

# America

JUNE 22, 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE



## THE SCANDAL OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Isabelle Senechal

p28

**The Editors on the  
Overdue Promise of  
Racial Justice**

p8

**Acompañamiento:  
The Church Walks  
with L.G.B.T. Latinos**

p18

**I Grew Up in a  
Catholic Cult**

p38



# WE ARE GRATEFUL

**FOR THE WOMEN AND MEN OF CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE  
WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED TO CARE**

---

We stand in awe of your grace under pressure, your dedication to serve, and your commitment to the needs of others. We remain in prayerful support of the work you do for the good of all. As we continue to weather this storm together, please take the time to care for yourself as you care for others.

*Our God goes before you and will be with you; God will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*

**DEUTERONOMY 31:8**



**[WWW.CHAUSA.ORG](http://WWW.CHAUSA.ORG)**

## The More Things Change

As hard as it may be to believe, this autumn will mark the eighth anniversary of my editorship of this review. On Oct. 1, 2012, Twitter was only 6 years old. The iPhone was 5 years old. Instagram was 2 years old. And **America** magazine was 103 years old.

In those first few months, we launched an ambitious, multiyear initiative to transform **America** into a media ministry that would meet the challenge of the digital revolution and allow **America** to lead the conversation about faith and culture in a new century. We announced a multiyear strategic plan to take **America** from a weekly print magazine with little digital presence to a multiplatform media ministry with vital, engaging content well beyond print.

To achieve that vision, **America** has been steadily growing. In 2012, we had 16 full-time employees. Today we employ 43. Our online readership is nearly 10 times what it was in 2012. We've redesigned and relaunched our print and digital editions, launched a video division, started a media fellowship for young professionals, rebooted the Catholic Book Club, produced award-winning podcasts, and recruited a worldwide network of correspondents and contributing writers. And we have done all of this while maintaining the standard of excellence that is our hallmark.

I believe that our founder, John Wynne, S.J., would be proud. When he founded **America**, he told its readers that because the press of events was so great, he dreamed of a day when **America** could publish daily. Well, I'm pleased to say that this day has arrived. **America** now publishes every day, multiple times a day, and even

hourly when news is breaking.

**America's** position in relation to the news cycle has not changed. As Father Wynne wrote, our main task is not to be a newspaper but a journal, a forum for commentary and analysis. We continue to report some news, but our main task is to explain what is happening, to put it in context, to analyze what is happening from a Catholic, Jesuit perspective.

And just as Father Wynne did, we are always asking what the best means are for accomplishing those goals of reporting, explaining, discussing and reflecting on events. In 1909, the only means was the printed word. This is obviously no longer true.

What we have discovered during these years of transformation is that reporting, analyzing and discussing events is now best accomplished through digital media, while in-depth reflection and long-form journalism are best accomplished in print. To accommodate that, it is necessary to shift our human and financial resources from print to digital, allowing both platforms to do well what each does best. That also makes sense when you consider that nearly a million people read **America** online every month, while 70,000 read it in print.

For these reasons, beginning this summer, **America** will shift to a monthly frequency for our print edition. If you are a print subscriber, your current subscription will be automatically extended. A separate communication will arrive with those details. As always, I encourage you to visit our website at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org) and to sign up for our daily e-newsletter.

In a recent column, I wrote that every crisis is also an opportunity. The Covid-19 crisis has given us an

opportunity to work fully remotely and to realize anew the power of a digital-first editorial strategy, its capacity to reach people on a scale our forebears could only dream about. And the economic pressures that have been brought to bear on the media by the pandemic-induced recession have reminded all of us of the importance of being flexible and innovative in order to remain commercially viable.

But let me be crystal clear about two things: First, this is not a fire sale. We are not reducing our frequency in print because we are going out of business. The underlying financials of America Media are strong, stronger than those of many other media organizations, even in the for-profit world. Second, we still believe in the power of the printed word. We believe that print is the best platform for in-depth, long-form reporting, analysis and commentary. A monthly frequency gives us the time and the resources to do that well.

As much as things change, some things stay the same. We remain committed to giving you the news, analysis and spiritual resources you need to make sense of events at the intersection of the church and the world. We renew our promise to you, the same promise Father Wynne made to our readers in 1909: "Neither labor nor expense will be spared to make **America** worthy of its name."

---

Matt Malone, S.J.  
Twitter: [@americaeditor](https://twitter.com/americaeditor)



# THE ISSUE

---

## GIVE AND TAKE

6  
YOUR TAKE  
Reader reactions on racial justice

8  
OUR TAKE  
To fight racism, Catholics must  
hunger for justice as we do for  
the Eucharist

10  
SHORT TAKE  
Remembering Catholic sisters in  
the pandemic  
Mary Diez and Kathleen O'Brien

---

## DISPATCHES

12  
'THE INK HAS RUN DRY ON  
WRITING STATEMENTS.' BLACK  
CATHOLICS CALL FOR ACTION  
IN WAKE OF FLOYD KILLING

In Zimbabwe, Covid-19 provides a  
cover for human rights abuses

GoodNews: In India, Catholic health  
care prepares to confront Covid-19

With an eye on U.S., Francis deplors  
"racism and exclusion"

---

## FEATURES

18  
CONQUERING THE SILENCE  
Latino Catholics reach out to their  
L.G.B.T. brothers and sisters  
J.D. Long-García

28  
A STORY OF SURVIVORS  
AND STATISTICS  
Fighting the scandal of  
human trafficking  
Isabelle Senechal

---

## POEM

45  
MERCY THE HORSE  
Willie Lin



AP Photo/Richard Vogel

Protesters lie on the street with their hands on their backs in West Hollywood, Calif., on June 3, 2020, following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Cover: iStock

## FAITH & REASON

34  
POLITICS AND THE PANDEMIC  
How Vatican II can help us navigate a moment of crisis  
Blase J. Cupich

## FAITH IN FOCUS

38  
GROWING UP IN A CATHOLIC CULT  
I had to tell my story to accept the truth about Father Feeney and the Saint Benedict Center  
Patricia Chadwick

## IDEAS IN REVIEW

42  
BALLET IN A TIME OF PLAGUE  
I had Covid-19. Ballet renewed my faith in the human body.  
Elyse Durham

BOOKS  
*Second Founding; End of October; Still Unhealed; To Begin the World Over Again*

CULTURE  
Hannah Gadsby’s “Douglas”; “Never Have I Ever”

## THE WORD

52  
The rewards for accepting the Gospel are awesome, but the demands are hefty

Romans calls for believers to focus on the Spirit of God within them  
Jaime L. Waters

## LAST TAKE

54  
OLGA SEGURA  
Catholics can lead the nation in confronting racism

The killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery and the violence and unrest around the nation have sparked renewed conversation around racial justice in our country and in our church. Readers have weighed in on the several articles that **America** has published on this theme in the past few weeks. Below are excerpts from some of their comments.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that there are three ways we can incur the sin of anger. First is excessive anger. Second is misdirected anger. The third is deficiency of anger. I am interested in this third way. We sin through deficiency of anger when we are not angry enough to boldly join the mass movement against racism, racism that the church calls a sin.

**Adeolu Ademoyo**

It is good to hear the voices of these black American Catholics. But we also need to hear the voices of white American Catholics who get it, who feel their pain and are determined to right this wrong. Blacks need to know they are not alone in their determination to seek justice and peace.

**Mary McGinley**

Catholic institutions should model justice by paying every employee a living wage. Universities that pay football coaches millions should reprioritize and pay grounds workers, cleaning staff, etc., a living wage. They should hire more professors of color and enroll more students of color, and teach the reality of our American history, including slavery and its ongoing ramifications. Catholics must rediscover our social justice roots.

**Annette Magjuka**

Just watched some of the media footage surrounding the president's impromptu address to the cameras on June 1. It is sickening to see the nation again embroiled in fighting itself. I lived in Washington, D.C., during the 1968 riots; we have not changed much since that time. Prayer is of the utmost necessity, not just holding up a Bible. Prayer is something we can all do.

**Frank Huber**

Could a large part of the problem in our church be its focus on sin as an individual's transgression against the divine will or God's laws? In my read of the Gospels, much of Jesus' words and actions were directed against the oppressive

systems under which his Jewish brothers and sisters lived. So why the church's fixation on individual transgressions on not on the disorder to God's world caused by evil such as systemic racism. Why is participation in or enabling of oppressive systems not named a grievous "sin"?

**Tom Whalen**

I am an 86-year-old mother of five, a grandmother and great grandmother. I am white. Before I became physically frail with a chronic illness, I rang doorbells, registered voters, made pleading phone calls, pounded the sidewalk for a just society in our country. My heart is bereft of comfort at the foot of this cross. Would that I could hold George Floyd and all the others in my arms close to my breast. I LOVE YOU.

**Angela Embree**

We have allowed police forces to become paramilitary units, in part by supplying them with military equipment and encouraging military "take no prisoners" tactics. We need to redefine police forces as peace forces, and institute non-violent philosophies and approaches. As a former U.S. Marine, I know many Marines whose goal upon leaving the Marine Corps was to join a police force, just for the power of carrying a gun. We have too many police officers who are grounded in hate, anger and violence. These people need to be replaced with "peace" officers

**Michael Svenssen**

[Breonna] Taylor would be alive and very safe if she could live in a wealthier, "whiter" neighborhood. Our black brothers and sisters should be equally safe at the hands of police, no matter skin color or address. The initial mediocre government response reinforces the fact that many are comfortable with that dichotomy.

**J. Jones**

# Thomas Merton on Prayer

Presented by Thomas Merton  
with an afterword by Father Anthony Ciorra, Ph.D.



Renew **your prayer life** with Thomas Merton  
in this **life-changing series**.

*"Hearing the teaching of Thomas Merton in his own voice is an incredible gift."*

– Deacon Larry Vaclavik,  
Houston, TX

**Thomas Merton on Prayer** invites you to take one of the great modern spiritual masters as your personal guide. Near the end of his life, Thomas Merton gave a powerful set of lectures on prayer to the Sisters of Loretto. He channeled a lifetime full of wisdom, piety, and prayerfulness into these erudite yet down-to-earth talks. Now, you have the rare opportunity to hear Merton's moving lectures.

This series of heartfelt talks has been remastered and made available for you to enjoy. Merton reaches out across the decades to inspire your spirit. You will explore such topics as religious poverty, philosophy, and monasticism. As you do so, you will discover what it means to truly live as a Christian today.

*Photograph of Thomas Merton by Sybille Akers. Used with Permission of the Merton Legacy Trust and the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University.*



## Thomas Merton on Prayer

remastered  
archival recording  
of Thomas Merton

14 Talks (including afterword) on 6 Discs

Audio MP3 ~~\$45.95~~ **SALE \$7.95**

Audio CD Set ~~\$45.95~~ **SALE \$7.95**

+ \$7.95 Shipping & Handling  
100% Satisfaction Guarantee

Free Shipping & Handling and **listen today**  
with our instant Audio MP3 Download option

**Coupon Code: A2228**

Order within 30 days of issue date.

### 14 Talks

1. Balance and Grace (7/28/1967)
2. Religious Virginity and Communal Love (7/28/1967)
3. The Institutionalized Church (7/28/1967)
4. Our Dedication to God (7/29/1967)
5. Escaping Entrapment (7/29/1967)
6. Ecstatic Life in the Spirit (7/29/1967)
7. Education, Learning, and Success (7/30/1967)
8. Christian Nonviolence (7/30/1967)
9. The Privilege and Obligation of Religious (7/31/1967)
10. Camus: The Status Quo (7/31/1967)
11. Religious Freedom (8/1967)
12. Monasticism and Contemplation (9/25/1967)
13. The Contemplative Life So-Called (9/26/1967)
14. Afterword by Fr. Anthony Ciorra, Ph.D.

**SALE ENDS 7/22/2020** [www.Learn25.com/MertonPrayer](http://www.Learn25.com/MertonPrayer)

Learn25 | 12115 Parklawn Dr., Unit B, Rockville, MD 20852 | Order online or call 1-800-955-3904

## To Fight Racism, Catholics Must Hunger for Justice as We Do for the Eucharist

The murder of yet another black American at the hands of a police officer haunts the hearts and minds of the country. The protests across the nation make clear the injustice of the killing of George Floyd and its roots in a long national history of racism, including contemporary patterns of police brutality. The violence that has broken out around some of these protests underscores the depth of anger and resentment in our communities. Such violence must be opposed and rejected. At a minimum, such acts detract from the important truth at the heart of these otherwise peaceful protests: Our country has not yet found—or built—the spiritual and practical resources necessary for overcoming racism.

Catholics cannot be content to stand on the sidelines of this struggle. In the face of racism, Catholics must hunger for justice as we hunger for the Eucharist. The Gospel calls us, as we prepare for Communion, to “go first and be reconciled” (Mt 5:24) with our sisters and brothers. At this moment, when the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us the depth of our need for the sacraments and for community, this national outcry should lead Catholics, white Catholics especially, to conversion, repentance and reconciliation.

Catholics are capable of mobilizing and forming consciences on issues of national concern. Examples of such efforts include the Fortnight for Freedom and other campaigns focused on religious liberty, the Catholic Day of Action for Immigrant Children that protests against family separation policies at the border and the many ways the church organizes Catholics to work for the protection of the unborn. The resources devoted and public at-

tention given to those efforts should be a yardstick for how far Catholics have yet to go in committing themselves to working against racism.

We must also ask what will make this moment—responding to the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, among so many others—different from 2017 or 2015 or 2014 or 1992 or 1968 or.... The need for racial justice is not new, nor are the cries of our black brothers and sisters, tired and angry. But perhaps the Holy Spirit is moving, in these days after Pentecost, to give us the strength to stay the course and work for lasting change. Catholics should be held to account six months from now and a year from now—and for our part at **America**, we ask to be—for what actions we have taken in response.

Here are five ways to begin.

*Repentance.* The church in the United States has been sadly complicit in the systemic injustices of white racism. (As a Jesuit publication, we must acknowledge our own part in this history: American Jesuits and their institutions owned and sometimes sold enslaved people until 1838.) White Catholics have often ignored and marginalized the voices of Catholics of color calling for the church to listen and respond to the needs of their communities. Catholic institutions have only just begun to acknowledge their part in the history of American racism, from slavery to Jim Crow, from housing segregation to police brutality. This work of memory must continue, it must be public and it must not shrink from hard truths. In order to be the body of Christ, the church must share in both the suffering and the repentance of all its members.

*Solidarity.* Catholics do not need

to invent new ways to fight racism. There is plenty of work already being done for racial justice. Yet many Catholics seem too timid to listen and collaborate with new movements, such as Black Lives Matter, that are leading today’s charge for justice. Bishops, pastors and lay leaders ought to make overtures to anti-racist activist groups present in their communities. In addition to showing solidarity in the work of organizing, Catholics can also show economic solidarity by supporting black-owned businesses in their own communities and by giving alms to organizations working for racial justice and ministries that directly serve black Catholics.

*Presence.* A previous generation of clergy and religious left us with iconic images of Catholics marching hand in hand with prominent civil rights leaders. Today, when images and videos of protests are shared more quickly and widely than ever, collars and habits have been sparse. Catholics, especially those whose presence and dress visibly symbolizes the church, ought to attend protests in order to demonstrate the church’s commitment.

*Formation.* To ensure deep, lasting change, Catholics will need to examine the ways we form consciences, especially in the work of education. Those in charge of institutions of formation, from seminaries to grammar schools, should examine curricula to see how the history and present reality of racism are addressed. Students formed by Catholic education should recognize racism both as an intrinsic evil and as a primary manifestation of social sin. The ability both to assess curricula and to educate students regarding these issues necessarily in-

volves the presence of people of color in positions of responsibility and authority.

*Prayer.* Prayer is one of the most effective modes of public witness Catholics possess. Catholics are united for various causes by novenas, processions, rosary campaigns and holy hours. It is no accident that these spiritual means, depending more on the grace of God than our own strength, bind us together and announce the Gospel of mercy and justice more effectively than proclamations of moral principles can do alone. Catholic groups, starting with the bishops and national organizing networks, and continuing down to the local parish, should promote a campaign of prayer for healing from the sins of racism.

So let us pray: God of justice, give us the courage to admit our sins and failings. Give us the freedom to seek your mercy and reconciliation with our brothers and sisters. And give us the strength to continue crying out to you for the healing of our nation until it fulfills its commitment to recognize that you have created all people equal.

