

# America

DECEMBER 10, 2018

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

2018 CPA MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

*The 2018 Hunt Prize Essay*

## With God in Iraq

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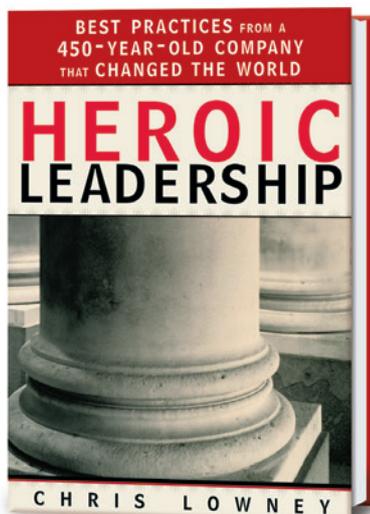
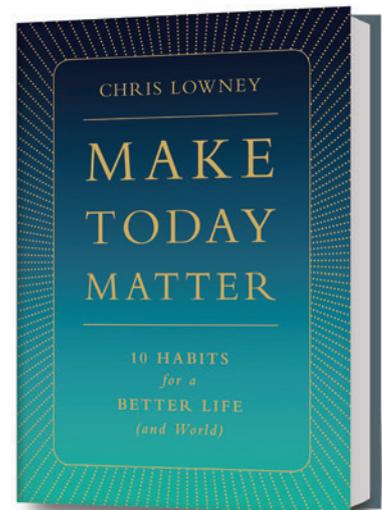
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## Planes, Trains and Automobiles

Hard to believe, but a mere six inches of snow paralyzed the capital of the world on Nov. 15. While the wintry mix was unexpected, it was not a very big storm, not by New York standards anyway. But like a good, yet cruel joke, the storm had perfect timing, arriving just as the afternoon commute was getting underway. A pile-up on the George Washington Bridge shut down one of the busiest bridges in the world, just as the busiest bus station in the world, the Port Authority Bus Terminal in Manhattan, was canceling trips. People abandoned their cars, others slept in their offices, and many more saw their two-hour commutes extended to eight or 10 hours or more.

But there were some scary moments. One school bus, according to *The New York Post*, left its school in Manhattan at 2 p.m. and didn't get all its passengers home until a little after midnight. Along the way, the kids asked to stop for food and to go to the bathroom but, reported *The Post*, "the bus matron and driver refused to halt." When some desperate students said that they might need to relieve themselves on the bus, the bus matron told them that it was against the rules and that she would lose her job if they urinated on the bus. *The Post* didn't say just what happened next, but everybody did make it home safely...eventually.

I'm sure this bus matron is a kind and hardworking person. She was in a crisis and was doing the best she could in very trying circumstances. I think it is also safe to say that if we were in the bus matron's shoes, most of us would have stopped the bus in order to allow the children to grab some fast food or, at a minimum, perform natural acts. She, however, chose otherwise, citing

the regulations.

But would she really have lost her job? If she had stopped the bus, surely her manager would have recognized the extraordinary circumstances and would have agreed that a reasonable person would say, "The rules be damned; we're pulling over to eat and pee."

Or perhaps not. I don't know what would have happened in this specific case, but I know enough about contemporary American life to concede that she might have been fired, even if any other reasonable person would have stopped too. One of the consequences of living in a secular world, one closed off from the transcendent, is that our politics becomes more moralistic. In a secular, moralistic political culture, law displaces our conscience as the decision maker.

"By exiling human judgment in the last few decades, modern law changed roles, from useful tool to brainless tyrant," Philip K. Howard writes in *The Death of Common Sense: How Law Is Suffocating America*. "This legal regime will never be up to the job," Howard says, "any more than the Soviet system of central planning was, because it can't think." Yet thinking and deliberating in conscience is what makes a human being a moral actor. In other words, if the bus matron is not a morally autonomous agent, acting in conscience, then why is she on the bus in the first place? Why not just program the rules into a robot and have it tell the kids that they have to hold it in no matter what?

Once upon a time, the law accounted for our moral agency, but now it more often restricts it. The result is a power play, one in which someone wins and someone loses. "Uniformity

in the common law, consisting of broad principles like the 'reasonable person' standard," wrote Howard, "generally permits adjustment for the circumstances. This type of uniform principle is almost synonymous with fairness. Uniform application of a detailed rule, on the other hand, will almost always favor one group over another." In other words, when the rules do not allow for human agency, creativity and even human error, then the rules become ends in themselves, which mainly serve the rule makers. When that happens, we will regulate and litigate more and more. A recent op-ed column in *The Washington Post*, for example, called for legal penalties for people who are dishonest in their profiles on dating apps, suggesting a legal standard "modeled on how we treat misleading commercial branding."

