxed/ and reverent together, as if/ suffering were more than a posture.”

After almost 40 years as a nun, Sister Gilbert requested release from the order. “You can deceive yourself into thinking you are praying when you are really writing poetry,” she had said years earlier. “I’m not a theologian, so I don’t know whether you can divide the two. But I think poetry is oriented toward expression and prayer toward silence.” By the time of her departure letter, she had arrived at a more direct conclusion: “religious life and poetry both demand an absolute commitment.”

Maura Eichner, S.S.N.D., who

published alongside Sister Gilbert in *The New York Times*, *The Literary Review* and elsewhere, disagreed with that sentiment. Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1915, she entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1933 and taught at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland for nearly 50 years. Her books include *Initiate the Heart* (1946), *The Word Is Love* (1958), *Walking on Water* (1972), *What We Women Know* (1980) and *After Silence: Selected Poems*, and her poetry is inventive and unique—shifting between pop culture and religion.

In the densely packed “Parking Lot,” “a fierce cat nurses her brood/ in a leaf-logged drain where no one would/ park though anyone could.” The short, strange piece “Advertising,” published in 1966, captures the era:

*On the neuter-gender sheath
paint Campbell soup pop art;
blow up breasts and rump
to flip the leering heart.*

And later in the poem:

*Lengthen the beetle hair;
blacken
the boots; shadow the eye;
pluck the eyebrow, tilt the
head.
Sell it for cool and high.*

“Creativity” describes a writer being interviewed on television, in which he says that he must write to “record this place before it changes.” The camera shifts to show “adobe walls, books, books,” and Sister Eichner slyly moves wider to show the writer’s pregnant wife “listening to his words,/ hearing—under her swelling smock—/ that other life.”

Her style shifts within her more religious work, as in “Dialogue at Midnight: Elizabeth to John”: “What we women know./ And how much we keep/ within the heart, secret/ as the honeycomb that is/ your skull growing in me.” Rather than a monologue, she chooses a dialogue between Elizabeth and John the Baptist—although he is still in her womb—and it is a masterful choice. She ends the poem with beautiful language: “My son John, trust this/ first solitude. Here in the/ ancient cave of my body,/ sail inland water/ safe from followers,// kings and dancing girls.”

Of all these mid-century nun poets, Mary Agnes, O.S.C., has the most enigmatic, and tragic, story. Born Pamela Chalkley in 1928, she joined the contemplative Order of Saint Clare in Lynton, England, in 1950. Her first book, *Daffodils in Ice*, appeared in 1972. The short title poem is ethereal: “Frost, moon, snow—silent fall, soul-musical./ Christ’s hand, outstretched to bless,/ sheds silver over all./ His scars, his ring—his marriage band/ are daffodils/ in ice.”

Sister Agnes’s debut release outsold future British poet laureate Andrew Motion’s collection (they shared a publisher). Her second book, *No Ordinary Lover*, appeared the next year. Luke Thompson, one of the few critics to consider her work, notes that even in her second collection, she shifts from using a capitalized pronoun of “You,” “signaling God or Christ,” to a lowercase referent, “allowing some romantic and erotic ambiguity.” Thompson notes that Sister Agnes was in love with a Benedictine monk, and in poems like “Palm Sunday,” she writes of longing: “The air sifts emotions/ thoughts hover/ brush my hair, in a thrush’s wing/ —silence at last,/

the wallflower is still/ full/ of flame/ I listen to its heart/ burn your name.”

A World of Stillnesses, her third book, appeared in 1976—in the midst of a nervous breakdown that caused her to leave cloistered life. Depressed and heartbroken, she continued to write for two more years, work that was posthumously collected in *Harvest* (2016). These later poems are haunting—the work of one who remained steeped in faith, despite the end of her cloistered life. The lines of “The Far Country” reverberate with pain: “Morning: a rose-rim glows,/ silhouettes the city,/ a bird sings, mindful of origins,/ intones notes it could have split/ alone over hills/ in a far country.// Sun smiles in my heart/ when shadows break/ as I wake/ married to past scars/ which still remain,/ stain a new day.” Yet other poems, like “Harvest,” retain the sweet feeling of hope:

*I had seen vibrations tremble
in a glow
over the horizon, to herald
your arrival:
you appear on a robin's song,
striding, young,
your hair sheaves of corn,
damsons and pears falling
from your hands,
ripe berries for rings,
your smile, apple-flesh.*

All these sisters—Mary Madeleva, Mary Berretta Quinn, Jessica Powers, Mary Gilbert, Maura Eichner and Mary Agnes—reveal a notable midcentury Catholic literary renaissance: women religious poets publishing widely. Their poetry is devotional and deft, complex and contemplative. The writing of these nuns captures Sister Mary Gilbert’s observation that “there is a tendency on the part of some persons to substitute poetry for religion, but there is an affinity between them.” These women bore lyric witness to this in verse.