*This editorial was first published online on June 1.*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>President and Editor in Chief</b>                          | Matt Malone, S.J.   |
| <b>Deputy Editor in Chief</b>                                 | Maurice Timothy Reidy   |
| <b>Executive Editors</b>                                      | Sebastian Gomes<br>Sam Sawyer, S.J.<br>Kerry Weber  |
| <b>Editor at Large</b>  | James Martin, S.J.  |
| <b>Production Editor</b>                                      | Robert C. Collins, S.J.   |
| <b>Senior Editors</b>   | Kevin Clarke<br>James T. Keane<br>J.D. Long-García<br>Robert David Sullivan   |
| <b>Creative Director</b>                                      | Shawn Tripoli   |
| <b>Graphic Designer</b>                                       | Alison Hamilton   |
| <b>Poetry Editor</b>  | Joe Hoover, S.J.  |
| <b>Vatican Correspondent</b>                                  | Gerard O'Connell  |
| <b>National Correspondent</b>                                 | Michael J. O'Loughlin   |
| <b>Associate Editors</b>                                      | Zachary Davis<br>Ashley McKinless   |
| <b>Assistant Producers</b>                                    | Colleen Dulle, Tucker Redding, S.J.   |
| <b>Studio and Production Manager</b>                          | JR Cronheim   |
| <b>Assistant Editors</b>                                      | Vivian Cabrera  |
| <b>Contributing Writers</b>                                   | Joseph McAuley<br>Nichole M. Flores<br>Cecilia González-Andrieu<br>Rachel Lu<br>Eileen Markey<br>Jim McDermott, S.J.<br>Kaya Oakes<br>Nathan Schneider<br>Eve Tushnet |
| <b>Contributing Editors</b>                                   | Ellen Boegel<br>Patrick Gilger, S.J.<br>Adam Hincks, S.J.<br>Maryann Cusimano Love<br>William McCormick, S.J.<br>Paul McNelis, S.J.                                   |
| <b>Regional Correspondents</b>                                | Dean Dettloff (Toronto)<br>Anthony Egan, S.J. (Johannesburg)<br>Jan-Albert Hootsen (Mexico City)<br>Jim McDermott, S.J. (Los Angeles)<br>Melissa Vida (Brussels)      |
| <b>Special Contributors</b>                                   | Jake Martin, S.J., Sean Salai, S.J.   |
| <b>Editor, The Jesuit Post</b>                                | Brian Strassburger, S.J.  |
| <b>Moderator, Catholic Book Club</b>                          | Kevin Spinale, S.J.   |
| <b>O'Hare Fellows</b>   | Ryan Di Corpo<br>Kevin Jackson<br>Isabelle Senechal   |
| <b>Executive V.P. and Chief Operating Officer</b>             | Traug Keller  |
| <b>Senior V.P. for Finance and Operations</b>                 | Rosa M. Del Saz   |
| <b>Director of Advertising Services</b>                       | Kenneth Arko  |
| <b>Director of Advancement</b>                                | James Cappabianca   |
| <b>Director of Marketing</b>                                  | Lisa Manico   |
| <b>Advancement Strategist</b>                                 | Heather Trotta  |
| <b>Special Assistant to the President and Editor in Chief</b> | Nicholas D. Sawicki   |
| <b>Business Operations Staff</b>                              | Glenda Castro, Karina Clark, Geena Di Camillo,<br>Ana Nuñez, Jonathan Tavarez, Elena Te,<br>Bianca C. Tucker  |
| <b>Editors Emeriti</b>  | Raymond A. Schroth, S.J.<br>Francis W. Turnbull, S.J.   |
| <b>Chair, Board of Directors</b>                              | Susan S. Braddock   |

americamagazine.org 1212 Avenue of the Americas, 11th Fl.  
facebook.com/americamag New York, NY 10036  
twitter.com/americamag America Press Inc. d/b/a America Media ©2020

## As Covid19 continues, pray for our retired Catholic sisters

In April and May, four retired School Sisters of St. Francis died and tested positive for the coronavirus in post-mortem medical examinations. Two School Sisters of Notre Dame who lived in the same facility in Milwaukee were also diagnosed with coronavirus after their deaths, and later in May, two sisters from the Sisters of Charity of St. Joan Antida succumbed to Covid-19 in the same city. The reports of their deaths were likely the first time many paused to consider the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic on a sometimes overlooked but highly influential subset of vulnerable elders: retired Catholic sisters.

The four retired School Sisters of St. Francis were residents of Our Lady of the Angels Convent, which serves about 50 sisters. For those of us who knew and ministered with them, their deaths are deeply personal. While Covid-19 is an unexpected, recent phenomenon, the grief of loss is part of the larger experience of nearly every congregation of women religious today.

Each time a sister dies, we celebrate her life and remember all the good that she did. Sister Marie June Skender was a teacher, musician and pastoral minister in the Midwest for more than six decades. Sister Annela Holtkamp was a homemaker at our convents, including more than 30 years at our high school in Kenosha, Wis. Sister Bernadette Kelter spent the first half of her vocation teaching grade school, then served as a home health aide for three decades. And Sister Josephine Seier started her vocation as a convent homemaker, then spent her last three decades ministering to elderly sisters.

We take comfort in the knowledge

that they are now enjoying the fullness of God's love promised in the Gospel, but still we experience the very human feeling of loss. Rather than deny our pain, we seek to let it focus our awareness of the pain of others and fuel our mission, especially with those who are poor and marginalized.

The average age of sisters in the U.S. province of our order is 83, so much of our international congregation's work in education, health care and social services is being undertaken by our younger sisters ministering in the Southern Hemisphere. In Bhopal, India, for example, our sisters have gone door to door during the pandemic to offer comfort to those who are locked down by government directives. The generosity of our supporters worldwide makes this extraordinary ministry of care possible.

To continue to undertake critical ministries like these in India, Africa, Latin America and here in the United States, we follow in the footsteps of our foundresses by continuously seeking innovative approaches to funding challenges. Our Lady of the Angels is one such innovative initiative. The facility provides a setting specifically designed for elderly sisters with memory challenges. For example, its wide halls wind in such a way that a sister will always be led back to her own room. Sisters can participate in a wide range of daily activities that engage all their senses. The celebration of the Eucharist and praying of the rosary offer comforting spiritual sustenance to these women of deep faith.

What makes Our Lady of the Angels unique is that it is the brainchild of two congregations of women religious. Both our community and the School Sisters of Notre Dame rec-

ognized a shared need that could be met better together. Partnership and collaboration enables us to honor our past while preparing for the future and continuing our legacy of service to those in need.

Though the cost of providing this specialized care is always a challenge, we take comfort in knowing that at the end of their lives, Sisters Marie June, Annela and Bernadette benefited from loving professional care, were accompanied by women they have loved for many years and found peace in a place they called home. Our Lady of the Angels represents our congregation's commitment to meet our future needs with the bold spirit of our foundresses. We are continuously seeking new partners who share that vision for women's religious life.

Our sisters around the world hold in prayer everyone who is making kindness and compassion their priorities to ease the burdens of this pandemic. We also ask for your prayers—for our sisters, for those with whom we minister and for those who are entrusted with the care of the most vulnerable.

Perhaps the experience of this pandemic will lead all of us to look again at how we deal with pain and loss. May it bring transformation and a world where the needs of all are seen as the responsibility of all.

---

*Mary Diez, S.S.F., is the president of the School Sisters of St. Francis, an international congregation of women religious.*

*Kathleen O'Brien, S.S.F., is the provincial coordinator for the congregation's United States Province.*

# SOMOS IS HERE FOR YOU!

“This solidarity with the sick is a real treasure, and is a distinctive sign of a care and authentic health assistance that place the person and their needs at the center.”

*Pope Francis on SOMOS. 9/20/19*



**Ramon Tallaj M.D.,**  
Founder and Chairman



1.833.SOMOSNY | [somosnyhealth.org](https://somosnyhealth.org)

©2020 SOMOS Healthcare Providers, Inc. dba SOMOS Community Care (SOMOS). All rights reserved.

**SOMOS**



## 'The ink has run dry on writing statements': Black Catholics call for action in wake of Floyd killing

By Michael J. O'Loughlin

Sister Mumbi Kigutha had just finished participating in a “circle of lament” with about 20 other people on May 30, sharing fears and frustrations about racism in the United States and the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer just a few days before, when she decided she needed to get out of the house.

She left the home she shares with other Sisters of the Precious Blood in Chicago’s Bridgeport neighborhood and headed to a protest downtown. She wanted to be around other people who know the challenges of being black in the United States.

“Going to be with people, where we could walk and just give a nod to one another, a smile and look in the eyes of people who, I knew, instinctively got it, that was very important for me to channel some of the rage and anger and frustration I had been feeling,” she said.

When she returned home later that day, she saw on the news that the peaceful protest she had witnessed had become chaotic. She said she was not surprised.

“When people are cornered and they have nowhere else to turn, this is to be expected,” Sister Kigutha said. “You can

only oppress people so long before things tend to erupt.”

Sister Kigutha said black people in the United States share a “pent-up grief” they must carry with them because so few resources are devoted to healing. “This is not just about George Floyd; it’s about 400 years of different tactics used to oppress people,” she said.

Sister Kigutha is just one of many black Catholics expressing frustration with racism in the United States and calling for systemic change in how the nation enforces its laws.

The National Black Catholic Congress called for a transparent investigation into the killing of Mr. Floyd, urging the nation to grapple with the conditions that allowed his death while in police custody to take place.

“We renew our call for a nationwide and sustained examination of conscience,” the Baltimore-based organization said. “Our nation must decisively confront and correct the conditions which allow violations of the inherent dignity of the human person. Our nation must have a firm purpose of amendment so that this centuries-old pandemic of racism is eradicated.”



CNS photo/Dave Hrbacek, The Catholic Spirit

The Rev. Paul Jarvis and parishioners of St. Bridget Parish in Minneapolis pray on May 31 at the site of the killing of George Floyd.

The National Black Sisters' Conference, a group representing black women who belong to Catholic religious orders across the United States, compared the present-day killings of African-Americans by police to lynchings in the 19th and 20th centuries.

"African American men, women and children are still being lynched, murdered and executed for playing with a toy gun, watching television in one's own home, and mistaken identity, driving or jogging while black, and being choked to death in cold blood by law enforcement officers, who have sworn to serve and protect," reads a statement published to the group's Facebook page on May 30.

The group, founded in 1968 and based in Washington, said that solutions to systemic racism

and ending police brutality include holding law enforcement accountable for its "willful negligence and compliance in racist activities and actions," barring choke-holds and other police tactics like the one that killed Mr. Floyd, and charging police with murder in cases where excessive force is used.

"As Christians, as Catholics, as people of faith, we must do more than just pray; we must model Jesus' message to love one's neighbor," the statement continued. "Our neighbor cannot breathe! Our neighbor is being lynched! Our neighbor is dying!"

Moving beyond writing statements of condolence and regret and instead enacting laws that protect black Americans must be the priority following Mr. Floyd's death, the Knights of Peter Claver said in a statement. The group calls itself "the largest historically African-American Catholic lay organization in the United States."

"The anger, emotions and outrage must be followed by effective solutions that do more than just penalize murderous actions, but eliminate future ones," read the statement, posted on May 29. "The ink has run dry on writing state-

ments, and it is now time to write laws, to write policies, to write sentences."

The president of Xavier University of Louisiana, a historically black Catholic university, wrote in a letter to students that justifications for killings at the hands of police like Mr. Floyd's make sense only in "the American mind corrupted by its notions of race."

"In the 1890s and early 1900s, when whiteness resurged to wipe away the gains of Emancipation and Reconstruction, the nation reasserted the privilege of whiteness, a privilege to instill fear and to act with impunity on blacks," the university's president, Reynold Verret, wrote. "Thus, came the Klan, the mobs and the policies and laws to disempower folk of color."

He called for "struggle" but said the focus should be on fighting for justice.

"Let us not be misled by those who urge us to destroy," Dr. Verret wrote. "Let us act for justice, walk prudently focusing righteous anger and pain toward right action, always honoring the memories of the sisters and brothers we lost. They are your best instruments as you take on the calling to build the more just and humane world."

Danielle M. Brown is the associate director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism. She told **America** that Catholics should commit themselves to education about racism and dialogue, even if it is not always comfortable. She noted that she has attended parishes where she feels welcome as a black Catholic but has heard priests receive negative feedback when they preach about racism.

"These are not homilies that are calling anybody bad names; they're not accusing anybody of racism. They're simply addressing the sin of racism, and the pastor gets angry emails," she said.

To help get those conversations started, Ms. Brown suggested resources like the U.S. bishops' 2018 pastoral letter on racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts." She said prayer is an important element of education about race.

"White Catholics have to realize, point blank, we have got to pray about this. Even if this 'does not affect you' at this particular moment, it is affecting you because it's affecting just about everybody," Ms. Brown said. "What we're seeing is a waking up of a national consciousness. White Catholics have to know that they are part of the change and

part of the solution.”

As for Sister Kigutha, she said witnessing the trauma of African-American communities hit disproportionately hard by Covid-19, followed by the latest highly publicized act of police brutality against a black person, has caused her and other black people grief and stress. She finds herself weeping, worried the nation will simply move on in a few weeks.

But Sister Kigutha plans to leave her home again in the coming days. “I’m going to go out and help clean up the neighborhood,” she said.

She hopes white Catholics will choose to act in re-

sponse to the protests, both by learning about the church’s role in perpetuating racism and then by doing something about it.

“I hope that Catholics and the parishes and the dioceses will put their money behind their wonderful statements that they’re issuing and do something. If the prelates and the clergy would all come out and march with this group of protesters, the police response would be way different,” she said.

Michael J. O’Loughlin, *national correspondent*.  
Twitter: @MikeOLoughlin.

## Fatal bias in Minneapolis?

The death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police on May 25 provoked scores of Black Lives Matter demonstrations and sporadic moments of violence by protesters, police and opportunists across the country. For many, the notion of a lethal police bias against African Americans appears self-evident, but ongoing research has also tracked the impact of bias among police.

The Washington Post has been counting deaths at the hands of police since 2015, when the shooting of the unarmed Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., ignited the Black Lives Matter movement. The Post reports that nationwide police have killed about 1,000 people each year since 2015.

Half of the people killed by police were white, and 26 percent were African-American. Since African-Americans account for less than 13 percent of the U.S. population, this means they are killed by police at more than twice the rate of white Americans. Another recent study found an even more substantial discrepancy, reporting that African-American men are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police than are white men.

As a police officer kneeled on his neck for almost nine minutes, Mr. Floyd called out, “I can’t breathe” and begged to be released before losing consciousness. According to Minneapolis police recordkeeping, the city’s African-American community, though only about 20 percent of its population, absorbs more than 60 percent of the violence—in the form of takedowns, mace, tasers, punches, neckholds and more—when arrests and other encounters with police become physical. The New York Times reports the police in Minneapolis used force against African-American residents seven times more often than against white residents during the past five years.

### Excessive force?

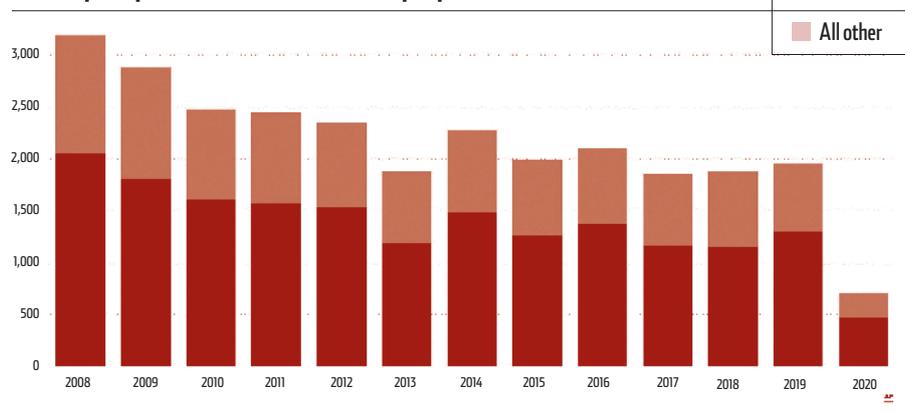
“Unconscious neck restraints,” used when an officer is trying to render someone unconscious, have been used 44 times in the past five years in Minneapolis—27 of those on African-American residents.

U.S. police killed three people per day in 2019—a total of nearly 1,100—which was far higher than in Western peer countries. In fact that U.S. daily number was higher than the annual average of 2.3 fatal police shootings in all of England and Wales between 1990 and 2014.

### Police impunity

Despite those high numbers, U.S. police are almost never charged for excessive force violations. Between 2013 and 2019, 99 percent of killings by police resulted in no charges.

Minneapolis police uses of force on black people versus all other races



Sources: The Washington Post; The New York Times; The Guardian; Mapping Police Violence database; “Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race-ethnicity, and sex” in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.



## In Zimbabwe, Covid-19 provides a cover for human rights abuses

A wall mural urges passersby to wear face masks in Harare, Zimbabwe.

After the fall of Robert Mugabe in November 2017, incoming President Emmerson Mnangagwa committed his government to a fresh start on human rights in Zimbabwe, pledging that he would be a “listening president” and that state-sponsored political violence and human rights abuses would be a thing of the past.

Instead, human rights monitors say, there has been an escalation of abuse in Zimbabwe. Those abuses have only grown more intense as social restrictions engendered by the Covid-19 crisis took hold in recent months.