It should be obvious that this way of thinking reduces a someone to a something. We are either human beings, created in the image and likeness of God and endowed with moral agency and free will, or we are merely machines, programmed through laws and regulations, mere code written by the programmers.

After the storm, *The New York Post* spoke to an expert at New York University about the region's transportation network. What Mitchell L. Moss said of New York's planes, trains and automobiles could also be said of human beings in a world where law displaces conscience: "The system doesn't have any slack in a crisis. We're not really equipped to handle a breakdown in one part when it has to be absorbed by other parts of the system."

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



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AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd

Central American migrants jeer at L.G.B.T. migrants who were part of the caravan hoping to reach the U.S. border, on the road to Donaji, Mexico, Nov. 2.  
Cover: An infantryman in Ramadi, Iraq  
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## How do you incorporate charity into your holiday traditions?

Ninety-five percent of survey respondents told us they donated money around the holidays. When asked why, readers gave a variety of answers, depending on where they lived.

“Now more than any other time of the year I’m seeing folks in need,” said Connie Walsh. “I live in Minnesota, so the drop in temperatures brings special concerns. But I’ve also spent the last 25 years working with poor, marginalized folks, and at this time of the year needs soar.”

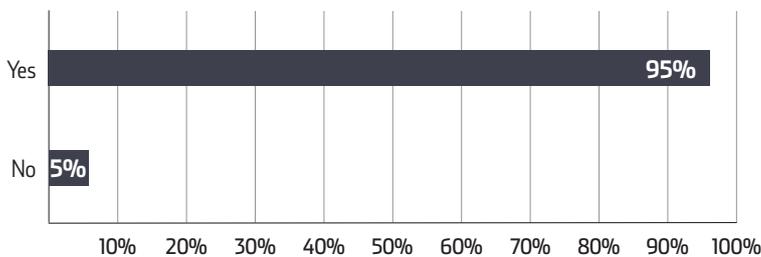
Respondents like Carolyn Capuano of Canton, Ohio, echoed these concerns. “As we head into winter in the Midwest, there are additional needs with which to assist. At Christmas, families who are poor desperately want to provide their children with something special, and our

giving can assist.”

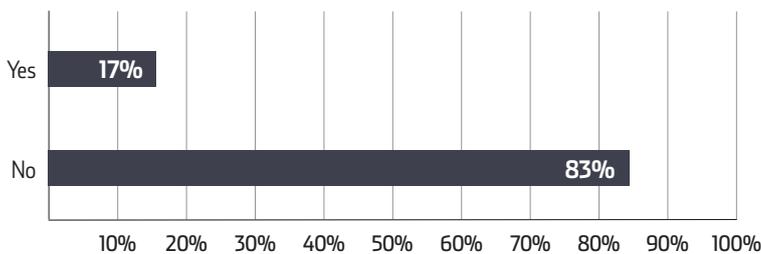
For some respondents, giving to charity is a spiritual practice. “I donate throughout the year, but I view it as a spiritual practice during Advent and Lent, a way to put Gospel values into practice,” said Lois Mills of Orlando, Fla.

When asked who they donate money to, respondents mostly named local organizations, such as those that support the homeless. One reader highlighted the importance of spending time with people who are isolated over the holidays. “We give to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul because they visit our neighbors in need in their home and determine what is really needed,” said Roger Playwin of Grosse Pointe Park, Mich. “Besides all the stuff, like furniture, appliances, clothing and food, often they need someone to just listen to their story.”