Nick Ripatrazzone has written for *Rolling Stone*, *The Atlantic*, *The Paris Review* and *Esquire*. His newest book is *Longing for an Absent God: Faith and Doubt in Great American Fiction*.

Quarantine

By Sonja Livingston

My father-in-law is coming to the end.
My husband drives over and stands beneath his bedroom window.

He tells his father about bluebirds in the park, how the cats are doing, says he remembers when he was seven and they went sledding on the hill in Acton.

My husband stands beneath the window
head tilted 45 degrees, taking in sky and pane and glass.

When he was a boy he thought his father was Superman.
Now his father has something to say but the words fall apart before they leave his mouth.

It's late March. Most of the snow has melted.
My husband stands under the window listening to the last of his father's voice, golden crocuses coming up at his feet.

Sonja Livingston's latest book is *The Virgin of Prince Street*. She teaches in the creative writing program at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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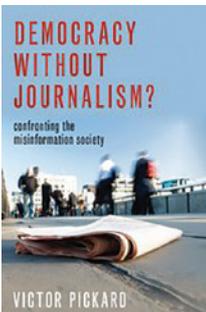
Seeking Personal Recollections of Edward Dowling, S.J. (1898-1960)

If you knew this Jesuit of AA & Cana fame, or know someone who did, please contact Dawn Eden Goldstein, who is writing his biography for Orbis Press:
(201) 577-2558 (mobile),
dawneden@gmail.com.



Reinventing journalism

By John W. Miller



Democracy Without Journalism?
Confronting the Misinformation Society

By Victor Pickard
Oxford University Press
264p \$27.95

On March 11, as the Covid-19 pandemic crisis erupted in the United States, Megyn Kelly, the former Fox news anchor, complained on Twitter about a lack of credible sources. “Even I as a journalist am not sure where to turn for real info on COVID,” she wrote.

Kelly is not alone in asking that question. Ironically, there have never been so many good answers: We can read all the world’s newspapers, libraries and scientific reports from our phones. This country’s trio of great newspapers, The New York Times,

The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal (where I worked for 13 years) employ thousands of journalists skilled at making phone calls, checking facts and writing useful and evocative true stories. When they make mistakes, they print corrections.

So why do we feel so unmoored, as if our democracy were suffocating from a lack of truth and a surfeit of shouting and drowning in Russian propaganda, Kardashian gossip and cat videos? Answers include a decline of good local news options, an overabundance of information and, of course, President Trump’s relentless bashing of journalists.

The media scholar Victor Pickard’s sharp new book, *Democracy Without Journalism?*, focuses mainly on the first issue.

A strong national network of newspapers has always been at the core of American democracy.

The founding fathers considered a

free press so essential that it was a main reason to subsidize postal and road systems. “As much as 70 percent of mail delivered in the 1790s, and 95 percent in the 1830s, consisted of newspapers,” Pickard writes. Thomas Jefferson said he would rather have “newspapers without a government” than “government without newspapers.”

You could divide the history of American media into three eras. The first was the pamphleteer period of the revolutionary republic. Political parties and business interests published their periodicals and blasted them out by horseback across the land. The second era began with the industrial revolution. Mass consumer businesses needed ways to reach and persuade customers to buy their soap, toy trucks and bicycles. They bought ads in newspapers.

For 150 years, this model reigned. There was consistent tension between the news-gathering side and the busi-

Thomas Jefferson said he would rather have “newspapers without a government” than “government without newspapers.” Pictured: The New York Times newsroom in 1942.

ness side of newspapers, and a rich owner could always use his writers to push his (more commonly) right-wing views.

But overall, it worked, with a business model replicable at local levels. Every town in the land could count on a newsroom of 100 or so men and women going to the office to check facts, write stories and pump their valuable work back into their communities, holding the powerful—mayors, doctors, factory owners and clergy—accountable. And because newspapers monopolized advertising, they were immensely profitable. You could become one of the richest people in the world by owning one.