Human rights activists and faith-based agencies say that Zimbabwe’s weak political and civil institutions have not been able to check the state’s excesses. “Human rights thinking has no tradition in Zimbabwe,” said Oskar Wermter, a German Jesuit priest who has lived in Zimbabwe for more than 40 years.

“The black majority which came to power in 1980 has not learned much about human rights. A place like Silveira House”—the social development center of the Jesuits in Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital city—“taught Catholic social doctrine, but this did not have much impact on the country as a whole,” Father Wermter said.

In a statement released on May 20, the Law Society of Zimbabwe called on the “state to discharge its constitutional duties and credibly investigate and prosecute all cases of violence.”

“These [violations] constitute a reversal of our aspirations of a democratic country that respects the constitution and rule of law,” the Law Society said.

In a statement released on May 22, the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations, an ecumenical group that includes the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, lamented what it saw as growing impunity by the state. “It is deeply disturbing that the

country has so many cases of abductions and torture in the last few months, most of which have not been conclusively investigated,” the church leaders said.

Mugabe, noted both for his academic background and for fiery rhetoric that at times led to violent consequences, once joked that he and his ruling party had “degrees in violence.” That legacy appears to have become entrenched in Zimbabwe’s political culture even after his death, observers say.

“Robert Mugabe, though a Catholic and quite familiar with Silveira House and the Jesuits there, did not respect Catholic social teaching,” said Father Wermter. “His was a gospel of power. The consideration of his and his party’s political power overruled all moral and spiritual considerations.

“Mugabe used to say that his government was in power because it had won the liberation war, not because they had been voted democratically into power,” Father Wermter added. “For a government with such a tradition—Mnangagwa is no different in this respect from...Mugabe—giving up violence as a political tool is difficult,” he said.

“The same system and governing party Zanu PF that presided over abuses with impunity since 1980 remain in charge today under President Mnangagwa,” Dewa Mavhinga, the director of Human Rights Watch for southern Africa, said. “The removal of Robert Mugabe did not change much because it is the same system that remains in charge and committing abuses.

“Zimbabwe authorities must allow independent investigations into abuses and punish perpetrators of abuses. The government spends huge amounts paying P.R. companies in Washington, D.C., in the hope that those companies will help image issues,” he said, “but the truth is simply that no one in the international community will respect a country that allows abductions, torture and rampant rape of women.”

Marko Phiri, a freelance journalist based in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.



## GOODNEWS: In India, Catholic health care prepares to confront Covid-19

Catholics are a tiny minority in Hindu-dominated India—with about 19 million adherents and just over 1.5 percent of the population—but they have managed to play an outsized role in health care there. The Catholic Health Association of India represents a network of thousands of clinics, hospitals and other facilities, serving 21 million people annually. It is the nation's second largest not-for-profit health care provider, after the government system.

Dr. Mathew Abraham, C.Ss.R, who serves as C.H.A.I.'s director general, says the backbone of the network is the 35,000 women religious who serve as nurses and doctors. “The majority of our network is mostly in the small towns and villages and the tribal areas where other [health care] facilities are mostly not available, so our clients are among those on the margins,” Father Abraham said. He added that C.H.A.I. medical centers in the cities serve mostly people from India's slums, accepting “people of all castes and creeds.”

On March 25, hoping to suppress the spread of the coronavirus, India began the world's largest lockdown, affecting 1.3 billion people. But the sudden move to close down all but essential services threw millions out of work and began

a desperate exodus of migrant and day laborers out of the big cities. The vast dislocation engendered an acute hunger crisis and thousands of new coronavirus vectors to contend with. “None of us understood the magnitude of this,” Father Abraham said. C.H.A.I. members are turning their institutional attention to food and hygiene assistance.

Father Abraham is still unsure what the impact of this migration will be on the Catholic hospital network and is trying to prepare for the worst. Like other Catholic health providers in the developing world, he is deeply concerned about acquiring protective equipment for medical teams.

Though reports of Covid-19 cases are escalating quickly, it remains uncertain how badly India will be hit by the pandemic. Father Abraham is fairly confident the numbers he has been hearing represent a significant undercount of the problem and worries that India's public health infrastructure will not prove up to the challenge of a significant outbreak. As an administrator, he has been focused on sourcing protective gear and tracking changes in practices and protocols as network members develop strategies for caring for and quarantining health workers who fall ill. He explained that many health workers belong to communities with elderly religious,



A health care worker swabs for Covid-19 in Ahmedabad, India, on May 22.

CNS photo/Amit Dave, Reuters

who will have to be especially protected from exposure.

Still, he described C.H.A.I.'s medical teams as ready to respond to this latest challenge. "We are religious," he said. "It's part of the religious commitment to take chances like this, and when we make such choices, we will have to face the consequences."

He added, "At the same time, we trust in God—God's protection, God's grace—and we keep moving. And that's what we pray for everyone, that they may be protected. This is a situation where we are struggling with something which really is unknown, [but] we take the chances. We are used to that."

He hopes that if the world joins together to confront the pandemic, something good may yet come of it. "This is a situation where everybody is suffering globally, and so we stand in solidarity with everyone, all over the world, [other] Catholics, every human being, because we're all sons of God," Father Abraham said. "We stand in solidarity in prayer and action."

Kevin Clarke, chief correspondent.  
Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.



Protesters gather in Minneapolis on June 1.

## With an eye on U.S., Francis deplors 'racism and exclusion'

Pope Francis spoke on June 3 of his great concern over the social unrest in the United States following the death of 46-year-old George Floyd while in police custody in Minneapolis on May 25, a death the pope attributed to "the sin of racism."

"We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life," the pope said in a message addressed to his "dear brothers and sisters in the United States."

Any Catholic who claims to defend the sacredness of every human life must combat racism and exclusion in all its forms, the pope said.

"At the same time," the pope added, quoting a statement from Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "we have to recognize that 'the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost.'"

In a statement released on May 29, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops called racism a "real and present danger," not a mere relic of the nation's past.

While praying for peace "across the United States, particularly in Minnesota, while the legal process moves forward," the bishops said: "We also anticipate a full investigation that results in rightful accountability and actual justice."

"We are broken-hearted, sickened, and outraged to watch another video of an African American man being killed before our very eyes," the chairs of seven U.S.C.C.B. committees said in the joint statement. "This is the latest wake-up call that needs to be answered by each of us in a spirit of determined conversion."

Gerard O'Connell, Vatican correspondent.  
Twitter: @gerryorome.



# CONQUERING THE S

*Latino Catholics  
reach out to their  
L.G.B.T. brothers  
and sisters*

Tim Mossholder / Unsplash



# ING ILENCE

By J.D. Long-García

A young woman waited at the back of the parish hall after a Spanish-language presentation at St. Clare's Church in Santa Clarita, Calif. Javier and Martha Plascencia had just finished their talk about the need for families to be welcoming toward gay and lesbian Catholics.

The woman paced a little and seemed reluctant to come forward, Mr. Plascencia recalls. The couple were packing up their materials when she finally approached them.

"I wish you would have come here two weeks ago," she said. "Maybe then my friend wouldn't have killed herself."

That woman's friend is one reason Catholic groups in cities like Los Angeles, San Antonio and New York are trying to overcome stigmas surrounding homosexuality within the Latin American community. While the acceptance of L.G.B.T. individuals among both Latinos

and the general U.S. population has grown significantly over the last 10 years, according to the Pew Research Center, other studies suggest that young Latinos face additional stressors coming from both ethnic and sexual identities. For example, Latinos may be especially uncomfortable with the prospect of becoming estranged from their families as a result of coming out. There also may be differences among families from different Latin American countries and cultures. Catholic ministries across the country are trying to help Latino L.G.B.T. Catholics and their families understand each other by working at this intersection of faith, culture and sexuality.

"In general, the trend in the Latino community is to be silent [about L.G.B.T. issues]," says Gil Martinez, C.S.P., pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Church in Los Angeles. "[But] I always talk about it with people and in homilies. I think the most important thing is that it

# 'I always talk about it with people and in homilies. I think the most important thing is that it should not be a secret.'

should not be a secret."

Father Martinez, a Paulist priest, has also gone to gay bars to offer spiritual accompaniment and even heard confessions there. "You want to be where people are," he said. "You want to walk with them."

He has been involved in L.G.B.T. outreach in a number of cities, including Boston, Memphis and New York. He described Latino L.G.B.T. Catholics as having a deep connection to the church, at least in terms of devotions. Their faith, family and culture are intertwined, he says.

Latinos in the United States—most of whom were born here—made up nearly 18 percent of the country's population in 2015, according to the Pew Research Center. Though growth has slowed in recent years, Latinos continue to be the largest ethnic minority in the United States, and about half of the community is Catholic. Among Latino Catholics, 70 percent supported nondiscrimination protections for L.G.B.T. people, and 65 percent favored the legalization of same-sex marriage, according to a 2018 poll by the Public Religion Research Institute. But there remained a generation gap, with 77 percent of Latino Catholics between 18 and 29 supporting the legalization of same-sex marriage but only 42 percent of those over 65.

The Plascencias were instrumental in establishing the Always Our Children outreach program in the Los Angeles Archdiocese, an initiative that took its name from the U.S. bishops' 1997 letter to "parents of homosexual children."

"There's still a desperate need for this ministry," Ms. Plascencia says. The couple, now retired, share their experiences with me in their living room in La Quinta, Calif., not far from Palm Springs.

In 2011, the couple started traveling to a few parishes a

month to give talks in both English and Spanish. When Mr. Plascencia got home after work, his wife would hop in the car with the dinner she had prepared. They would eat together on the way through the congested freeways and not get home until about midnight.

"We were able to bring a message of love and acceptance to people with different sexual orientations—and to their parents," Mr. Plascencia says. "There's no doubt in my mind that this ministry has saved lives. By going around like itinerant messengers, this ministry has brought people together."

Their son, Xavier, came out to them 15 years ago, when he was 29. Mr. and Ms. Plascencia say they were very accepting.

"I told him, 'You are my flesh and blood and I carried you. How could I not accept you?'" Ms. Plascencia recalls, with tears. Both parents regret that their son did not come out earlier. Before telling his parents, Xavi had met a man who helped him accept who he was. The two are now married.

"When we met Ted, we thought he was a wonderful young man," Mr. Plascencia says. "You immediately feel he's a good Christian in every aspect."

This welcoming environment is far from a universal experience for Latinos and Latinas who come out to their families.

Mr. and Ms. Plascencia also used to host support groups in their living room, finding that many people felt more comfortable there than in church. Mr. Plascencia explained that people are often afraid or ashamed to be seen going into a room at church designated for a meeting for L.G.B.T. Catholics. But all sorts of people would come to their home—nuns, priests and parents as well as gay and lesbian Catholics. For a while, they were apparently the only Spanish-language L.G.B.T. support group in the archdiocese.

On one occasion, Ms. Plascencia says, a woman who had been attending the group for months finally brought her husband. They had learned that their son was gay; and while the mother was more accepting, the father was very angry.

"He kept hitting himself," Ms. Plascencia says, demonstrating that the man was punching his knee. "He kept saying he preferred his son would be dead than to be gay."

One woman, whose daughter is lesbian, cried at every meeting. Another woman brought her Bible with her and would flip through it to particular verses. "But the Bible



The Rev. Michael Gutiérrez, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Baldwin Park, Calif., has faced challenges to L.G.B.T. ministries that he believes stem from certain cultural views.

says that my son is going to go to hell,” she would say.

“Most of what you hear from the pulpit is rejection,” Mr. Plascencia says. “Some Catholics use the Bible as a penal code rather than as a book of love.”

The Plascencias may have been trailblazers when it comes to lay-led L.G.B.T. ministry to the Latino community, but today they are not alone.

“Our social reality has changed, and it requires the church to respond in a way that is responsible and welcoming of the individual,” says Eddie De León, a Claretian priest who is chair of the department of spirituality and pastoral ministry at Chicago Theological Union.

Father De León says that many church leaders may not have a lot of experience with L.G.B.T. Catholics. Unfortunately, he says, they sometimes preach without hearing from people in this community.

Families also struggle with this lack of familiarity.

“What I find is there is often confusion, hurt, lack of understanding,” Father De León says. “All of us are children of God, and this is a sanctity of life issue. The bottom line is to offer hospitality and invite them in. And once they arrive, you listen.”

### **A Starting Point for Conversation**

It is 2019, and Carlos Alarcón, an Oblate priest, is speaking about L.G.B.T. ministry in Spanish during the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress, an annual convention that draws tens of thousands of Catholics. Yunuen Trujillo, a recent law school graduate and a religious formation leader with the L.A. Archdiocese’s Catholic Ministry With Lesbian and Gay Persons, teams up with Father Alarcón for the presentation.





J.D. Long-García

Catechists, parents and youth ministers pack the room for an often contentious dialogue, especially during the question-and-answer period. Father Alarcón reads from different parts of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

“This is what you have heard,” Father Alarcón says, referring to a couple of paragraphs from the catechism, including No. 2357, which describes homosexual acts as “contrary to the natural law.” These acts are not open to “the gift of life” and are not to be approved, according to the catechism.

“This is what you have not heard,” he says, reading part of the paragraph that follows in the catechism: “They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.”

Father Alarcón has used these verses as a starting point for conversations with parents and groups for decades. Some parents come to hear an argument they can use to tell their children they are wrong, but when he reads the parts that deal with acceptance, they often get upset. “No, that’s not true,” they tell him. “They don’t want to hear that. But

it’s the doctrine of the church, too.”

The priest has a long history with L.G.B.T. Catholics. After he entered the seminary, his brother came out to him. Later, his sister came out.

“I’ve been really privileged because people approach me,” he said. “What can I say as a priest representing the church? What can I say to these people so they can find a loving God, a merciful God, a forgiving God? I pray a lot so that God gives me the right words.”

Over the years, Father Alarcón has established support groups at parishes and spoken about accepting L.G.B.T. Catholics during homilies. He invites parishioners to reach out to him if they want to talk more about it.

A man in his 70s once reached out to him to talk. “He told me his beautiful story about discovering he was gay when he was 13,” Father Alarcón tells me in the rectory of St. Ferdinand Church in San Fernando, Calif. “He didn’t know what to do about it because all his life he’s been gay [and had never told anyone]. He felt so bad. All those years, he never dared to talk about it because he was so scared.”

Ms. Trujillo was asked by a participant if she was gay

Martha and Javier Plascencia helped establish support groups for parents of L.G.B.T. individuals in their living room in the Los Angeles area. They found that many people felt more comfortable there than in church.

during the question period at the end of the session. She answered, unapologetically, that she identified as a member of the L.G.B.T. community. The audience cheered.

“How can we make sure we still walk together? When a person wants to know Jesus, how can we make sure we’re not presenting obstacles?” Ms. Trujillo tells me at a Denny’s in Baldwin Park. Latinos turn to the church in times of crisis, she says.

“We’re immigrants. The only thing that is the same in our life is the church,” says Ms. Trujillo, who came to the United States when she was 16.

When young people discover they are gay or lesbian, many struggle with what their family is going to say. Their parents, in turn, worry about the reaction from their own parents and siblings. “Se me cayó el bebé,” some will say, meaning, “I dropped the baby.” Parents struggle both with their own preconceptions and with a fear that the community will reject them and their children.

While parish ministries focus on spiritual growth, Ms. Trujillo says L.G.B.T. ministries too often are forced into “doing damage control.” That includes trying to offer a welcoming environment to individuals who have felt rejected by the church during vulnerable times in their lives.

“[L.G.B.T. Catholics] could leave the church, and in some ways that would be easier to do. But this is where they found Jesus,” Ms. Trujillo says. “I’ve seen the good that ministry can do, and I have seen the bad. But there is much more good that the Catholic Church can do.”

Some parishes that are more open to L.G.B.T. communities have faced resistance from parishioners. The Rev. Michael Gutiérrez, the pastor of St. John the Baptist in Baldwin Park, Calif., has supported a ministry program for the L.G.B.T. community since it began at his parish in 2016. Yet, he said, young people and youth ministry leaders have struggled to talk about L.G.B.T. issues. His parish, which has large Latino and Filipino communities, has faced challenges he believes stem from certain traditional cultural views. It has lost families who did not like the outreach to the L.G.B.T. community.

“It is the reality of our families. We can’t ignore it,” Father Gutiérrez says, acknowledging that certain families in his community tend to “brush it under the rug” when it comes to the topic.

“As pastors, we’re obliged to speak up. We have to speak up when people are feeling left out.”

# ‘There’s no doubt in my mind that this ministry has saved lives.’

## The Church ‘Wasn’t There for Me’

Cynthia Cortez was serving on the parish council when she told Father Gutiérrez about her sexual orientation, with the intention of starting a group at the parish. He was supportive, and Ms. Trujillo helped lead some of the initial sessions on church teaching.

“I always felt like I had the courage and skills and was strong enough to start it, but I didn’t know how,” Ms. Cortez says. “I felt like I needed to start a group so that people had a place to go.”

At first, the group was about church teaching, but it eventually became more of what Ms. Cortez describes as a “listening ministry.”