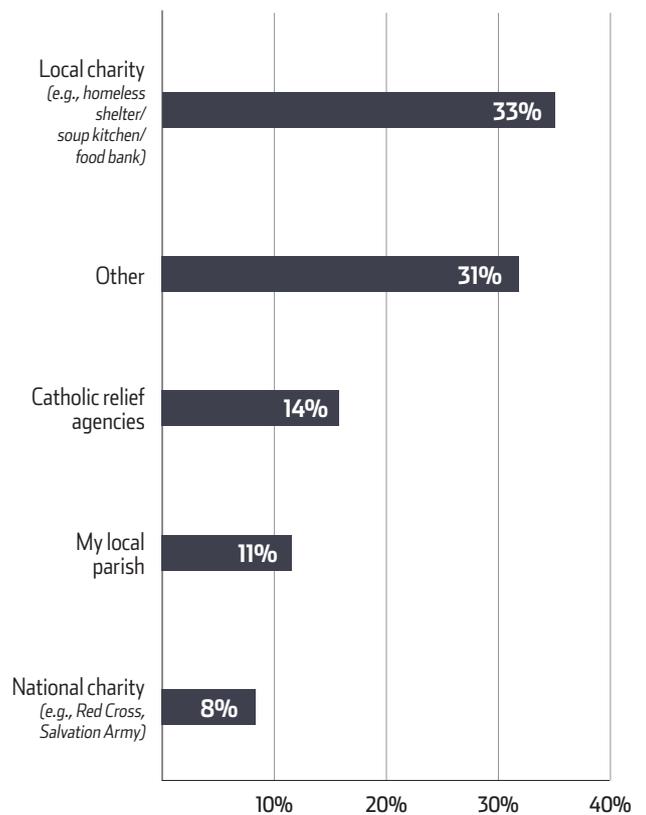
### Do you donate money around the holidays?



### Do you volunteer more in November and December than in the rest of the year?



### What is the primary organization you donate to?



These results are based on reader responses to a poll promoted on Facebook, Twitter and in our email newsletter. Because of rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

### Money in Politics

Re “America’s (Un)Civil War,” by Matt Malone, S.J. (Of Many Things, 11/26): Civility and compromise, perhaps, are joined at the hip. Politicians and candidates inclined to compromise could face election opponents backed by mega-money. Why would any politician or candidate intentionally incur the wrath of mega-money?

Chuck Kotlarz

### Addressing Clericalism

Re “#ChurchToo,” by Lea Karen Kivi (11/26): How many young women were “chosen” by a priest for special attention, only to be abused? And years later, when they realized the violation, were too conflicted to take any kind of action against the men involved? Until the church begins to address false privileges of clericalism, these victims will never come forth.

Jane Steinhauser

### Not in Favor

Re “A Statue of the Virgin Mary Will Be a Sign of Welcome on the U.S.-Mexico Border,” by J.D. Long-García (11/26): I travel the neighborhoods of South San Diego (near the site) and those of downtown San Diego, and I see the extreme poverty. There is so much good that could be done with the \$2 million cost of the statue. Sadly, this is more a political statement than a work of charity.

Doug Kelchner

### Legacy of Abuse

Re “A New Play Asks: What Is Owed to Abusers?” by Michael J. O’Loughlin (11/26): We know that many abusers were abused themselves as minors, so how many of the abusive clergy were themselves victims of clergy abuse? How do we reconcile the idea of mercy to the abuser who was himself a victim?

Letitia Roddy

### One Duty

Re “The Catholic Mystique,” by Kaya Oakes (11/26): Both women and men have crucial roles in the church. Our society wrongly equates the ordained priesthood and hierarchy with power. Ordination bestows the duty of service, not dominance over the church and over others. All the baptized are tasked with the duty of evangelization.

Anne Chavez

### Fighting Anti-Semitism

Re “The Moral Duty to Fight Anti-Semitism” (Our Take, 11/26): Yes we do have an obligation to fight anti-Semitism. As a father of four, I very much want my kids to grow up in a caring and tolerant society. That is reason enough to fight anti-Semitism. Did I mention that I love my country and want it very much to live up to its ideals? There’s yet another reason.

Joe Martino

### Anti-Polish?

Re “Heroic and Unheroic Poland,” by Monika Rice (11/12): It is extremely disconcerting to me, as a graduate of a Jesuit university, that this erudite order would be associated with this article. Ms. Rice focuses on worn-out anti-Polish canards that have been repeated ad nauseam. She might instead have exposed the fact that almost one-half of all hate crimes in New York City are perpetrated against Jews. The author would have you believe the Holocaust occurred in a vacuum in German-occupied Poland. Hitler ordered his troops to “kill, without pity or mercy, all men, women, and children of Polish nationality and language.” This article dishonors the memory of millions of Polish Christian victims.

Yvonne Kowalczewski

Boston, Mass.