Now we are in the third era. It’s a mess. Almost all newspapers are dead or dying, felled by advertisers’ dumping dollars on pixels instead of print. Old-school newsrooms have not been replaced by equivalent new businesses.

During the morning time they once spent reading 800-word stories on paper, people stare at a screen scrolling Facebook. In the evenings, there is national television to watch, stations chosen to accord to your political beliefs. The president is a reality TV star decrying “fake news,” which is simply any coverage he deems too critical.

The United States “has essentially conducted a hundred and fifty-year experiment in commercial journalism by treating news as both a commodity and a public service,” Pickard concludes. “With the latter function driven into the ground by the market, this experiment has largely failed.”

The modern media landscape still includes some great legacy newspapers, mentioned above, and magazines like *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*. In the new world, rich owners, like Jeff Bezos, can help keep things stable. There are a number of digital start-ups that cover things many people care about, such as politics and sports. There are news organizations, like ProPublica, the Marshall Project and NPR, funded by foundations and some public money.

But none of those solve the problem of how a city council meeting in Iowa gets covered. “When a journalist shows up these days, it’s this weird thing, like what are they doing here?” a councilwoman I interviewed in Iowa City told me recently.

Pickard aims to help “reinvent journalism” by working out a new economic model based on some sort of public subsidy for reporting outlets all over the country. Instead of seeing journalism as primarily a business, we should view it as a public service. “Any progressive agenda worth the name must fight for an adversarial news media that provides accurate information about social problems, challenges powerful interests, and opens up a forum for underrepresented voices and alternative visions for society,” he writes.

Pickard offers examples of other countries that subsidize public media, present and past. In 2016, for example, the BBC assigned 150 “local democracy reporters” to news organizations around the country. “Whereas Japan, Britain and Northern European coun-

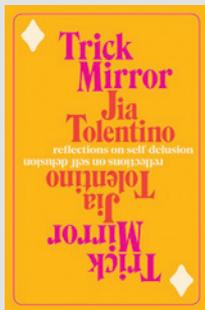
tries spend anywhere from \$50 to well over \$100 per capita on public media, the United States government allocates about \$1.40 per person per year,” he writes.

In 1912, Los Angeles launched a city-owned newspaper, *The Los Angeles Municipal News*. The paper, governed by three citizen-volunteers appointed by the mayor to four-year terms, had a circulation of 60,000 copies. The paper’s masthead read, “A newspaper owned by the people.” It covered local government matters and offered both sides of all important arguments. In 1913, voters chose to defund it after a campaign by commercial newspapers. “Voted into existence and supported by local taxes, the municipal paper stands testament to a largely forgotten alternative to the commercial newspapers,” writes Pickard.

But even if all of Pickard’s ideas were planted in welcoming soil, we are not going back to three networks, Walter Conkrite and a private local paper or two in every town. James Madison wrote that a popular government “without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or perhaps both.”

Whatever happens, we are sure to be presented with even more possibilities. The choice to limit farce and tragedy will be, more than ever, up to us.

John W. Miller is a Pittsburgh-based writer and former staff reporter and foreign correspondent for The Wall Street Journal.



Trick Mirror
By Jia Tolentino
Random House
320p \$27

Self-expression, self-delusion

Is self-delusion a bad thing? In a recent interview with a Filipino news station, Jia Tolentino remarked “to be a writer necessarily involves self-delusion. You have to think that what you have to say is important enough for people to listen.” But, she warns, that egoism has to be tempered by honesty. Thus, the question becomes: In an age of limitless self-expression, is self-reflection without self-delusion even possible?

Tolentino, a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, attempts this seemingly impossible task in her debut book, *Trick Mirror: Reflections on Self-Delusion*. In this collection of nine essays, Tolentino writes about a range of topics including the advent of our internet culture, the modern wedding industry, megachurch evangelical Christianity, market-driven feminism and college rape culture.

Cautious readers might assume that *Trick Mirror* must be oversaturated and contrived. Set your minds at ease, dear readers: These essays are expertly written. This is in large part because Tolentino seamlessly weaves anecdotes into her well-explained research. Each essay reads as a literary narrative that treats the reader as an intelligent conversation partner.