“A lot of people who were coming were stepping into a church for the first time in years,” she says. “They just wanted to hear, ‘God loves you.’ That’s what attracted them. Not the L.G.B.T. ministry. But to hear that they are loved.”

Some who came were angry at the church, Ms. Cortez says, but the group learned to manage those conversations without getting defensive. Non-Catholics came, including atheists, but the group was never large. On average around 10 people, mostly Latina women, came to meetings during the first couple of years.

Some parents, she says, believed they had to choose God or their gay child, and she did not feel supported by other parishioners. She struggled to keep her faith. At the end of 2017, she had planned a trip to the Vatican and thought, once she made it there, everything would be O.K.

“I wanted that visit to make me feel like I wanted to stay in the church. But it didn’t. I was just accepted in this little small space,” Ms. Cortez says. “The Catholic Church wasn’t there for me. I created a space for myself. They didn’t. I didn’t think it was fair for me to keep carrying the burden of creating a space for me.”

She eventually left the Catholic Church. Ms. Cortez says she wanted to feel free but felt the only way she could do that was to leave the church. She had remained celibate

# Parents struggle both with their own preconceptions and with a fear that the community will reject them and their children.

and followed the church rules, but while she was supported by her pastor, she felt she was not accepted by other parishioners.

“You still need your parishioners to be supportive,” she says. “That doesn’t mean waving a rainbow flag. It means being seen as a person. We were still outcasts.”

## Chastity and Courage

A number of different kinds of ministries throughout the country reach out to L.G.B.T. Catholics. New Ways Ministry, Dignity USA and Fortunate Families, for example, promote the acceptance of L.G.B.T. individuals in the church and society. In certain dioceses, members of the L.G.B.T. community can find listings of parishes that are more L.G.B.T.-friendly.

Then there is Courage, a group that has done outreach for nearly 40 years. In general, Courage, an approved apostolate of the Catholic Church, does not use the term “L.G.B.T.” to describe this community. Instead, it refers to those “experiencing same-sex attraction.”

Unlike the other groups I spoke with, Courage puts a heavy emphasis on chastity. The first of its five “goals for courage”—which are read at the beginning of every meeting—is “to live chaste lives in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching on homosexuality.” The fourth goal also refers to chastity: “To be mindful of the truth that chaste friendships are not only possible but necessary in a chaste Christian life; and to encourage one another in forming and sustaining these friendships.”

“Every baptized person—priests, single, married, consecrated—is called to live the virtue of chastity,” Rossana Goñí Cuba, the Spanish-language coordinator at Courage’s international office, wrote in an email to **America**. “However, at Courage we emphasize chastity in our spiritual accompaniment since it is the virtue that, among others, will



Yunuen Trujillo is a law school graduate and a religious formation leader with the Los Angeles Archdiocese’s Catholic Ministry With Lesbian and Gay Persons.

help our members to understand the meaning of their sexuality and its beauty as a whole.”

Currently, there are just two Spanish-language Courage chapters (out of 112 chapters nationwide) in the United States, Ms. Goñi says. Courage also has a program for parents, called EnCourage. But again, in the United States, there are only two Spanish-language EnCourage groups, and Ms. Goñi says most bilingual Latinos attend the English-language groups.

Some pastors who lead churches with Spanish-speaking communities are overwhelmed, Ms. Goñi says, speculating as to why there may be so few chapters. “Also, they might be a little afraid to minister to people who experience [same-sex attraction], possibly due to the still prevailing ‘macho’ culture,” she says. But even when groups are not available, she says, one-on-one accompaniment can help individuals recognize they are children of God.

“If people feel sexual attractions to the same sex, it doesn’t mean at all that the person is bad, but that his or her attractions are not according to God’s plan for human sexuality, since a same-sex sexual relationship is not open to the gift of life nor to the complementarity between the sexes,” Ms. Goñi says. “We are not defined by our sexual attractions. We are much more than that!”

Like some parents, Eva Cordova struggled with her son’s sexuality. She spoke to me in Spanish on her drive from work, but had to cut the call short when she arrived at home. She did not want to upset her son.

“I first tried to convince my son that it was not true,” Ms. Cordova says of learning that her son identifies as gay. “That was a two-year long conversation. I was so upset that I had not seen it.”

Her son did not play with other boys and he did not play sports, she says. They registered him in soccer for years, but he never liked it. When she spoke to a priest about it, he told her to throw him out of the house if he refused to change. She did not do that but kept trying to find ways to “heal” him.

“There are many parents who don’t look for help, and that lets the enemy enter,” she says, referring to the devil and his attempts to sow hatred within families.

The Rev. Richard Samour, a Courage chaplain in San Antonio, Tex., helped her through it.

The priest is involved with three different groups, including a men’s Spanish-language group, and accompanies a transgender person. “We have to tell them they are loved,” he says, “but we also have to tell them the truth about the church teaching.”

He also leads Ms. Cordova’s group through online video conferencing. Her relationship with her son is not what it used to be, Ms. Cordova says, but they have come to respect each other’s beliefs.

“He has a friend and we know each other,” she says, referring to her son’s boyfriend. “He comes to family parties.... I don’t want anyone to treat my son badly, so I will not treat that boy badly.”

I also interviewed a young man who is a member of a Courage chapter in California but chose not to reveal his real name. He said Courage helped him recover a different kind of masculinity that includes living chastely, not the “hyper-masculinity” depicted by Hollywood and Spanish-language telenovelas.

“My same-sex attraction is a reminder that I need God in every moment of my life,” he told me. “I consider myself a Latino man with unwanted same-sex attraction. My identity is as a beloved child of God. Sometimes I’ve had a hard time with that.”

### ‘Good, Queer Catholics’

The intersection of faith, family and culture is central to Ismael Ruiz’s work with L.G.B.T. Catholics in San Francisco, including a young adult group in the Castro, long known as a gay neighborhood. A number of Latino participants say they moved to the area to be away from families that rejected them. Mr. Ruiz, who teaches religious studies at Sacred Heart High School in the city, says a number of his students from Latino and Filipino backgrounds struggle with the issue.

The Latino men he works with retain a devotional spirituality, he says. They pray the rosary, take part in processions, venerate Our Lady of Guadalupe and attend many Spanish-language celebrations with Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone.

“They retain their identity as Latinos and as Catholics, but their relationships with their families are often broken because their families don’t feel [that their two identities] fit together,” Mr. Ruiz says. Latinos tend to stay close to their families, he says, so losing contact is hard.



Javier Plascencia describes the symbolic meaning of the “pride” rainbow as part of his outreach to L.G.B.T. Latino Catholics.

J.D. Long-García

“We need to understand that there are a lot of church teachings, social justice, love of neighbor. [Catholics] have a tool called conscience that helps them to decide what to do,” Mr. Ruiz says. “There are honest Catholics, Hispanic or not, who are trying to be good, queer Catholics.”

Most L.G.B.T. Catholics do not agree with the church teaching on homosexuality and live outside of it, he says. “We need to stop looking at them as people who need to be ministered to and see them as God’s gift and see how they can be a part of our communities,” Mr. Ruiz says.

In Los Angeles, Patricia Quirarte offers a similar perspective. She was one of 12 children growing up in Mexico, and her grandfather fought as a Cristero when the church was persecuted by the Mexican government in the 1920s. Her family used to call her *la monja*, “the nun,” as a child because she was so devout.

She maintained her faith after moving to the United States and has been involved in the Movimiento Familiar Católico with her husband; they have both served as catechists.

After her daughter married, her son Miguel Ángel told her that he was bisexual. He was in high school.

“I don’t know what I am,” she recalls him telling her.

Ms. Quirarte set him up with a therapist through Catholic Charities so he could work it out. After six sessions, Miguel Ángel was ready to talk to his mom again. He was crying. Through the therapy sessions, he came to understand he was gay.

“I don’t want to embarrass you guys,” he told his mom.

“First you have to accept yourself,” his mother told him.

“I can do one of those brainwash things,” he said to his mom, referring to the controversial “conversion therapy,” which claims it can change a person’s sexual orientation. Its use on minors is banned in many states.

“No, no, no,” Ms. Quirarte told her son.

“I am a man that is attracted to other men,” he told her

before addressing some cultural stereotypes. “But I’m not going to put makeup on or put on dresses. And I’m not going to talk funny.”

She learned about the Catholic Ministry for Gay and Lesbian Persons, part of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, at the L.A. Religious Congress. They assured Ms. Quirarte of her son’s standing in the church.

“I’ve learned that when we try to act like we have God figured out, we learn we really don’t,” Damaris Molina, who is involved with the Catholic Ministry for Gay and Lesbian Persons, told me. “We have to be honest with ourselves. Why would God put a person who identifies as L.G.B.T. in my path? We have to be open to the mystery that God is.”

Meeting with the group led to a change in Ms. Quirarte. “I’m going to start thinking that it isn’t so bad that my son is gay and that God loves him,” she remembers telling herself after meeting with the ministry. “That’s something I had never heard before.”

She began secretly attending an L.G.B.T. support group at Javier and Martha Plascencia’s house. “My husband loves my son, but he found it hard to accept him,” Ms. Quirarte says, adding that her husband had an anxiety attack after learning about his son. “He was praying that God would heal my son so that he would be attracted to women.”

After several months, she invited her son to accompany her to the meeting. When he realized what the meeting was about and how he was accepted there, he was overjoyed. “I’ll be happy when my father comes here,” she recalls him saying.

But still, Ms. Quirarte notes, a number of the parents who attended had kicked their kids out of the house. Some children had died by suicide. There is still a lot of prejudice in the community.

“There is such a great need,” Ms. Quirarte says. “There is so much ignorance. I would include myself in that. I did not know before. But the church accepts them as children of God. We need education, top to bottom, so that we become a church that is more open.”

---

J.D. Long-García is a senior editor at *America*.

# IMAGINE

Imagine yourself interacting with the people and places mentioned in Scripture. Walk with Jesus throughout his journey and experience guided reflection through imaginative prayer in the Jesuit tradition.

## IMAGINE: A GUIDE TO JESUIT PRAYER

A ten-part podcast series

In Partnership With



America

CLASSIFIEDS  
MARKETPLACE

Are you looking for a...  
Job, Retreat, Scholarship, Volunteer  
Opportunity, Book, Gift and More?

**VISIT CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE**  
[www.marketplace.americamagazine.org](http://www.marketplace.americamagazine.org)

**START YOUR SEARCH**



Contact us today!

**Ken Arko**  
Director of Advertising Services  
O: 212.515.0126  
C: 732.720.9941  
[karko@americamedia.org](mailto:karko@americamedia.org)

**Geena Di Camillo**  
Advertising Services Associate  
O: 212.515.0127  
C: 727.741.9209  
[gdicamillo@americamedia.org](mailto:gdicamillo@americamedia.org)

# A SURVIVOR'S STORY OF ANTI-STATISTICS

## Fighting the scandal of human trafficking

By Isabelle Senechal

---

When Riana H. was 15 years old, she ran away from home.

This was not a one-time incident for the willful teenager, who developed a habit of disappearing after her family moved from Austin, Tex., to California in 2010. Whenever Riana clashed with her mother over her restrictive house rules or curfew, she would take off for a few hours to hide out with her new friends.

It was not unusual, then, when Riana decided to run away one night after getting into another argument with her mother for missing curfew. This time, however, she reached out for help from the wrong person—an older man (we will call him J.) who had given her his phone number earlier that day. Though Riana was suspicious of J.'s interest in her, she felt she had run out of options: "It was cold and nighttime. I had nowhere else to go, so I ended up calling the number."

J. offered to put Riana up in a hotel room for the night. On the way, he gave her a drug that made her feel lightheaded and woozy. Riana remembers the room being occupied by another teenage girl, who started taking pictures of her.

"It kind of felt like a dream. It was my first time doing drugs, so I was kind of out of it. I didn't know what was going on," Riana told me over the phone.



The next morning she woke up, disoriented, to J. knocking on her hotel room door. At first, he downplayed what had happened the previous night, refusing to answer any of Ri-ana's or the other girl's questions about their current situation or their hazy memories of their encounters with J. It was not until a week and a half later that his intentions with the photographs were made clear: J. was a sex trafficker, and Ri-ana was his next victim.

Human trafficking remains a vast yet largely hidden criminal industry that generated an estimated \$32 billion annually in 2012; and sex trafficking, in particular, exploits roughly four million people around the world. Hearing people like Ri-ana recount her own experiences as a sex-trafficking survivor in her sometimes shaky yet persistent voice can help many put a face to these numbers and ask hard questions: What will it take to end human trafficking? And how should people of faith respond to this injustice?

### **Inside a Hidden Crime**

Human trafficking is a unique, 21st-century social issue, in part because labor trafficking, including commercial sex trafficking, was not internationally recognized as a distinct crime until Nov. 15, 2000, when the Palermo Protocol was drafted at the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. Before that, the legal definition of human trafficking was murky at best, with virtually no uniform consequences for those who exploited individuals for labor or sex acts. The Palermo Protocol sought to change that by constructing the first global, legally binding agreement, one that includes a universal definition of trafficking in persons and encourages cooperation among the signatory polities to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases.

On Oct. 28, 2000, a few weeks before that seminal U.N. convention, President Bill Clinton signed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, marking the first law in the history of the United States to address human trafficking. Under the T.V.P.A., trafficking was established as a federal offense



# Sex trafficking exploits roughly four million people around the world.

that warranted severe criminal penalties. Since 2003, five reauthorizations of T.V.P.A., along with the Palermo Protocol, have served as the legal definition of human trafficking used in the United States.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, sex trafficking involves any commercial sex act that “is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such [an] act has not attained 18 years of age.” For adult victims, how a state interprets “force, fraud, or coercion” is key; it determines whether a case is viewed as prostitution (illegal but considered voluntary) or trafficking (illegal and considered involuntary). But for minors, this definition means that *any* solicited sex act constitutes sex trafficking (the term “child prostitute” is therefore grossly inaccurate; by definition only adults can be prostitutes).

Because she was a minor, Riana’s case automatically qualified as sex trafficking. If she had been an adult, proving her status as a victim might have been harder, although her description of J.’s intimidation tactics and fraudulent behavior indicates fraud or coercion.

In the beginning, J. took Riana’s cellphone so that she could not contact her mother or law enforcement for help. He hovered constantly by her side and kept her compliant by forcing her to take more drugs. He would pretend to come across seemingly innocent jobs for her, only to reveal at the last moment that these “financial opportunities” actually involved sex acts. J. was deceptive and manipulative, and he used those skills to take advantage of Riana’s vulnerable position as a runaway teen.

“He took that vulnerability and tried to act like he cared, [like he was] your boyfriend or whatever he was supposed to be to you,” Riana explained. “It’s not always about kidnap[ping]. [Traffickers] feed on your emotions, make you trust them, and then end up being about something else.”

On one occasion, early in her entrapment, Riana tried



to escape J. by leaving with one of J.’s colleagues, who had promised to help her get out of the trafficking ring. Unfortunately, this man turned out to be an even more violent, aggressive trafficker than J.; during a car ride that was supposed to be Riana’s ticket to freedom, the man menaced her by keeping a gun trained on another girl, who had a black eye, in the front seat. The man dropped Riana off at a hotel “in the middle of nowhere” and warned her that he would not let her go unless she made a certain amount of money for him.

Realizing that this was potentially a more dangerous situation than the time she had spent with her first trafficker, Riana ended up calling J. and pleading with him to take her back. Initially, J. claimed that he did not want to pick her up because he believed she had made money for another pimp—according to Riana, traffickers will stop associating with girls who sell for other pimps—but Riana managed to convince him otherwise. After that incident, Riana started seeing J. as more of a protector than an abuser.

“At the time I was, I would say, brainwashed. I went from thinking he was a bad person to thinking he was, I guess, protecting me or a good person,” Riana said.

Riana was trafficked for six months before the F.B.I. got involved with her case. After J.’s arrest, she was bounced from foster parent to foster parent before landing at Courage House, a therapeutic group home for girls rescued from sex trafficking that, at the time, was operating out of Northern California. (Full disclosure: My second cousin is the executive director for Courage House Tanzania.) It was at Courage House that Riana learned she was three months pregnant.

“[My doctor] told me I was pregnant and...I busted out laughing. I didn’t think I could get pregnant after basically everything I’ve been through,” she said.

Riana stayed at Courage House until about the sixth month of her pregnancy, at which point she returned to her parents’ house to have her baby. Now a member of the military in her mid-20s, Riana is advocating for other human trafficking victims.

“It’s easier for me to tell people the whole story and details [about my experience] because when people look at me, they don’t see my trauma or anything that I went through,” she said. “Then when I do explain to [people] that it’s not about what females wear or the fact that they’re out

in public by themselves...and they get all hostile, I explain my situation and they're just shocked.... I just feel that everybody should be aware [that this kind of thing is] going on.”

### **Church Teaching on Trafficking**

Awareness of human trafficking has steadily increased around the world since the early 2000s, thanks in large part to activists and courageous survivors like Riana. Among those advocating justice for human trafficking victims, religious groups have been particularly vocal.