*Monika Rice Responds:* I thank Ms. Kowalczewski for her comment. My article does not discuss Polish suffering under Nazi terror and, therefore, cannot logically dishonor the memory of its victims. Neither does it discuss the conditions of Nazi-occupied Poland; instead, it refers to the pogrom perpetrated by Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne against their Jewish neighbors in July 1941. Reinhard Heydrich’s order to the Einsatzgruppen to “trigger local pogroms” provides as much context for this crime in German-occupied Poland as is needed to understand that there were Polish “locals” who were able to be “triggered” to murder their Jewish neighbors. The fact that many vocal Poles prefer to resort to a red herring technique of a charge of “dishonoring the memory of millions of Polish Christian victims” is an ironic confirmation of the main argument of my article, quod erat demonstrandum.

Monika Rice

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Letters to the editor can be sent to [letters@americamedia.org](mailto:letters@americamedia.org). Please include the article title, author and issue date, as well as your name and where you are writing from.

## The Enduring Call to Fight Racism

For the first time since 1979, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has released a pastoral letter on racism. The new letter, “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love,” developed by the conference’s Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church, was approved by the bishops, 241 to 3, on Nov. 14.

Like “Brothers and Sisters to Us,” the 1979 pastoral letter, this new communication names racism as a sin, calling it “a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of the persons offended, to recognize them as the neighbors Christ calls us to love.” The document touches on issues like the water crisis in Flint, Mich., police misconduct, racial biases in the criminal justice system and the relationship between racism and other forms of prejudice, including anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The new document also differentiates among the varieties of racism faced by Hispanics, Native Americans and African-Americans. “As this country was forming, Africans were bought and sold as mere property, often beaten, raped, and literally worked to death,” the letter states. Language this explicit and historically detailed is a significant development from the approach of the authors of the 1979 letter.

The new pastoral letter calls on Catholics to work for racial justice and proposes practical steps, including acknowledging the complicity of Catholics in the sin of racism, educating people about the nation’s legacies of slavery and discrimination, and working for racial justice in parishes as well as in civic and social institutions.

In recent years, Catholics of color have been critical of the church’s own

institutional ties to slavery, including the sale of 272 enslaved men, women and children by the Jesuits at Georgetown University in 1838, as well as the church’s historically slow response to the demands of justice. Others have been critical of the fact that it has been nearly 40 years since the bishops released their last major statement on this important topic. While these criticisms have some merit, “Open Wide Our Hearts” is a step in the right direction.

“The Church in the United States has spoken out consistently and forcefully against abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, the death penalty, and other forms of violence that threaten human life,” the bishops say. “As bishops, we unequivocally state that racism is a life issue. Accordingly, we will not cease to speak forcefully against and work toward ending racism.”

As reports of xenophobia and other forms of hate crimes continue to rise in the United States, and as racial tensions are cynically exploited for political advantage, the pastoral letter is a necessary reminder for Catholics of their duty, as both Christians and citizens, to combat racism and every form of unjust discrimination.

### A Chance for Bipartisan Reform: Criminal Justice

November was a good month for advocates of criminal justice reform. In Florida, voters approved a ballot initiative on Nov. 6 to restore the right to vote to people with past felony convictions. The amendment to the state constitution, if properly implemented, will automatically en-

franchise 1.4 million citizens, about 10 percent of Florida’s adult population. African-Americans, who are disproportionately incarcerated, will stand to benefit the most.

On Nov. 4, President Trump announced his support for a prison reform bill that has been working its way through Congress. The First Step Act would reduce some mandatory minimum sentences and give judges more discretion in sentencing decisions; increase support for vocational and education programs in prison; and retroactively apply the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, which reduced the disparity between the punishment for crack and powder cocaine offenses, among other reforms.

Both the ballot initiative and the First Step Act stand out for garnering bipartisan support. In Florida, Amendment Four, which was endorsed by both the American Civil Liberties Union and the Koch brothers-affiliated Freedom Partners passed with 64 percent of the vote in an electorate that was otherwise split down the middle between Democratic and Republican candidates.

Likewise, federal lawmakers in both parties have worked for years to build support for prison reform. The result is a compromise bill that does not go far enough but, coming on the heels of the bipartisan package to address the opioid crisis signed into law in October, could build momentum for more sweeping reforms in January.

Critics of the First Step Act are correct that the bill will do little to reverse decades of mass incarceration. First, it applies only to federal prisons, which hold about 10 percent of the people imprisoned in the United

States. And even at the federal level, the bill strengthens rehabilitation efforts for those in prison while doing little to keep people out of the system to begin with. Significantly reducing the total prison population—1.5 million people in federal and state facilities combined—will require reversing political incentives that give prosecutors and judges every reason to lock up more people for longer sentences. It will also demand that the government invest in front-end programs that divert people away from the prison pipeline.