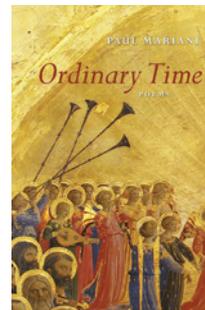
Of all the essays, “Ecstasy”

stands out among the rest. In it, Tolentino juxtaposes her evangelical upbringing with her introduction to drug use. Her particular experience of the \$34 million campus of Houston’s Second Baptist Church (which she and her friends called “the Repentagon”) and the type of caustic, corrupt religion it symbolized continues to resonate today.

As a child, Tolentino writes, “believing in God felt mostly unremarkable, sometimes interesting, and occasionally like a private, perfect thrill.” Yet, as she grew older, the easy Christianity she knew quickly broke down. She grew irritated by how church leaders handled tragedy and change. Theatrical sermons and worship services could not compete with the burgeoning and artistic hip-hop scene in Tolentino’s adolescence.

“I can’t tell whether my inclination toward ecstasy is a sign that I still believe,” Tolentino writes, “or if it was only because of that ecstatic tendency that I ever believed at all.” For people of faith today, this essay pierces through our own self-delusion when we speculate about why young people are leaving our churches, synagogues and mosques. Tolentino shows that in some cases, certain theologies are simply not robust enough to contend with the realities of life.

Angelo Jesus Canta is a graduate student in theology at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry and a former O’Hare fellow at America.



Ordinary Time
By Paul Mariani
Slant
80p \$11

Spiritual wisdom

Ordinary Time is the celebrated biographer and poet Paul Mariani’s eighth collection of verse, the pinnacle of a master poet’s achievement. The title refers to both the liturgical calendar and the quotidian, to emphasize how the sacred enters human history.

A Jesuit-educated scholar who has also written a book about doing the 30-day Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Mariani knows the contours of time and realizes that *Ordinary Time* is anything but. Mariani’s poems ask, “Does God know us only by the names our parents gave us?,” another reminder of how the human and eternal meet.

Indeed there are many stories brimming with spiritual wisdom throughout Mariani’s beautifully crafted poems. Many focus on his life and family—receiving his first holy Communion; hijinks with his brother; college; marrying his life-long bride Eileen; having a “bunch of grandkids, two elevens, a fourteen, a fifteen, a seventeen.” Family is a testimony of faith for Mariani.

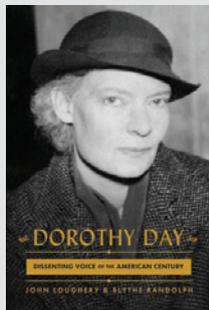
Epiphanies flow through *Ordinary Time*. My favorite is “we must learn to live as waves, each of us unique, but part, always part, of the ocean from which we came.” Witnessing four women helping a

stranded elderly woman on a cold dark night unite with her daughter, Mariani experiences his own “genuine Mitzvah,” confessing that though he has lived in this place for 50 years, he is still in some sense lost.

Mariani has his own distinctive voice, the conversational sublime combining engaging storytelling with the profundities of Western civilization. Poems here honor Botticelli, Da Vinci, Dante and Creeley but also Morgan Freeman and Fats Domino. Echoing Dante’s eighth circle of hell, Mariani characterizes Long Island as a “shrieking malebolge,” and while visiting New Orleans, he grieves for an “Ecce Homo face, a face like Christ’s, the face of a brown man beaten, spat upon, then mocked and lynched.”

Perhaps nowhere is Mariani’s voice more eloquent than in “Mexico,” about his grandfather, who was part of a U.S. cavalry detachment hunting for Pancho Villa there in April of 1916. In a glorious periodic sentence, he recounts that “Through endless arid/ days and deserts, past blooming cacti/ and blue fevered skies and serpentine arroyos,/ past the chalk-dry bones of men and cattle/ flowing ghostlike backward by him, he floats as in a dream.” Ekphrastic, generational, transcendental, these lines capture the poetic mastery of *Ordinary Time*.

Philip C. Kolin is the distinguished professor of English emeritus and editor emeritus of the *Southern Quarterly* at the University of Southern Mississippi.



Dorothy Day
Dissenting Voice
of the American
Century
By John Loughery
and Blythe Randolph
Simon & Schuster
448p \$30

Saintly and fiery

Nearly 40 years after her death, Dorothy Day continues to confound most believers. The founder of the Catholic Worker movement, alongside the vagabond philosopher Peter Maurin, Day lived a life that today poses significant challenges for just about anyone mindful of the least of our brethren.