For decades, faith-based nongovernmental organizations and religious institutions have made significant contributions to the anti-trafficking movement, often employing their faith-based reasoning and the knowledge they have gleaned as service care providers, teachers and missionaries in marginalized communities to educate others about modern slavery, as well as to provide services for victims and inform policy change. The Catholic Church is no exception.

In a letter addressed to Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran for a conference on the human rights dimension of human trafficking in 2002, St. John Paul II called trafficking in persons “a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights,” invoking the Second Vatican Council document “Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the Modern World,” which describes slavery as “a supreme dishonor to the Creator.” Further, the pope echoed a global consensus that “promoting effective juridical instruments to halt this iniquitous trade, to punish those who profit from it, and to assist the reintegration of victims” should be top priorities in the fight against human trafficking.

Pope Francis, too, has made human trafficking a principal focus in his vision for the church. In 2015, he dedicated his annual message for the World Day of Peace to human trafficking, which he proclaimed is a “crime against humanity,” and called for “a mobilization comparable in size to that of the phenomenon itself.” Two years later, Francis charged the Migrant and Refugees Section of the Vatican

with developing pastoral guidelines for the issue.

From April 9 to 11, 2019, the Vatican hosted an international conference called Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking in Sacrofano, Rome, where 18 groups determined 42 action items for the church to complete in its efforts against the trafficking of persons. These pastoral proposals included taking a more proactive role in raising public awareness, involving survivors in policymaking and programs on human trafficking, encouraging local dioceses and parishes to offer temporary shelter and specialized assistance to victims, and enlisting the help of Catholic universities to research human trafficking.

“The Pastoral Orientations on [Human Trafficking] are deeply grounded in the Church’s reflection and teaching and in its longstanding practical experience responding to the needs of men, women, boys and girls caught up in human trafficking,” Flaminia Vola, the office’s regional coordinator for Western Europe and head of the team’s anti-trafficking efforts, said in an email. “Expertise and awareness about the phenomenon [have] changed over time, but the reference values for its evaluation remained unchanged.”

### **Shining Hope in the Darkness**

Human trafficking is a dark and complex subject, but the situation is not without hope. Although much work remains to be done to effectively address and completely dismantle the economic, social, legal and political systems that enable trafficking of persons, progress has been made by civil society, nonprofits and public and private sectors.

Groups like Catholic Relief Services and Polaris have worked to raise awareness and develop holistic, survivor-oriented programming. The National Human Trafficking Hotline has helped with 56,504 cases of human trafficking in the United States—some involving multiple victims—since 2007. States have expanded statutes on human trafficking (with varying degrees of success) to connect victims with resources and help law enforcement handle trafficking incidents. And in January 2020, President Donald





# Faith-based nongovernmental organizations and religious institutions have made significant contributions to the anti-trafficking movement.

Sex and labor trafficking may not be eliminated in our lifetime, but we can still do our part to stop the scourge. Here are a few practical steps you can take:

- ▶ First, continue educating yourself on human trafficking. The more informed you are, the better you can work to raise awareness and dispel public misconceptions or myths about human trafficking.
- ▶ Listen to victims and survivors like Riana, who are the experts on the issue.
- ▶ Read the Vatican's Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking and work to implement their recommendations at your home parish, church or local community.
- ▶ Consider contributing financially to anti-trafficking nonprofits and projects like H.T.I. Labs. Academic research, prevention and rehabilitation for survivors can be costly, so your donations go a long way in making important work against human trafficking possible.

Trump signed an executive order to expand his domestic policy office to include a new position that will focus solely on combating human trafficking.

One anti-trafficking project that has successfully combined private and public sectors, secular and faith-driven organizations, and advanced innovative research on the issue is the Human Trafficking Initiative at Creighton University, a Jesuit school in Omaha, Neb. (and my alma mater). Co-directed by Crysta Price, founder and chief executive officer of H.T.I. Labs, and Terry Clark, a professor of political science and international relations, H.T.I. uses data science to collect, analyze and evaluate the scope of human trafficking in a given region and recommend corresponding policy solutions.

"We are focused on providing research analysis broadly to the entire [anti-]trafficking effort in our state, and we provide support outside of our state as well," Mr. Clark said in a phone interview.

The project began in 2013 when Mr. Clark—along with two of his colleagues, John N. Mordeson, a professor of mathematics, and Mark Wierman, an associate professor of computer science—opened an experimental research laboratory that used cutting-edge information technologies to produce data on various social issues. Ms. Price, then an undergraduate studying international relations and economics, joined the research lab soon after, where she quickly assumed responsibility for a project that focused on international trafficking flows.

Ms. Price tracked women and children moving between countries with high sex-trafficking rates—for example, between Thailand and Laos or Russia and Ukraine. After close to a year of research, she realized that the same methodology could more accurately measure the prevalence of sex trafficking in the United States—data that for the longest time seemed out of reach, given the secretive nature of human trafficking. The team secured grant funding from the Sherwood Foundation and Women's Fund of Omaha, and H.T.I. Labs was born.

How does Creighton's H.T.I. team find data

on a crime as secretive as sex trafficking? One piece of it comes from online advertising.

“While trafficking is a hidden crime, it still has to advertise in some way to an underground market of sex buyers, who aren’t necessarily your classic criminal [archetype],” Ms. Price explained. “Advertising to those sex buyers is always going to be the way that we capture information about the people being sold.”

“And that’s what really distinguishes sex trafficking from other forms [of trafficking], because those other forms...don’t really have to go out on the open web to reach a broad market,” added Mr. Clark.

Initially, most of the advertising data that H.T.I. Labs processed came from Backpage.com, a classified advertising website that was the largest domestic online marketplace for commercial sex until the F.B.I. seized the site in 2018 to remove prostitution and child sex-trafficking ads. While shutting down Backpage did mitigate the website’s monopoly on sex solicitation, the controversial shutdown has been criticized by activists for scattering sex trafficking to other corners of the internet and thus making it more difficult to gather evidence for trafficking investigations.

“The shutdown of Backpage complicated the ability for law enforcement to investigate and prosecute trafficking,” said Ms. Price. “There were a lot of ongoing investigations where evidence relied on the data that only Backpage had.”

Backpage’s shutdown also complicated the research done by H.T.I. Labs. “Now, instead of one website in the continental United States, located in the United States, we have half a dozen to a dozen abroad. Instead of using just one format, we have to try to collapse things across all these different formats,” Mr. Clark said. It’s a lot of data to process; H.T.I. Labs continually adjusts its algorithm to capture as much of it as they can.

In order to corroborate the data they pull from online advertisements, H.T.I. Labs works with the Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force, law enforcement, local shelters and women-centric nonprofits like Women’s Fund of Omaha to compare the information that each organization has collected on the different dimensions of human trafficking. “It’s that feedback loop that allows us to train our algorithms and to feel confident in the assumptions that we’re making,” Ms. Price said.

Through their research, H.T.I. Labs was able to estimate that 900 individuals were sold for sex in the state of Nebraska per month in 2017.

“The work of H.T.I. Labs...has been integral in allow-

ing us to work collaboratively to impact systemic issues like sex trafficking,” Meghan Malik, the trafficking project manager for Women’s Fund of Omaha, shared in an email. “Their work provided Nebraska with the first empirical data on the commercial sex market in our state, which has helped the Women’s Fund inform policy change and identify solutions to support survivors in our community.”

One such policy change that Women’s Fund of Omaha successfully advocated for (using data and research analysis generated by H.T.I. Labs) was LB-1132, a state law that allows trafficking victims to annul convictions and expunge criminal records they may have accumulated while they were being trafficked. Under LB-1132, adult survivors of sex trafficking can build new lives for themselves without worrying about the impact that the crimes their traffickers forced them to commit might have on a job interview or housing application. The Nebraska Legislature unanimously passed LB-1132 in April 2018.

Ms. Price explained that her drive to do this work is fueled by not only the opportunity to conduct research in an understudied area, but also to work on a social justice issue that disproportionately affects women.

“The dynamics of the exploitation that’s happening here, it’s really kind of every woman’s story,” she said. “It can be a little bit depressing at times, but you know, at the end of the day, it feels good to work on something that hits home for so many women.”

“Without my faith, I don’t think I’d be involved in this at all,” Mr. Clark said. He added: “[When we see injustice], do we just throw our hands up in the air and give up? Or do we partner with God...putting our hands to the plow where we’ve been called to?”

Isabelle Senechal is a Joseph A. O’Hare fellow at America.



Listen to Riana tell her story in a podcast episode hosted by Isabelle Senechal on **“The America Media Podcast,”** wherever you listen to podcasts.

[SEARCH: THE AMERICA MEDIA PODCAST](#) • [SUBSCRIBE](#) • [LISTEN](#)





A Catholic church in Long Beach, Calif., is seen chained off on Easter morning, April 12, during the coronavirus pandemic.

# Politics and the Pandemic

*How Vatican II can help us navigate a moment of crisis*

By Blase J. Cupich

Our nation and our church stand at a pivotal moment as we ponder the crucial issue of how religious communities can contribute to the common good in a time of pandemic and bitter partisan political division. For the Catholic community, the penetrating vision of the Second Vatican Council on religion, the state and the political order provides an unparalleled orientation, identifying a clear pathway of public engagement, conscience formation and authentic witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### A New Vision of Church-State Relations

From the start, “*Gaudium et Spes*” (“The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”) offers a new approach toward the church’s activity in the public square. Referring to the “church *in* the modern world” rather than “*and* the modern world,” the title of the document signals that the church exists on its own terms, not because any agency gives permission or grants a right. As Vatican II’s decree on the church’s missionary activity puts it, “The pilgrim church is by its very nature missionary” (“*Ad Gentes*,” No. 2). In other words, the church’s autonomy and freedom derive from the fact that it has been sent, that its very nature is missionary.

Moreover, while the church enjoys its autonomy to act in the world, it does not stand in competition with the world. Rather, being *in* the world means that the church journeys in solidarity with all of humanity. If the church is to preserve its identity as “a sacramental sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of the whole human race” (“GS,” No. 42), there must be a proper balance between its autonomy and its solidarity with humanity.

Maintaining that balance means that while the church does not act as a direct agent in the political, economic and social order—not in the same way, say, as our elected officials do—its mission is to illuminate these dimensions of human life in order “to establish and consolidate the human community according to the law of God” (No. 42). As such, when the church engages the state, it should not limit itself to explicitly “religious” issues. Nor should it engage the state exclusively on issues of self-interest—for example, the protection of religious institutions.

Rather, it must speak about all that pertains to the common good, which “would include the promotion and defense of...goods such as public order and peace, freedom and equality, respect for human life and for the environment, justice and solidarity” (from the doctrinal note published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on

Nov. 21, 2002, “The Participation of Catholics in Political Life”). And the church’s proclamation of these values is not merely institutional but occurs primarily through the informed consciences of Catholics as citizens, who infuse Gospel values into the life of society and the state.

The church’s religious mission is best understood as one of service. The church offers its teachings with no pretense of having all the answers but recognizes that it will make mistakes and “will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven” (“*Lumen Gentium*,” No. 48). In fact, the church respects human knowledge and “desires to add the light of revealed truth to mankind’s store of experience” (“GS,” No. 33, and “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” No. 241). This conciliar teaching corrects a mistaken attitude toward the world found in some pre-conciliar *societas perfecta* ecclesiology, which viewed the church as divided from and standing over the rest of humanity.

By virtue of the universality of the church’s mission, it is not bound to any particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system. On the contrary, the church’s “universality can be a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations, provided these trust her and truly acknowledge her right to true freedom in fulfilling her mission” (“GS,” No. 42). It is in this spirit that the church “admonishes her own sons, but also humanity as a whole, to overcome all strife between nations and race in this family spirit of God’s children” (No. 42). By building relationships of trust in society, the church not only advances the cause of religious freedom but remains true to carrying out its universal mission.

As the church insists that its right of free exercise “must be recognized in the juridical order and sanctioned as a civil right,” it also recognizes that religious freedom “is not of itself an unlimited right. The just limits of the exercise of religious freedom must be determined in each social situation with political prudence, according to the requirements of the common good, and ratified by the civil authority through legal norms consistent with the objective moral order” (“*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*,” No. 422; see also “*Dignitatis Humanae*,” No. 2). Here again, we have an example of striking a proper balance between the church’s rightful autonomy and its commitment to work in solidarity with others, including civic officials, for the benefit of the human community.

### Practical Consequences

The Vatican II vision of church, state and politics provides a secure pathway as we face the issues of pandemic and

# While the church enjoys its autonomy to act in the world, it does not stand in competition with the world.

partisanship that are becoming destructive of our national unity. The intense debates in recent weeks about religious freedom versus the right of the state to protect public health provide a key example. For the church, the right to public worship lies at the core of its mission and identity. Similarly, for the state, the protection of its citizens is at the heart of its *raison d'être*. Too often, the public debate has focused on these sets of rights as if they were absolute.

One way to break this seeming impasse may be found in the focus in “*Gaudium et Spes*” on the common good, which recognizes the transcendent goal of each of these claims: public worship and the defense of human life. But it places those claims within the larger context of the whole of human flourishing. Neither public health and the defense of human life nor the right to public worship can be ignored. Both must be integrated into the larger constellation of issues surrounding our response to the pandemic, such as the economic suffering that our country is enduring, the vulnerability of older people and the ways in which people of color are disproportionately suffering during this crisis.

The conciliar teachings point to the reality that religious freedom can sometimes be limited by the state in accord with laws that promote the common good but that such limitations must be carefully circumscribed and monitored. Vatican II invites us to a broad, integrating perspective, rather than one that arises from absolutist interpretations of partial dimensions of the common good. And the council urges us to pursue wide, cordial public discussions of these questions rather than tactics that lead to confrontation.

This means that the central issue for the church during this election campaign season is to find a way of witnessing to Catholic teaching in the public square without allowing that witness to become distorted by partisan divisions. One of the council’s most illuminating passages on the role of the church in the modern world provides the inspiration

that must inform the church’s contribution to today’s public debate:

The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person. The Church and the political community in their own fields are autonomous and independent from each other (“GS,” No. 76).

## Navigating the Issues

How can the church be a sign and safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person during the 2020 election cycle?

First, by witnessing to the whole of the church’s social teaching through its participation in public debate and by forming, not replacing, the consciences of believers. Catholic leaders must reject any effort to truncate church teaching and the imperatives of the Gospel in a way that reinforces partisan divisions.

Second, by transcending such divisions in every political relationship and policy discussion. There should be cordiality with all candidates and public officials but not alignment with any candidate or party.

Third, by always recognizing the sacred dignity of conscience among all people, not seeking to short-circuit the responsibility that citizens have to bring the light of their conscience to bear upon their own political choices.

The church is *in* the world. It is called to be both immanent and transcendent. As Vatican II made clear, that means it must speak prophetically and not be compromised. It must engage the state and public leaders in cordiality but not in partisanship. It must witness to the Gospel in its entirety.

The church’s proclamation of the dignity of the human person and the pursuit of the common good in all of its dimensions provides an essential framework for navigating the issues that divide the nation today. This is why the church enters the public square with both confidence and humility amid the perils that surround us. And it is in the sacred consciences of lay women and men that the church finds its greatest resource for transforming the world.

---

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich is the archbishop of Chicago.

# JOIN OUR JESUIT LEGACY SOCIETY WITH YOUR PLANNED GIFT TODAY

We encourage you to join the more than 60 members of the Jesuit Legacy Society by including **America** in your estate plans.

Now more than ever, your support empowers us to tell the stories that matter most—providing the news, analysis and spiritual resources you need.

Here are a few strategies that could help guide your charitable giving in the coming months.

## **If You Plan to Itemize And Want More Deductions**

- Include America Media in your estate plan
- Make a distribution from your retirement plan
- Make a gift of property or real estate

## **If You Plan to Take the Standard Deduction And Want to Reduce Taxable Income**

- Make a gift of stock and avoid capital gains tax
- Make an I.R.A. charitable rollover gift

To learn more about your planned giving options, please visit [americamagazine.org/plannedgiving](http://americamagazine.org/plannedgiving).

Contact  
**James Cappabianca**  
Director of Advancement  
212.515.0101  
[jcappabianca@americamedia.org](mailto:jcappabianca@americamedia.org)

---

It is important to consult with an attorney, accountant or tax advisor before making any major financial decisions.



# MY CHILDHOOD AT THE CENTER

I grew up in a Catholic cult. I had to tell my story before I could accept that.

By Patricia Chadwick

“Mom,” my daughter said in a take-charge tone of voice that reminded me of myself. “There are two things I have to tell you.” It was our first time seeing each other since I shared the manuscript of my memoir with her a couple of months earlier.

“First,” she said, “you need to stop everything until you finish your book. And second, you have to accept the fact that you grew up in a cult.”

I had been working on the book, *Little Sister*, for eight years, and my daughter, then a junior in college, knew the story of my upbringing within the Saint Benedict Center. I had been taking her to visit my childhood home her entire life.