In *Dorothy Day: Dissenting Voice of the American Century*, John Loughery and Blythe Randolph mine rich primary sources and other materials to explain how a social activist and reporter with a penchant for alcohol, male company and 1920s-style bohemian living emerged as a kind of American Mother Teresa.

Formally received into the church in 1928, Day bought the entire package, including an enduring sense of obedience to magisterial authority. But this surrender did not prevent her from assailing church leaders or acquaintances for their deference to politics or the spirited pursuit of material comforts.

The authors suggest that the Great Depression of the 1930s and the entry of the United States into World War II in 1941 only hardened Day’s view that followers of Christ were not doing enough to work for peace and relieve suffering around

them. They argue that Day felt “the American people were conditioned to embrace an entirely new outlook, one that left them feeling overly reliant on government.”

The narrative picks up speed as it follows Day’s career up until the mid-1970s, when her activism, picketing and protesting finally began to subside. Day was first arrested in 1917 for picketing in favor of women’s suffrage, and her last incarceration took place in 1973 in connection with her involvement in Cesar Chavez’s United Farm Worker protests.

Not only does this biography highlight Day’s many paradoxes, it also presents its subject as a challenging role model for any follower of Christ.

“The same woman who attended Mass every day of her adult life, refused to hear any criticism of the Pope, and accepted Vatican teachings on all matters concerning sex, birth control, and abortion,” the authors astutely observe, “could be blistering in her remarks about priests who lived in well-appointed rectories and turned a blind eye to racial segregation in their own parishes, bishops who were allies of the rich and powerful, and Catholic writers who viewed patriotism and faith as equivalent virtues, who were more concerned with the threat of ‘godless Communism’ than the needs of the poor.”

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



In quarantine with Fiona Apple

By Rob Weinert-Kendt

The singer-songwriter Fiona Apple has never shied from sonic or formal ambition.

In pop music history the 1990s may be best known for the ascendance of grunge and hip-hop. But it was also an unlikely boom time for piano-based singer/songwriters: Tori Amos, Rufus Wainwright, Ben Folds, Sarah MacLachlan. High in these ranks was Fiona Apple, whose debut album, “Tidal,” kicked off not with piano but with a clatter of percussion and a spoken-sung taunt: “I tell you how I feel, but you don’t care.”

Her stunning new record, “Fetch the Bolt Cutters,” also begins with percussion and a confessional, first-person lyric, delivered with the incantatory intensity that is one of Apple’s signatures: “I’ve waited many years/ Every print I left upon the track/ Has led me here.” As ever, she seizes—demands—full attention from the jump, like a performer commanding a stage. And for 52 minutes and 13 tracks, she never leaves it. To a degree unmatched by her previous four albums, “Fetch the Bolt Cutters”

feels like a sustained performance, dense with emotion and observation, filigreed with crafty detail.

It also never quite relaxes from that tense, coiled, rickety head space. If Apple’s music has never been exactly easy to put on in the background—as with Broadway cast albums or a lot of hip-hop, I find I need to listen closely to fully enjoy it—it amply rewards the trouble. And now that we’re all in an indefinite pandemic lockdown, all-or-nothing music like this may have arrived at precisely the right moment.

Apple has never shied from sonic or formal ambition before, but here she has broken her songcraft down to its molecular level. Many of the songs here sound like schoolyard chants or nursery rhymes that have grown into homemade chorales, like the devilishly catchy “Relay,” which contains this uncomfortable pearl of insight: “Evil is a relay sport/ Where the one who’s burnt turns to pass the torch.” Though we hear some of her distinc-

tively chiming or churning piano figures, “Fetch” is dominated, almost to a fault, by percussion and vocals.

What comes across, as ever but more than ever, is Apple’s unbidable individuality—the kind that often gets dismissively coded in women as “feisty” (or worse), but which is usually admired in men as principled stubbornness, an inability to suffer fools. When she defiantly intones, in “Under the Table,” “Kick me under the table all you want/ I won’t shut up,” she is both conjuring a recognizable dinner-party awkwardness and laying down a marker, a line she won’t cross—and that we had better not either. Lest this all sound impossibly earnest, she also utters a priceless line that could have been written by Mae West: “Cookie, don’t push me.”

Elsewhere her lyrics reach beyond her usual frankness to new levels of concision and narrative bite. The traffic-stopping “For Her” is in many ways the album’s showpiece; in

a Broadway musical it would be the 11 o'clock number. Using a swarm of sing-songy multitracked vocals, Apple outlines the perfidy of a Weinstein-like Hollywood rake who has been “treating his wife like less than a guest” and who is known for “never showing weakness unless it’s awards season.” Then she unnervingly shifts gears from third-person sympathy for his other victims to a blistering confrontation over her own assault. It’s a #MeToo testimony with a vengeance, and it is as bracing, enraging and sad as it sounds.

Apple has earned just comparisons to Joni Mitchell or Nina Simone, female geniuses as abundant in craft as in personal drama. A better analogy may be to Tom Waits, whose early work groomed him for the role of latter-day Tin Pan Alley songsmith, much as Apple’s earlier pianistic tunes, often orchestrated by outside hands, seemed to call back lovingly to earlier eras.

But one day, Waits (encouraged by his wife and co-writer, Kathleen Brennan) made a breakthrough to his signature sound, detuning his piano, banging on brake drums and raving like a demented carnival barker. Apple has found her own way to a similar atavistic essentialism: to music as ritual, possibly even of the healing kind. There are worse ways to spend a quarantine than to sing along with her: “I need to run up that hill/ I will, I will, I will, I will, I will.”

Rob Weinert-Kendt is an arts journalist and editor of *American Theatre* magazine.

What is the price of greatness?

The first thing I noticed when tuning in to “The Last Dance” were Michael Jordan’s eyes. The second was the glass of tequila resting on a side table. The two might be related.

Transporting viewers back in time—to an era of a clear-eyed, passionate young Jordan whose focus and intensity in the game of basketball were intimidating even through a TV screen—“The Last Dance” tells the story of the 1997-98 Chicago Bulls and their quest to win a remarkable sixth N.B.A. championship in an eight-year span. The 10-part documentary series was produced by the Oscar-winning ESPN Films.

In 1997, Bulls management and top players (read: Michael Jordan) agreed to give a film crew nearly unrestricted access to their upcoming season. In 2016, a producer finally convinced Jordan it was time to release the footage. The result is a detailed journey through the season in which the Bulls won the championship despite the drama of early-season struggles and bitter organizational politics.

But the real brilliance of the series is seated in a white chair, wearing a blue T-shirt and jeans, sporting that glass of tequila. Michael Jordan’s greatness is so immense that even now, long past his playing days, it still commands our

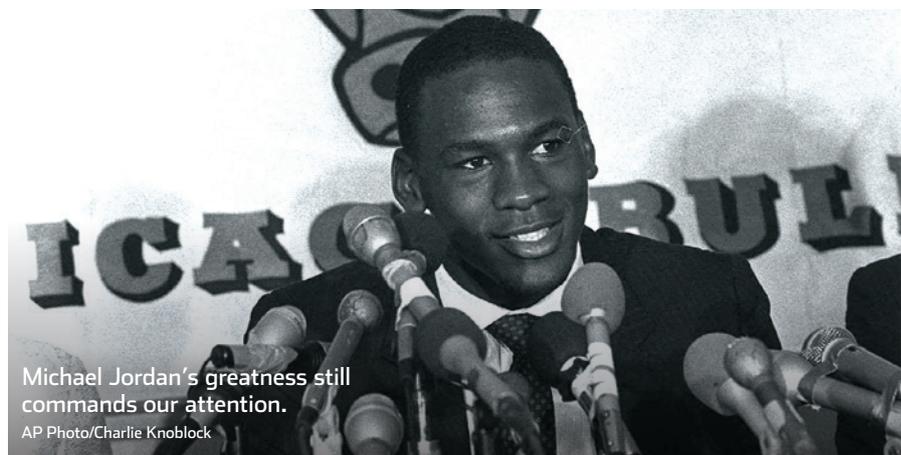
attention. We crave any insight into this athletic greatness because there is something both superhuman and supremely human about it.

But that unbridled greatness on the basketball court also had a cost. And that brings me to Jordan’s eyes. Clips of Jordan’s college and early N.B.A. career show his remarkably clear eyes, full of energy and quietly radiating confidence. He is hungry. He has the eyes of a kid who would score 49 points against Larry Bird’s Boston Celtics in the playoffs and then decide that was not enough; he scored 63 the next night.