Her words struck me full-on, and I could answer only one of her demands. “I’m working day and night on it, darling, and I’m almost there,” I replied. But her description of my childhood caught me completely off guard. A cult? My home was a cult?

I thought about the cults that were in the news during my young adulthood: the murderous Charles Manson and his harem of besotted women; Jim Jones, who led his 900 followers to a “Promised Land” in Guyana only to coerce them to participate in a mass suicide; David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, who barricaded themselves against the rest of the country in a stockaded fortress near Waco, Tex., in the 1990s. When U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno ordered the use of military force against Koresh and the occupants, I felt an instantaneous kinship with the besieged men, women and children behind the wooden fence. It brought me back to a time and a place when, as a child at the Saint Benedict Center, I was told that the whole world was against us.

Still, at that time, I didn’t see some of the common threads between the way I was brought up and the cults that had made headlines in my lifetime.



A childhood photo of the author with her grandmother, father and two younger siblings

dren born to the married couples.

My earliest memories are filled with the sound of laughter, of being in the constant company of the energetic and intellectual men and women of the community. I did not know that they had come together in this joyous enclave because of a falling out with the local authorities of the Catholic Church and Rome. (Father Feeney was dismissed by the Jesuits and excommunicated in 1953 after refusing to reply to a summons to the Vatican.) Nor did I know that my father, a teacher at the Jesuit-run Boston College, had, along with two other professors, been fired in early 1949, when I was just 7 months old, because of their rigid theological views.

Though I was only about 3 years old, I remember well when the members of the community gave up their “worldly” attire and began donning identical clothing: black suits for the men and long black pleated skirts, topped with a white blouse and a black jacket, for the women.

When I was 4 years old, Father Feeney ordained that everyone change their “worldly” names and adopt new “religious” names. It did not matter to me that I was forbidden to call my parents “Mommy” and “Daddy” anymore but had to address them as Sister Elizabeth Ann and Brother James Aloysius. I knew they loved me, and I loved them back.

But I was upset when, at 5 years old, Father Feeney changed my name from Mary Patricia to Anastasia. Young as I was, I knew then that Father (as we called him) and Sister Catherine wielded all the power at the center.

I did not mind when the big brothers (as all the men were called) built a stockade fence around the seven houses that served as our homes and shut out the rest of the world, as long as I still lived with my parents and three younger sisters and younger brother.

But I was devastated when, at the age of 6, together with my 4-year-old sister and 3-year-old brother, we were separated from our parents and two youngest siblings. No longer part of a loving family, we were suddenly being raised by one of the big sisters, a stentorian woman who meted out corporal punishment on a regular basis. I watched in agony as my little sister, Mary Catherine, became a frail and frightened child, prone to going for days without eating. My only recourse was to assume, as best I could, the role of protector, which often meant surreptitiously eating her meals so that she would not be punished.

### Shutting Out the World

Saint Benedict Center was founded by Catherine Clarke in 1940 as a meeting place for Catholic college students in the Boston area. Within a few years, its popularity led to the installation of the renowned Jesuit priest, Leonard Feeney, as its full-time chaplain. By 1948, however, the center had dwindled to about 60 followers of Father Feeney, all of whom adhered to a strict interpretation of the Catholic doctrine *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (“outside the church there is no salvation”).

As a child, my life was centered around the activities of the men and women who chose to follow Father Feeney, including my parents and an array of married couples and single men and women, all of whom became members of the unofficial religious order they established and called the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Within a few years, we had grown to nearly 100 because of the 39 chil-

## The Geographic Cure

There was hope when Sister Catherine announced that we would leave our home in Cambridge and move to the hamlet of Still River in central Massachusetts, where, she promised, we could run through the fields and have dogs and cats for pets and horses to ride.

But what she didn't say was that once we moved, the children would no longer be allowed even to speak to our parents, who had been coerced into taking vows of celibacy and were no longer allowed to live with each other. We embarked on a monastic way of life; silence and prayer filled much of our day. Members of the community were forced to sever all ties with their families, and we were schooled on the premises.

Within this environment, Father Feeney and Sister Catherine told us over and over again that we were “the luckiest children in the world because you have been dedicated to God from the day you were born.” We were lucky to be saved from the evil of the outside world, from the dangers to our souls that came from reading newspapers and watching television and movies and listening to the radio, from the sinful music of the Beatles and from the sinful clothing that people “out in the world” wore.

I failed to see how we were so lucky. Severe corporal punishment was part of our daily lives, and Sister Catherine would frequently remind us that we should embrace martyrdom because it was the surest way to get to heaven.

Despite the endless warnings about the evil lurking in the outside world, my curiosity about all things beyond the confines of our closed community was insatiable.

As a young teenager, I began to realize that my life's path was out of my hands. I was in training to become a big sister, like my mother, and a celibate bride of Christ. Nothing could have been further from my dreams: a prince for a husband and a beautiful house surrounded by a flower garden and lots of children. When at the age of 16 I was forced to become a postulant, I felt trapped.

At the same time, I developed a series of crushes on grown men within the community. We were not taught biology, much less sex education, and I did not know what these feelings meant or what to do about them.

During my senior year in high school, Sister Catherine informed me that “not everyone has a call to be a nun.” In a meeting that was both bizarre and frightening, she let me know that I would be leaving my home when I graduated in six months. It was a death sentence of sorts—being banished from the only place in the world

that was safe.

In June 1966, not more than an hour after my graduation and two months shy of my 18th birthday, I was expelled from the center without so much as a goodbye to the rest of the community, whom I considered my family. When, over the next few days and weeks, members of the community asked Sister Catherine about my departure, she replied, I would learn later, that I “was destroying the religious vocations of the brothers.”

## Coming to Terms With the Past

Sister Catherine died two years after my expulsion from the community. After her death, a number of children at the center informed their parents of the secret, violent beatings they had received, leading to a mass exodus of families. In the early 1970s, Father Feeney became reconciled with the Catholic Church, though he never recanted his views on *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. The community of men became a Benedictine abbey, while the women came under the auspices of the Diocese of Worcester.

After the publication of my book, I began to share my story at libraries and clubs and on radio shows around the country. I came to realize that my listening audience agreed with my daughter: I had been brought up in a cult. The signs that I had overlooked were now staring me in the face: blind obedience to an absolute authority, centralized financial control, paranoia about the outside world, separation of families, scorn for those who left the community. Why had I missed what now seemed so evident?

Truth be told, I believe my telling of the story might have been impaired had I approached it from the point of view of describing a cult. That was for the audience to discern and for me, ultimately, to accept.

Pure and simple, the center was my home, and I loved it and the people who were part of it. They were my family, all 100 of them.

I cared, therefore, how those who consider the center their home today would receive the book. I shared it with the head of both the men's and the women's communities ahead of publication and offered to engage with the current leadership, but those requests were denied.

My mother, on the other hand, was completely supportive. She and my father left the community with two of my siblings in 1969, three years after I was expelled, and my other two sisters left in 1971. She was in her 80s and read every chapter as I was writing it. She encour-

aged me to keep on going. As I neared the end, she said, “Parts of it make me sad, but it’s all true, and you need to publish it.” Her words have remained with me and bolstered me when the burden of sharing my story seemed at times daunting. She died six months before the official launch date.

### Lights and Shadows

I have been asked how I could forgive my parents for what to many seems like abandonment. I understand that point of view, but I saw and still see it in a different light. Even as a child I was aware of a creeping grasp that Father Feeney and Sister Catherine had on everyone at the center. I felt that my parents and I were suffering together, and when we were once again reunited as a family, several years after I was banished, I never felt anger toward them nor the need to forgive them.

I am also asked how I can remain Catholic. Again the answer is uncomplicated, at least for me. The sins of some people within the church, or, for that matter, other churches or governments or corporations, do not invalidate the good that is offered. There is no religion that does not find itself challenged from time to time on account of the behavior of its leadership. Abandoning Catholicism would do nothing to inspire me to lead my life in a better way. That may be a simplistic response, but it is one I believe sincerely.

Perhaps the most profound question I have been asked as I have toured with my book came from a gentleman: “What in your life would you change if you could do it all over again?” I pondered his question: At age 18, I found myself kicked out of my home, without parental advice, money or a path to higher education. Armed only with faith and a determination not to fail, I faced a world I had been taught to believe was full of sin and danger. The journey was long and arduous but also in many ways exhilarating, and with pluck, luck and an array of mentors, I managed to survive and eventually thrive.

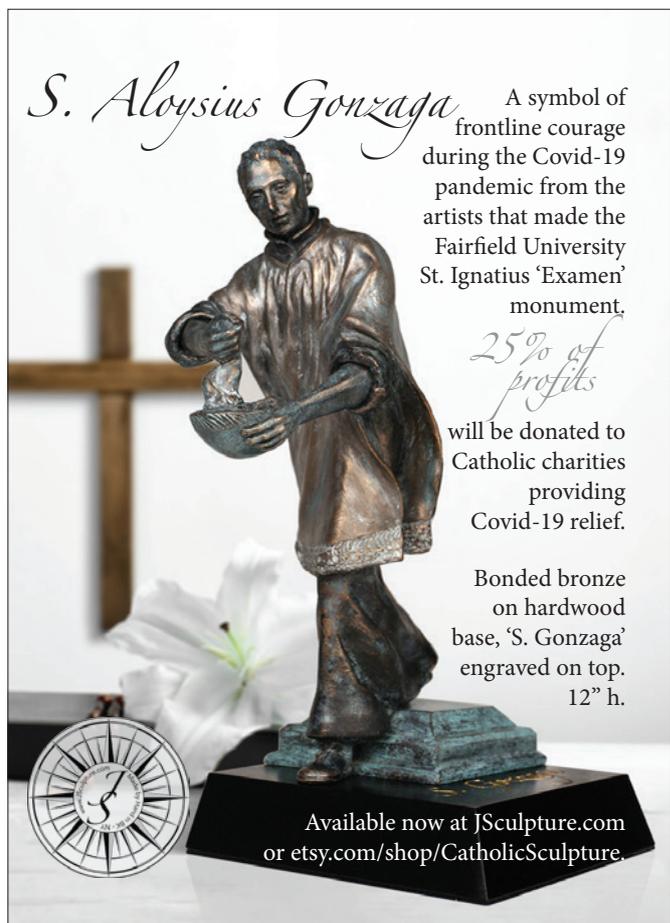
Now I am a 71-year-old woman with a long past and a shorter future—a woman about to celebrate her 35th wedding anniversary with a man I would marry all over again, with 26-year-old twins who are my pride and joy, with an array of friends who range in age from 92 to 20, with experiences good, bad and fantastic—and if any element of my upbringing had been different, how do I know if I could make those claims?

I answered, “I wouldn’t change a thing,” and I meant it.

I have spent little if any time wondering, “What if?” or “If only” regarding my childhood. Life presents us with an array of lights and shadows, peaks and valleys, good times and bad, and it is up to us to accept that reality and navigate through the ups and downs of life. Yes, I was raised in a cult. Yes, that made for a unique life with unique challenges, but I have been blessed in countless ways, not the least of which is the joy of having a daughter whose honesty and love allowed me to see and accept the truth about my childhood.

---

Patricia Chadwick is a retired global partner at Invesco and now sits on corporate boards. *Little Sister* is her first book. She is now at work on another book that will tell the story of climbing the ladder in the all male world of Wall Street.



*S. Aloysius Gonzaga* A symbol of frontline courage during the Covid-19 pandemic from the artists that made the Fairfield University St. Ignatius ‘Examen’ monument,

*25% of profits* will be donated to Catholic charities providing Covid-19 relief.

Bonded bronze on hardwood base, ‘S. Gonzaga’ engraved on top. 12” h.

Available now at [JSculpture.com](https://www.JSculpture.com) or [etsy.com/shop/CatholicSculpture](https://www.etsy.com/shop/CatholicSculpture).

# *Ballet in a Time of P*

By Elyse Durham

Ballet also shows us  
the human body as it  
was meant to be: full  
of health and life.

# a Plague

Every era has its heresy. Not a new heresy, mind you: A cursory glance at church history will reveal the same six or seven ideas being recycled over and over again. And every era has in its character some kind of predisposition to one of these ideas. I have always thought that ours was gnosticism: the belief, among other things, that our physical bodies are a burden, that our true selves are wholly incorporeal, that a spiritual life means freedom from the physical world.

These are dangerous ideas; they are endemic in our culture and counter to the Christian tradition. They are also easy to succumb to in a time of plague. This year has exposed our vulnerabilities as humans in startling and painful ways. No matter how wealthy our nations, how advanced our technology, how enlightened our culture, how progressive our ideals, we are still as vulnerable to disease as the lowliest animal.

In these circumstances, it is difficult to see the merit in being physical creatures. The pandemic has made our bodies enemies to one another, posing constant threats to our families, our communities, even our places of worship. Six-foot lines have bisected every institution imaginable—even, for infected spouses who must quarantine themselves, the marriage bed. From all this, it is tempting to conclude that our bodies are burdens indeed.

Simultaneously, the pandemic has crammed as much of our lives as possible onto screens and into Zoom calls. Though these technologies give us much to be thankful for (I myself have benefited enormously from them, as I will note later), they can also distance us from our physical selves. These days, it is easy to

forget that we and our neighbors are more than floating heads on a conference call.

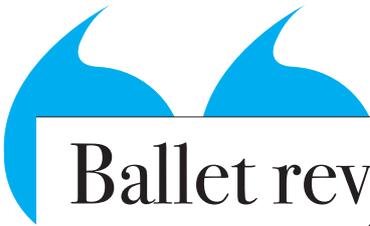
God made the human body. God made the physical world and called it good. How can we avoid the heresy of Gnosticism while protecting our neighbors from our germs? How can we recall the sacredness of our flesh while being constantly reminded of its weakness?

The day the World Health Organization declared a pandemic, I got sick, too. Like many thousands of my fellow Detroiters, I had Covid-19. Within a week, Detroit was one of the largest hotbeds of the coronavirus in the country and the world.

I was lucky. Though my illness was frightening and my lungs still do not quite feel like themselves three months later, my case was mild, and I was never hospitalized. Many in Detroit were not so lucky. By the time this goes to press, Wayne County will likely have lost as many to Covid-19 as New York City lost on Sept. 11, 2001.

How do you praise God for your body even as you struggle to breathe? How do you remember the joys of the incarnation as the news is flooded with the horrors of mortality, as phrases like “organ failure” and “intubation” and “cytokine storms” become part of our everyday vocabulary?

Because of my illness, I self-isolated at home for weeks before shelter-in-place orders were enforced across the country. Though life seemed to go on around me, I was cut off from the world. My touch had become dangerous. I could not go to the places that were once part of my everyday routine—gym, library, grocery store—because my body had become a liability to others. Even the doors of my church were closed to me, Communion itself forbidden. As I self-isolated, trying to love my neigh-



---

# Ballet reveals the transcendent within flesh that appears too ordinary for us, too mundane.

---

bors by leaving them alone, it was tempting to believe that my very flesh was evil.

I had not realized how much the world had changed—how much I had changed—until I watched a video of two dancers from the New York City Ballet. Filmed just before the pandemic, the video’s eerily prescient melancholy perfectly matched the somberness of the moment. But what took me by surprise was seeing the two dancers touch. I had been isolated at home for so long, enmeshed in the unfolding pandemic, that I gasped when the dancers clasped hands. I watched, riveted, as the dancers embraced, supported and carried each other in a passionate pas de deux (literally, “step of two”). I had already forgotten what it looked like for two humans to be in communion with each other.

As the pandemic continued, and my self-isolation was replaced by a mandatory lockdown, I immersed myself in the very physical world of ballet. From my couch, I watched full-length ballets from companies around the world. From my home office, I took virtual ballet classes from professional dancers on Instagram Live and from my home studio in Boston. I bought a ballet barre on eBay and did pliés and relevés and tendus as my teacher directed me onscreen, her familiar voice guiding

me through the steps. I am no dancer, but these things reminded me that I was still human, even though I was contagious. As Christ’s multitude of healing miracles show us, even a diseased body is an icon of the incarnation.

Ballet is civilization at its finest. To a world in upheaval, it is an emblem of calmer times. Like any kind of athleticism, it represents abundance: access to plentiful food, time and resources for training, the peace and leisure necessary for spectatorship. It is an eminently civilized art form not only because it still carries traces of the 17th-century courts from which it sprang but because of its connection to longstanding tradition, even in its most contemporary forms. A plié is a plié, even in a pandemic.

Ballet also shows us the human body as it was meant to be: full of health and life, making not one but a thousand beautiful choices, sacrificing comfort for the sake of something greater, disciplining oneself for the benefit of others. Ballet reveals the transcendent within flesh that appears too ordinary for us, too mundane. Ballet makes us wonder at the most familiar sight of all—the human body—and lets us see it transfigured, as dancers leap and twirl and reach undreamed-of physical heights. In the bodies of dancers, viewed from afar,

I saw an icon of the incarnation, the beauty of the body. Our bodies may be vulnerable to death and disease, but they also mirror Christ.