In the modern-day interviews ESPN conducted with Jordan, his eyes are different: cloudy, aging, difficult to read. Maybe it’s just the high definition cameras, or maybe he’s on his third tequila, but a 2013 profile of Jordan put it this way: “Aging means losing things, and not just eyesight and flexibility. It means watching the accomplishments of your youth be diminished.”

We know how the 1997-98 season ended, but that internal struggle that accompanies the pursuit of greatness is far from over. Perhaps this is the real “last dance” for Jordan.

Kevin Jackson, *Joseph A. O’Hare, S.J., fellow.*



Michael Jordan’s greatness still commands our attention.

AP Photo/Charlie Knoblock

Moved by the Holy Spirit

Readings: Acts 2:1-11; Ps 104; 1 Cor 12:3-13; Jn 20:19-23

Throughout the Easter season, we have heard readings that highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in comforting, sustaining, inspiring and empowering believers in Christ. On Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus' followers, the readings highlight the Spirit's role in propelling the Christian movement forward after the resurrection.

In the first reading from Acts, Luke situates the descent of the Spirit 50 days after Easter and 10 days after Jesus' ascension into heaven. After Mary, other women and the apostles witness the ascension, the apostles select a new person to replace Judas. Today's reading describes these disciples in an upper room dramatically experiencing a heavenly wind and tongues of fire descending above them. Beautifully, these tongues of fire represent the many languages they are able to speak in order to spread the Gospel. According to Luke, the Spirit enables the apostles to be understood by a variety of communities. These new believers are amazed that the apostles can connect with them—"We hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God."

Luke's account can inspire all people, especially church leaders, to communicate in ways that resonate with their communities. In Acts, the apostles do not require first-century converts to learn Aramaic in order to hear Christ's message. Instead, they preach in a way that can be received by everyone. Today's leaders should work intentionally to make the Gospel understandable, available and inspirational to a diverse 21st-century audience. Just as the apostles adapted to their context, modern leaders should creatively adjust to today's circumstances. This might involve rethinking content, tone and platforms to speak to the global church. It could also require the recognition of preachers among the laity and in religious life who could address the challenges of the world more convincingly.

The Gospel reading from John is the same text we read on the Second Sunday of Easter. In John's account, the Spirit is given by Jesus' breathing onto his followers. The event is not described as occurring 50 days after Easter;

*Lord, send out your Spirit,
and renew the face of the
earth. (Ps 104:30)*

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Do you pray for guidance and support from the Holy Spirit?

In what ways can you use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to inspire your life?

How can the Holy Spirit help you to connect with your diverse community?

instead, John connects it to one of Jesus' resurrection appearances. By giving the gift of the Spirit, Jesus fulfills his promise to send the Spirit; moreover, by giving the Spirit, Jesus empowers and entrusts this group with authority.

This Pentecost Sunday we should reflect on the role of the Spirit in the missionary work of the early Christian community and in the life of the church today. This is an excellent opportunity to pray St. Augustine's prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy. Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.

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God's Steadfast Love

Readings: Ex 34:4-9; Dn 3; 2 Cor 13:11-13; Jn 3:16-18

During the Easter season, several readings highlighted the role of the Holy Spirit in sustaining the Christian community after Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. Over the past weeks, we have encountered biblical articulations of the relationship among the persons of the Trinity. As we return to Ordinary Time, today we celebrate the Holy Trinity, a mystery of faith that demonstrates the love within God and its manifestations on earth. Each of the readings is short but significant for understanding the implications of God's steadfast love.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." John asserts the distinctiveness and the interconnection between the Father and the Son. Likewise, he frames Christ's suffering as an act of love (Gk. *agape*) that enables believers to receive eternal life. Christ's presence on earth is salvific, not judgmental, an

assertion that is reiterated elsewhere in the Gospel (Jn 5:24, 12:47).

In the first reading, we also hear of God's love for the world. The context is Moses receiving the law on Mount Sinai. Within this experience, God's mercy, graciousness and kindness (Hb. *hesed*) are highlighted. Recognizing God's love, Moses requests forgiveness for the sins of his community.

Both *agape* and *hesed* are theologically significant terms whose magnitude should not be missed. They express the nature of God's relationship with creation as active, not passive. "Love" and "kindness" demonstrate God's engagement, faithful commitment and care for the world.

The love that God shares with the world comes from within God's essence. The second reading provides us with the quintessential Trinitarian formula that distinguishes and unites the persons of the Trinity, affirming their relation to one another and the world. Grace (from belief in the Son), love (from the Father who gave his Son), and fellowship (from the Spirit who empowers the faithful) are all actions of the Trinity.

Just before this Trinitarian statement is made, there is a farewell address that can inspire ancient and modern readers of this text: Rejoice, mend relationships, be encouraging and agreeable with one another and live in peace. Like the Trinity, these ideas are both individual and collective. Rejoicing over the salvation that comes through Christ begins in personal belief, yet that belief is shared by many and unites people as a faith community. Similarly, actively working to live in peace and harmony is beneficial both personally and communally.

On this Trinity Sunday, as we reflect on the love and connections within the Trinity, we should express our gratitude for God's steadfast love and work to imitate God in our interactions with one another.

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

'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.'
(2 Cor 13:13)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How can God's love for the world influence your life?

What can you do to foster a loving community?

How can you show gratitude for God's love?

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Who Will We Become After the Coronavirus?

For students, the key is resilience

By Rosemarie Nassif



There are many things we do not know about our experience with Covid-19, but we do know that this pandemic will end. There will be a “normalcy” to which we will return, even if it will look and feel different. All of us will have changed in some way. Our resiliency—as individuals, as families, as communities, as a nation and as a world—is being tested.

Scientists define resilience as the capacity to absorb disturbance and then reorganize so as to regain one’s identity. Resilience is not about not changing. It may require evolving as a result of all that is learned and experienced through a disturbance. We are not all born resilient, but we are all born with the capacity to acquire resilience.

My mother taught me resilience. She lived 97 active and engaged years, facing many challenges and difficulties. Her parents were immigrants from Lebanon, and as the second oldest of nine children, she began working at her father’s grocery store at age 13. Right before she passed away, she struggled with pneumonia and said to me, “Honey, I’m not going on the shelf.”

Throughout my professional life, I have been a teacher, an administrator, a university president and an advocate for education. Educators have always gone beyond teaching the three Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic; and today we seek to instill in our students that fourth R of resilience. Both edu-

cators and parents are struggling with schooling at home during the pandemic, and they are realizing that they are underprepared and under-resourced—but also under pressure to ensure that their students are learning to their fullest capacities. Such an expectation is unrealistic, but realizing this does not release them from the pressure.

At the same time, children are grieving the loss of their playgrounds and playmates, the structure of the classroom, and their sports teams and music classes and clubs. They are grieving the physical absence of their teachers and grieving for graduations, proms and birthday parties that are postponed or canceled. As we struggle to teach them reading, writing and arithmetic, how do we also teach them resilience? How do we teach them how to regain their identity throughout their loss?

We can instill resilience by teaching three W’s. The first is worth. Every student needs to believe that he or she is worthy—worthy of our time, our interest, our belief in them, worthy of our highest expectations and, at this moment especially, worthy of our feelings of incompetence. We do not know all the answers, and we do not have to pretend otherwise.

The second W is will: The discipline and courage to achieve is essential. Will incorporates a grit and sustained persistence to overcome obstacles when pursuing your passion

or believing in the justice or rightness of a situation. The third W is wonder: Students must have a belief in the promise, a belief in the *more* that we can become, as well a belief that we can make a difference by choosing to create the *more* for our world. They must have a curiosity that is fed by an optimism of all that is possible, even when experiencing grief.

The real test of our individual and collective resilience is: How will we change from the pandemic and who will we become? This will not be decided when the pandemic ends; rather, it is being decided now.

Isn’t it true that we do not want to be the same when our “normalcy” occurs? I think we want to be different. We want the ordinary to become extraordinary. We want those most vulnerable in our midst to become our neighbors, and we want our communities to thrive in our togetherness. We want our nation to see itself as one among many—interconnected and interdependent.

Let us together spread the grace of resilience now so that we will become more than we were before.

Rosemarie Nassif, S.S.N.D., is the executive director of the Center for Catholic Education at Loyola Marymount University. She previously served as president of the Fund for Educational Excellence in Baltimore and as a senior advisor at the Department of Education during the Obama administration.



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