Even in a time of plague, the human body is not a burden, not a prison from which we must be freed, but the vessel through which we experience all the gifts God has given us: the sensual beauty of the natural world, the embrace of the ones we love, the partaking of Christ’s body and blood. As the New York City Ballet dancers reminded me, God designed a world in which we physically support, embrace and carry one another. With patience and with prayer, we will one day return to this world.

No matter how long the pandemic rages on, no matter how digital life becomes, we are first and foremost incarnate beings, called to be present in the physical world. We can continue to love our neighbors, remembering that the stranger we see on the street is not just a vector for disease but someone whose incarnate self we can love from afar, recognizing them as an icon, as admired as a dancer in a ballet.

---

*Elyse Durham is a fiction writer and journalist from Detroit. Her work has appeared in Christianity Today, The Cincinnati Review and elsewhere. Twitter: @Durham\_elyse*

# Mercy the Horse

By Willie Lin

“Horse named Mercy freed from  
Florida septic tank by rescue workers”  
— Associated Press (9/21/16)

The reeds, the tall grasses bent, holding  
the impression of such weight. Such was the way  
I went on, afraid to set my weight entire  
on the world, shifting, distant at someone’s knee.

\*

Too prone to darkness  
all my life I have asked for a task,  
a purpose to survive me. To be a beam  
broken by a falling weight. To be impossible,

\*

as the woman in the poem, who longed to be gathered,  
swept up and carried  
like a pile of fallen leaves. I came to a name  
as was my method: late, to everything.

\*

Mercy, if given  
form, would be a storm  
loosening between the shoulders, would ride, wind-borne,  
to that moment beside water

\*

when, because you could not bring it closer  
to you, you brought your face  
closer to it, like some dog, some lower animal,  
would be the soft strands falling

\*

from women shorn of their hair, believing  
that it’s where history, their loneliness,  
resided, close  
to the surface of things. But stay,

we do not know where the forgotten reside.  
In the nightmare I repeat  
my mistakes—such was my mind when the eye saw  
river of mercury, I read river of mercy—

\*

I climb a small gray hill  
where tragedy had burrowed, made its home,  
hard labor  
indifferent to precision, I think  
joy is final,

\*

I rise, shrug off my form, believing  
I already have what I’ve wanted—to skip to the ending,  
to arrive to all there was: effervescence and dread,  
cries of *Mercy lives*.

---

Willie Lin lives and works in Chicago. She is the author of the chapbooks *Instructions for Folding* (Northwestern University Press, 2014) and *Lesser Birds of Paradise* (MIEL, 2016). This poem was a runner up in the 2020 Foley Poetry Contest.

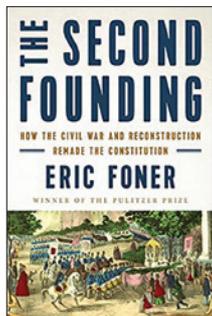
America | CLASSIFIEDS  
MARKETPLACE

***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.

# A dream deferred

By Michael A. Vaccari



**The Second Founding**  
How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution  
By Eric Foner  
W.W. Norton  
256p \$26.95

The word *slavery* appeared nowhere in the U.S. Constitution before 1865. Slavery was a matter of state and local law; not a legislative concern of the federal government. Many of our country's founders were slave owners, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. It took the Civil War to eliminate slavery. Equally important, however, were three amendments to the Constitution that remade our country's foundation: the 13th Amendment in 1865, the 14th Amendment in 1868 and the 15th Amendment in 1870. While a story about these three amendments should

promise an uplifting experience, the reality is much more complicated.

Eric Foner's *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*, tells a sad story: how the U.S. Supreme Court, many Southern states and Congress delayed for nearly a century what Foner calls the Second Founding. Foner, an emeritus historian of the Civil War and Reconstruction at Columbia University, applauds the ideals of the supporters (the Second Founders) of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments. He also clearly shows that the issues debated during Reconstruction are still being examined today—the meaning of equal protection, entitlement to citizenship, the balance of powers between the federal government and the states, the right to vote and the rights of aliens.

Foner lays out in three chapters the background of each of the three amendments, provocatively titling the one section on the 13th Amendment,

“What Is Freedom?” The amendment, declaring four million slaves to be free upon its ratification in 1865, introduced the word *slavery* into the Constitution and gave the federal government broad authority over state and local governments, businesses and private individuals to enforce its abolition.

While the first 12 amendments to the Constitution were put in place to *restrain* Congress (e.g., no laws limiting free speech, no cruel and unusual punishments), the second section of the 13th Amendment *expanded* Congress's powers to enforce provisions to abolish slavery. But it did not address the meaning of equality before the law during a period when most people believed that the amendment would not lead to giving black males the right to vote.

Further, under Reconstruction, a number of laws enacted across the American South undermined the 13th Amendment by allowing for involuntary black labor, particularly in the case of criminals. Foner points out

Three amendments to the Constitution remade our country's foundation: the 13th Amendment in 1865, the 14th in 1868 and the 15th in 1870.

---

that “[t]o this day, persons convicted of crimes are routinely subjected to involuntary servitude while incarcerated.” Former prisoners, after having served their penalty, are still subjected to discrimination in employment, housing, reception of food stamps and the right to vote. Florida and Kentucky, for example, only recently restored voting rights to more than a million ex-felons in 2018 and 2019.

In his examination of the 14th Amendment, Foner notes that “no change in the Constitution since the Bill of Rights has had so profound an impact on American life.” Unlike the 13th Amendment, which had no “state action” requirement and applied to both public authorities and private parties, the 14th Amendment affected only actions by the state or local governments, mandating equal protection under the law.

The Supreme Court's infamous opinions on the 14th Amendment developed for over a century after its passing. The court ruled that segregation was not unconstitutional provided that the separate accommodations were “of equal merit” and the activities involved private businesses, not state or local bodies. It also ruled that the “egregious violations” in the age of Jim Crow and, later, the internment of Japanese-Americans in World War II, were constitutional.

Another interpretation of the 14th Amendment's equal protection provision occurred just recently, in a 2019 Supreme Court opinion on racial discrimination in jury selection. In that case the state prosecutor employed peremptory challenges to strike 41 out of 42 black prospective jurors; the almost all-white jury then convict-

ed the defendant of murder. The Supreme Court reversed the convictions, with Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh acknowledging the history of racial discrimination in jury selection and the 14th Amendment's original objective to protect black people's right to jury service. One of the striking elements in this case is that the U.S. Supreme Court's action reversed the Mississippi Supreme Court's decision upholding the convictions.

Regarding the 15th Amendment, Foner notes that it was passed just two years after “[t]he future of black suffrage became a major issue in the presidential campaign of 1868.” The Democratic vice presidential candidate that year claimed that Reconstruction put the South under the rule of “an alien race of semi-barbarous men.” Various efforts were in place to deny the right to vote to black men, including requirements like property ownership, literacy tests and poll taxes.

With the historical background on the three Reconstruction Amendments covered, Foner analyzes the Supreme Court's “crucial role in the long retreat from the ideals of Reconstruction.” He notes that on issues like the relationship between the federal government and state power, the meaning of “equal protection,” and the legality of segregation, “in almost every instance, the [Supreme] Court chose to restrict the scope of the second founding.”

Any study of legal opinions from Reconstruction through the end of the 19th century must, regrettably, include a list of infamous decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court. The court denied suffrage for women (1873), held that the Civil Rights Acts of 1875 were unconstitutional because they covered acts

by private parties (1883) and upheld separate accommodations at hotels and theaters and racial segregation in public schools so long as the facilities were “of equal merit” (1877 and 1896).

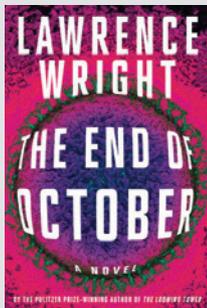
State legislatures and white voters come off no better in this account. An “Appendix on Reconstruction” from 1865 to 1877 describes in detail numerous setbacks for African-Americans after the heady first few years after the Civil War. For example, in 1870 and 1875, the first and second African-American senators in U.S. history were elected. The next African-American was elected to the Senate almost a century later, in 1967. In 1872, the first African-American governor was elected. The next was not elected until 1989.

Significant revisions occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, but deep inequalities remain today. In an epilogue, Foner summarizes the shortcomings of the Reconstruction Amendments as interpreted by the Supreme Court, and offers several potential changes to the court's narrow interpretation of these amendments to give new meanings based on their language and intent.

Whether one agrees with all of Foner's interpretations and suggestions or not, *The Second Founding* presents his arguments in an intelligent manner with a strong historical foundation. His positions should earn the readers' attention as they wrestle with the best approach needed to bring justice to the public square.

---

Michael A. Vaccari is an attorney and an adjunct associate professor of law at Fordham University School of Law.



### The End of October

By Lawrence Wright  
Knopf  
400p \$27.95

#### Another plague

The title of Lawrence Wright's medical thriller, *The End of October*, hangs over the story like a pall. Referring to an expected second onslaught of what Wright calls Kongoli Influenza, a killer pandemic, the title adds suspense to an already conflict-ridden plot.

The novel bears a disturbing resemblance to the Covid-19 pandemic raging across the globe, thereby ratcheting up the tension. But according to Wright, a Pulitzer Prize-winning nonfiction writer for *The New Yorker*, the resemblance is coincidental.

Wright's compelling plot, which is set in the present, begins as a novel virus is found in a camp in Indonesia. It causes pneumonia and turns people blue as they bleed from body openings. When it hits the United States, it is particularly virulent in Philadelphia (as was the 1918 Spanish flu). Like the 1918 flu, it strikes young adults hardest and has an extremely high lethality rate.

The novel's protagonist, Henry Parsons, is a microbiologist and an assistant director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He travels to Indonesia on behalf of the World Health Organization to investigate this new virus. When he realizes the lethality of Kongoli, he

quarantines the camp where he is working. Unfortunately, his driver steals away to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Parsons hopes to stop him before he can spread the virus to millions of other pilgrims.

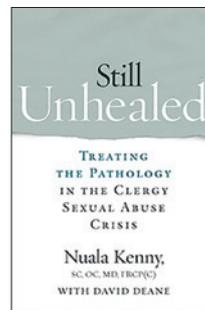
The trajectory of the story proceeds from there, and the reader follows Henry as he tries to understand the virus and keep one step ahead of looming destruction.

When Parsons is not trying to save humanity, he thinks about the science of medicine and disease, viruses and bacteria, pandemics, extinctions, vaccines and the scientists who discovered them. In that sense, this well-researched story resembles John Barry's nonfiction account *The Great Influenza*.

As Parsons wrestles with the virus and its devastating effects on civilization, he also struggles with belief in God. He debates the existence of God with his Muslim friend Prince Majid, who gives Henry a copy of the Quran. Parsons reads it in the novel's darkest moment. Previously, Parsons had believed that religion was superstition and insisted that science would provide answers to mankind's questions. But as this nail-biting story develops, he is not so sure.

---

Diane Scharper is the author or editor of seven books. She teaches memoir and poetry in the Johns Hopkins University Osher program.



### Still Unhealed

Treating the Pathology in the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis

By Nuala Kenny, S.C., O.C., M.D., F.R.C.P. (C.), with David Deane  
Twenty-Third Publications  
175p \$19.95

#### Still sick

A Canadian pediatrician and woman religious who has worked on issues of sexual abuse for more than three decades, Nuala Kenny, S.C., offers her diagnoses and prescriptions for treating the "sick soul" and the "global septic shock in the Body of Christ" in *Still Unhealed*.

Kenny has been working in this area since she joined the one-of-its-kind, lay-led Archdiocesan Commission of Inquiry on Clergy Sexual Abuse in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 1989. *Still Unhealed* follows on her earlier work, *Healing the Church: Diagnosing and Treating the Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis* (2012). Kenny brings to this study all the investigative curiosity that one would expect from a physician confounded by a patient's failure to heal. In fact, in the case of treating the church, the physician seems far more interested in recovery than the patient itself does.

However, Kenny's determination gives the reader hope. She makes us realize there are solutions to this deep crisis that need to be implemented with urgency.

While the sexual abuse crisis has been investigated by those inclined to either law or morality (with their interests in crime and sin, respectively), Kenny's medical mind

and heart presents us with the crisis as an illness. Concerned not only with the abuse itself and the insensitive banality of the hierarchy's responses, she focuses on the underlying ecclesial pathology that sustains the lethargy and resistance that has characterized much of the "hierarchicalism" (my term) that leaves the church impotent and compromised.

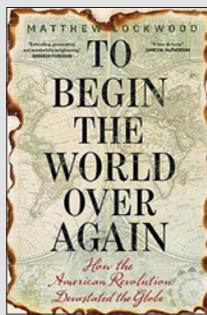
Kenny finds the root of the sickness in the church's agency—that is, the ecclesial leadership that is insufficient in its capacity to mend and recuperate but rather governs in ways that stave off the Holy Spirit's attempts to animate and restore the body of Christ.

While occasionally consulting her colleague, the theologian David Deane, Kenny proposes, among other prescriptions: women and other lay cardinals (a proposal I have heartily endorsed); the elimination of mandatory celibacy for the priesthood; women deacons; greater lay oversight in matters of allegations and accountability; a more truthful sexual ethics; and, in the formation of priests and bishops, an appreciation for servant leadership and a respect for the obligation to follow one's conscience.

Nuala Kenny, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, reminds one of the authority that other doctors of the church, like Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Ávila, have had as they dealt forthrightly with scandal and leadership in the church. A very wise read.

---

James F. Keenan, S.J., is the *Canisius Professor and vice provost for global engagement at Boston College.*



### To Begin the World Over Again

How the American Revolution Devastated the Globe

By Matthew Lockwood  
Yale University Press  
523p \$30

#### Revolutionary history

Books about the American Revolution are endlessly fascinating—and fascinatingly endless. In *To Begin the World Over Again*, Matthew Lockwood presents an entirely fresh thesis, one well summed up in the subtitle: *How the American Revolution Devastated the Globe.*

Americans brought up to believe that our founding was a blessing for posterity, with its promise of liberty and freedom for all, will find the very idea that the American Revolution was a negative event discomfuting. And yet Lockwood presents the revolution not through a narrow prism but through a wide-angle lens, showing how the events of the 1770s had reverberations far beyond American shores. Or, as he puts it, “the most urgent lesson taught by America’s founding moment” was the fact that “Americans’ actions have, and always had, unforeseen, unimagined global consequences.”

The American Revolution was a political, social and moral earthquake. While the tremors began in places like Boston, Philadelphia and New York, the aftershocks reached far beyond, to be felt in places like England, Ireland, Spain, Russia, China, India, Africa and Australia. On the surface, it had immediate effects upon statesmen and empires, for it created threats to

their prestige and power, sometimes resulting in regressive measures and culminating with repression and retrenchment—the opposite of what the revolution intended.

But the lasting ramifications were felt by the people who inhabited other lands, the people who lacked the means to achieve power and influence or just the wherewithal to achieve a better life. Lockwood, while acknowledging the great and powerful figures like George Washington and King George III, focuses on the ordinary people by telling their stories and how they reacted to the events around them.

There are so many arrestingly told stories that it would be unfair to mention just a few of them; they all deserve to be recounted and discussed. But Lockwood vividly recounts how certain individuals played seminal roles in the affairs of their nations, from peasants, philosophers, criminals and publicans to aspiring politicians. Through their actions, policies on criminal justice, taxation and political representation came to prominence as never before. Once populations got a whiff of that democratic air, there was no turning back. Nations and empires felt the shiver of that breeze, and the ramifications are felt to this day.

Readers with preconceived notions about the founding of the United States will find cause to revise their views and perhaps see our history—indeed world history—in a new light.

---

Joseph McAuley is an assistant editor at *America.*

# Hannah Gadsby is not quitting comedy, after all

By John Anderson



It's "my second album," Hannah Gadsby tells her live Los Angeles audience in "Douglas," offering a very tactical concession of defeat.

One of the basics of comedy is the element of surprise, and Hannah Gadsby's "Nanette" surprised us by not being comedy. What was it, then? Performance art? Standup memoir? A "lecture," as some of Gadsby's detractors (she tells us) deemed it? It was unquestionably funny. It was also heartbreaking. And its amorphous qualities helped make Netflix's filmed version a hot topic of conversation in 2018.

As a "Nanette" fan might have anticipated, Gadsby drives "Douglas," named after her dog (there's a reason), directly into the teeth of "Nanette." It's "my second album," she tells her live Los Angeles audience, offering a tactical concession of defeat before the battle is even underway. If you are here because you liked "Nanette," she asks, why are you here? It can't possibly be repeated. Of course, if you didn't like "Nanette," why in the world are you here? And if you never saw "Nanette" well, "good on ya," the Australian performer says, all the while demolishing the conventions

of comedy, which she said she was quitting in "Nanette" anyway.

It takes approximately 14-and-a-half minutes of setup—or tear down—before Gadsby says, "The show starts... now!" Prior to that she has told the audience everything she is going to tell them in advance, thus employing the element of distraction, like a magician who shows you your card, puts it in the deck and takes it out of your handbag at the end of the program.

What does she tell them she is going to tell them and then tells them? The "real" material—although there is nothing "unreal" about the way she's been massaging the reception—involves several interwoven themes, one of them her late-in-life diagnosis of autism, something that she makes pointed as well as funny. Another is hate-baiting ("Don't take the bait!" she warns the audience) about men and patriarchy, the implicit pretensions and privilege of golf, the Paleo diet and the historical inaccuracies of—yes—"Teenage Mutant Ninja Tur-

bles," who, as we all know, are named Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael and Donatello. Donatello doesn't belong in there at all, she explains with mounting faux agitation. He should be named Titian! They are supposed to be named after Renaissance artists! Donatello isn't even Renaissance! It's an arguable point, as the real point here is irrationality and unreason, and how it can be expressed by all of us—women, autistics and men—especially when it involves something like whether the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are actually "tortoises!"

Comics, or whatever Gadsby is, generally inhabit a character on stage, whether it is an exaggerated part of themselves or a new creation. Rodney Dangerfield, obviously, was the disrespected husband; more subtly, Jerry Seinfeld is the popular guy from high school who had gotten his heart broken; Samantha Bee is the nerd who was smarter than everybody else and is getting her revenge. Gadsby? It is not quite clear. Her personality—not

just her life experience—is part of the act to a degree that surpasses those others. She relies on an abundant amount of vulgarity (she thinks it is a good punchline and it often isn't), but that is as much a tic as the self-satisfied smile she offers after a particularly good gag. Is she being arrogant? It is probably exactly the opposite.

Not many comics/social critics/monologists integrate Renaissance art, or the saints, into their act, but Gadsby does and rather brazenly: As a way of getting into the patriarchy of all things, Gadsby uses a variety of slides of religiously inspired art which,

when viewed in isolation and without annotation, can look a bit ridiculous. Central to this sequence is an etching by the obscure Dutch engraver known as I.A.M. of Zwolle that depicts St. Bernard and the Lactating Virgin, which readers can look up on their own. Gadsby makes great sport of it and other bits of allegorical churchly art, but she also makes fun of Americans for saying “gas” instead of “petrol” when gas(oline) by definition is not a gas! But we digress, and so does she, and not always to precise effect.

But such is the magic of “Douglas”: Sometimes Gadsby is playing a former standup comic explaining the mechanics of comedy; sometimes she is an autistic performing a story about her dog; sometimes she is explaining autism while exhibiting all the symptoms of the condition. “Douglas” may not be a masterpiece, but its mosaical construction is extraordinary.

---

John Anderson is a television critic for *The Wall Street Journal* and a contributor to *The New York Times*.

## The promise of ‘Never Have I Ever’

When I was young, I longed to see a version of my Asian immigrant family’s experience on mainstream television. Growing up, other than the international movies we brought home from the local Filipino grocery store, my options were Disney’s “Mulan,” films and TV shows with Asian brainiacs or stereotypical martial arts action movies.

This year, my hopes were fulfilled, thanks to Netflix’s new comedy-drama “Never Have I Ever,” from Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher. Inspired in part by Kaling’s own upbringing, “Never Have I Ever” is the story of a South Asian girl, Devi Vishwakumar, who is Indian-American. It is a not-so-typical coming-of-age story of a first-generation American teenager dealing with grief in addition to cultural and family pressures—all while trying to survive high school in the Los Angeles area.

In one episode, Devi’s family goes to a local Hindu celebration of Ganesh Puja, a birthday party for the Indian god Ganesh. The colorful portrayal—filled with burning incense, Sanskrit chanting and gossiping aunties in shimmering saris—is an example of Kaling’s efforts to more robustly represent Indian rituals on the screen.

Devi and her two best friends, Fabiola and Eleanor, are considered

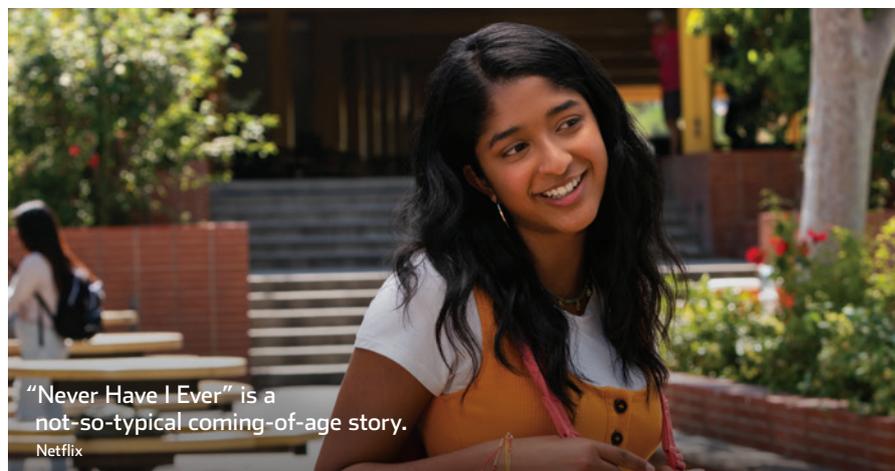
the “nerds” of the sophomore class at their diverse high school. Yet from the start they still come across as independent, strong-willed women of color. But perhaps the most groundbreaking and refreshing aspect of the show is its treatment of mental health. In many Asian and immigrant families, talking about feelings is hard but necessary work. “Never Have I Ever” depicts this struggle with grace.

“Never Have I Ever” is just one, realistic story of the Asian-American experience. It also feels like my own story. Although I am not Southeast Asian or Indian-American, I related to the show because of my own experience as an only child growing up in the suburbs of Los Angeles; because of my own struggles with perfectionism, identity and anxiety; because of my own story as an Asian American daughter of immigrants, always hoping to make my parents proud.

The show provides a unique look at the Asian-American experience. But it is also a realistic and feel-good comedy. It is a show about understanding grief and saying goodbye. It is a show about family, love and togetherness. In other words, it is about life.

---

Allyson Escobar is a former **America** intern.  
Twitter: @heyallysonrae.



“Never Have I Ever” is a not-so-typical coming-of-age story.

Netflix

# Rewards With Risks

Readings: 2 Kgs 4:8-16; Ps 89; Rom 6:3-11; Mt 10:37-42

Today's readings highlight the benefits of having faith in God. The readings also reveal the risks and requirements that come with discipleship.

In the first reading, a “woman of influence” shows hospitality to the prophet Elisha. She recognizes him as a man of God, offers him food and even provides him a furnished room for when he visits. In verses that the Lectionary omits, Elisha, moved by her generosity, offers to intercede to obtain political and military support for her, but she declines, stating that she lives among people who are familiar with her. Elisha's servant, Gehazi, reports that this woman has an aging husband and no son, which could suggest that she has been unable to conceive. Elisha promises that she will embrace a son, and as the narrative continues beyond today's reading, she gives birth to this miraculous child. The child grows up but then dies suddenly. The woman seeks help from the prophet, who ultimately revives her son.

There is much to learn from this narrative. Notably, it teaches us about hospitality, tenacity and gratitude. The woman was kind to Elisha, seeking nothing from him. In return, Elisha shows gratitude and enables her to conceive. Yet she experiences the loss of her child, and she persistently implores Elisha to restore her son to her. The Gospel reading echoes these themes of hospitality and prophetic power.

As on the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time, today's Gospel is an excerpt from the missionary discourse (Mt 10:1-11:1) in which Jesus forecasts the experiences of his followers as they spread the good news. Jesus proclaims, “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward” (Mt 10:40-41). This message anticipates that some people will in fact reject the apostles and the message of the Gospel. Jesus highlights the value of accepting the good news. Open reception of Jesus' followers will enable people to receive Christ, and through him the Father in heaven. Moreover, Jesus connects prophetic actions, like his miraculous deeds that recall those of Elisha and Elijah, with receiving rewards.

In addition to these benefits, Jesus expounds on the

*Elisha came to Shunem, where there was a woman of influence, who urged him to dine with her. (2 Kgs 4:8)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

In what ways can you show hospitality in your community?

What actions show your love of God and others?

How do you actively live out your faith?

demands and difficult decisions his followers will face. Jesus requires them to love him more than their own parents and children. Likewise, they must “take up their cross,” which involves acts of self-sacrifice. Jesus even alludes to martyrdom by affirming that people who lose their lives on account of their belief in him will have eternal life, an idea that also appears in the second reading from Romans.

The rewards for accepting the Gospel are awesome, but the demands are hefty. Jesus wants his followers to recognize fully the implications of their decision to believe. Belief is not passive or easy. It is an active engagement with God and community. Devoting oneself to God will result in a life of sacrifice for the sake of others. Jesus previews the work of true discipleship and invites his followers to imitate him, while recognizing the benefits and challenges they might encounter.

# Divine Assistance

Readings: Zec 9:9-10; Ps 145; Rom 8:9-13; Mt 11:25-30

On the Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, openness and acceptance were prominent themes in the readings. Today's readings build on these ideas while emphasizing the assistance and protection that come from God.

In the first reading, from Zechariah, the prophet describes a time of peace and holiness. As his community had experienced invasion, war and exile, Zechariah prophesies that a divine warrior king will dismantle armies and destroy weapons to bring peace throughout the world. Sometimes, the divine warrior imagery in the Old Testament seems problematic in its depiction of a violent God. While these concerns are valid and caution is needed when wrestling with such images, for communities who endured hardship, these images could be a saving grace and a reflection of divine love.

Zechariah speaks of his community as "daughter Zion, daughter Jerusalem," feminine epithets that reflect the familial connection between the people and the land that many were forced to leave during exile. The language of "daughter"

*The Lord supports all who  
are falling and raises up all  
who are bowed down.*  
(Ps 145:14)



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Do you pray to God for relief during difficult moments?

In what ways can Scripture enhance your prayer life?

How can you help people in your community who are struggling?

also heightens the bonds between the community and a parental God. The Gospel of Matthew depicts Jesus speaking of his followers in a similar manner. When Jesus offers thanks to the Father in heaven for revealing information to his followers, he refers to them as "little ones" or "infants." This language expresses tenderness and Jesus' interest in the community's spiritual growth and development.

Jesus proclaims his connection to the Father; and he encourages people, especially those who are burdened or weary, to join him to receive rest. In the context of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus may be relieving his followers from some of the requirements of Jewish laws. He uses the agrarian image of yoking an animal as a metaphor for the difficult task of keeping Jewish laws. Later in Matthew, Jesus speaks of Jewish leaders laying heavy burdens on others (Mt 23:4). In contrast, today's Gospel presents Jesus' teachings as gentle and comforting; although, as we read last week, Jesus also sets high standards for his followers. Yet the Gospel promises that in sharing Jesus' yoke, his followers will also find rest, suggesting that Jesus himself offers assistance in our challenges.

The second reading, from Romans, takes notions of physical burdens of the flesh and calls for believers to focus instead on the Spirit of God within them. Paul exhorts the Roman community to recognize the Spirit of God, who enriches and empowers their lives. The Spirit resides not solely in their physical bodies, but in their midst, in their community of faith. Like Zechariah and Matthew, Paul calls the community to rely on God for assistance. As many people continue to struggle throughout the world, today's readings assert God's intimate connection to our lives, and they remind us to pray to God, especially in times of need.

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

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



CATHOLIC  
INITIATIVES

# Confronting Racism in America

*The church can become an active force for justice*

By Olga Segura



Here in New York, the city worst hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, my fiancé and I struggle to emotionally support our families, which includes medical professionals whose spiritual lives have been affected by the deaths they see daily. Black Americans are also grappling with the deaths of black women and men at the hands of police officers or armed citizens, something that has continued unabated during the pandemic.

In March, Breonna Taylor, 26, was shot as she slept in her home by Louisville, Ky., police officers who forcibly entered her apartment to serve a search warrant in a narcotics investigation. And in February, Ahmaud Arbery, 25, was shot by armed white men while jogging in his neighborhood in Georgia.

These were just the latest instances in which unarmed black people were killed by armed citizens acting as vigilantes or by police officers. But far from being desensitized to such news, Americans were almost universally outraged by the death of George Floyd, 46, on Memorial Day. A police officer in Minneapolis used his knee to pin down Mr. Floyd's neck, ultimately suffocating him as the latter cried out, "Please, I can't breathe."

Every day, black women and men are faced with the reality that in the United States all it takes is one person to see your body and the color of your skin as a threat. Black people are

routinely viewed by white citizens and police as suspicious, dangerous and unworthy. And now black Americans must confront the dangers of being in a black body while wearing masks in public spaces.

Black people are suffering. How can the church show that it is listening? Parishes and other worship groups can invite members of the Black Lives Matter movement to discuss ways the church can become a leader in the fight for racial equality. Pastors can speak from the pulpit about the issue, extending an invitation for white Catholics to reflect on the ways they are complicit in the sin of racism. There should also be anti-racism training at all levels of formation in the church, from religious education programs to priestly formation. [For more on this, see the view of **America's** editors on Page 8.]

More immediately, Catholics can support organizations like the Minnesota Freedom Fund, which is raising funds and working with the National Lawyers Guild and Legal Rights Center to support activists who are arrested while protesting; Reclaim the Block, a grassroots organization working to combat police corruption in Minnesota; and the Louisville Community Bail Fund, which provides bail funds and post-release support for activists in Kentucky who are protesting the shooting death of Ms. Taylor. And

our leaders can be at the frontlines, pulling from the rich examples of Catholic activists within our tradition, from Sister Antona Ebo to Dorothy Day to Sister Norma Pimentel.

Pope Francis, during a recent celebration in honor of St. John Paul II, spoke about the need for merciful justice, a principle that tells us that as Catholics, we must fight to give every human being the dignity and resources they deserve. He prayed to John Paul and asked "that he give to all of us, especially to the pastors of the church, but to everyone, the grace of prayer, the grace of closeness and the grace of just mercy, merciful justice."

To be a merciful church, we must rebuke the violence that took the lives of Ms. Taylor, Mr. Floyd and so many others. This means courageously and radically transforming our church into an active force for justice and a solace when the world seems to tell our people that we do not matter. To be a church that follows Pope Francis means that as Catholics, we are to be a church that sets an example for all Americans and fights for the protection and dignity of all black lives.

**Olga Segura, a former associate editor at America, is the author of the forthcoming book *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church*.**



# *'Leave Nothing Undared for the Gospel.'*

- Saint Eugene de Mazenod

Oblate School of Theology is a Catholic graduate school that provides theological education for the church's mission and ministry in the world. Inspired by the charism of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Oblate School of Theology educates, forms, and renews men and women to "preach the Gospel to the most abandoned." O.S.T. educates and prepares church leaders—Catholic priests, deacons, seminarians, non-Catholic clergy, women religious and lay ministers—for mission and ministry through the integration of pastoral experience and theological study.

## **Master's Programs**

- Master of Divinity
- Master of Arts in Theology
- Master of Arts in Spirituality
- Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry—available bilingually in English and Spanish

## **Doctoral Programs**

- Doctor of Ministry
- Ph.D. in Spirituality



**OBLATE**  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

# Campion Center



Sitting quietly, doing nothing,  
spring comes, & the grass grows.  
Matsuo Basho.

Spring has indeed returned,  
summer is on its way,  
but our world has changed.  
Still, the reality of the Resurrection  
breaks through.  
We are God's people,  
giving and loving,  
however we can,  
for as long as it takes,  
wherever we are called.  
We are an Alleluia people!

Responding to the spiritual needs of a COVID world

**Offered at no cost to participants.**

**Free registration [www.campioncenter.org/programs](http://www.campioncenter.org/programs)**

**A high enough price has already been paid for this pandemic**

#### **ONLINE EVENINGS OF PRAYER**

- ▶ Creativity & Inspiration  
in the COVID New Normal  
**JOHN PREDMORE, SJ**  
Wednesdays, June 24

#### **WEEKEND RETREAT**

- ▶ COVID Emptied Our Lives:  
How Will We Choose Life Now?  
**NANCY SHERIDAN, SASV**  
**CLARE WALSH, MSHS**  
November 20 - 22

Designed as an in-person  
Weekend Retreat with online  
participation

#### **ONLINE DAYS OF PRAYER**

- ▶ Experiencing God  
in the Ordinary  
**WILLIAM BARRY, SJ**  
Sunday, July 19
- ▶ Listening for  
the Heartbeat of God  
in the Season of Pandemic  
**KATHRYN CLEARY**  
Saturday, August 8
- ▶ Finding God in a Pandemic:  
Navigating the Storm at Sea  
**ROBERT WEBER, PHD**  
Saturday, September 12

**VISIT: OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE IN A COVID WORLD [WWW.CAMPIONCENTER.ORG/SPIRITUAL-RESOURCES](http://WWW.CAMPIONCENTER.ORG/SPIRITUAL-RESOURCES)**

Content that can help us navigate the spiritual waters of this pandemic tempest