Reform efforts at the state level—including reducing or abolishing bail, reducing certain mandatory sentences and expanding the use of drug courts and treatment programs—have already demonstrated that a less punitive criminal justice approach does not necessarily lead to higher crime rates.

Another promising though resource-intensive approach known as “holistic defense” seeks to address the life circumstances—poverty, drug addiction, mental illness—that often lead people to engage in criminal behavior by providing poor clients with lawyers, social workers and other specialists. A new study by the RAND Corporation and the University of Pennsylvania Law School found that defendants who received such wraparound services were 16 percent less likely to go to jail or prison (25 percent less for drug cases) and that those who were locked up faced 24 percent shorter sentences (63 percent shorter for drug cases).

The United States spends \$81 billion to lock people up each year, and the human costs of incarceration to inmates, their families and entire communities are incalculably greater. With the First Step Act, Congress can begin to invest in smart reforms and in people instead. It is not enough, but it is a promising start.

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## How pastoral failures in communication are provoking a crisis of faith

Last month, it seemed as if the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops had failed as soon as it began, with Cardinal Daniel DiNardo's announcement that the Vatican had asked the bishops not to vote on proposals for responding to the sexual abuse crisis in the U.S. church (see Page 12). For many U.S. Catholics, waiting all summer for the meeting had already seemed like an unconscionable delay, and this last-minute order to wait again seemed callous, if not outright cruel. Now an official response was being pushed off to sometime after February's international meeting of presidents of bishops' conferences in Rome.

The tragedy is not that the bishops were unable to vote on the reform proposals. It is that the faithful were left to read tea leaves in an attempt to understand what their bishops and their pope were trying to do in the first place. The fund of trust has been spent so far into deficit that the Vatican's action, which in the past could have been interpreted and explained over time, instead provoked a crisis of faith in church leadership, if not in the church itself. While much of this damage is caused by bad communication, it would be a mistake to understand it primarily as a public relations failure. It is above all a pastoral failure to understand the experience of the faithful and prioritize their needs above the strategic, canonical, bureaucratic and clerical concerns that have thus far governed the church's response to this crisis.

Distrust in church leadership has been building all summer and fall. From the McCarrick revelations to the Pennsylvania grand jury report to the mess of the Viganò accusations, the faithful keep learning about the ways

their leaders have avoided responsibility. After the grand jury report was released—at a date known ahead of time and after dioceses had received advance copies—the faithful waited an agonizing two days for the Vatican press office to offer a response and another four days after that for Pope Francis to issue a new letter on sexual abuse. And while Pope Francis' choice of silence in response to Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò's calumnies seems to have been well discerned, the lack of explanation around it left room for the worst possible interpretations to fester.

With every new revelation, we wait for the slow and inadequate acknowledgment of error, usually fenced by excuses about following the best available advice at the time or explanations of why allegations were not taken more seriously. These explanations, no matter how valid, do not answer the most pressing question: How can we trust that things have really changed?

There are hopeful explanations for the Vatican's halt of the bishops' vote. The proposals may have been written in haste before the annual meeting, and developing processes for holding bishops accountable requires coordination with the Vatican. These reasons could have surely been explained in advance by the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops and the U.S.C.C.B.

Instead, we got a surprise announcement, on the morning of the first day of the conference, that appeared to catch the bishops as flat-footed as everyone else. Cardinal DiNardo was left to explain the request communicated in a letter from the Congregation for Bishops, but the letter was not released. While governance by letter is standard ecclesial

practice, its inadequacies under these conditions are tragic. The opacity of the Vatican's intervention may have done more damage than the intervention itself.

People with knowledge of the inner workings of the Vatican have told me I should not expect the universal church to operate according to the expectations of the 21st-century media landscape. They also say that Americans have unreasonable expectations that whatever happens on their shores should command instant attention from everyone everywhere. These are fair points.

Nonetheless, reports that arrive at a 21st-century pace are how the majority of the faithful find out both about the church's failures in the sexual abuse crisis and its halting attempts at reform. The failure to plan for that situation is a pastoral failure. It causes real harm and scandal among the faithful; it weakens trust that has already been damaged and betrayed by the failures of church leaders time and time again. As Elizabeth Bruenig wrote in *The Washington Post* on Nov. 14, such trust "is an exhaustible capacity."

Rebuilding that trust will happen only with God's grace and significant reform unfolding over years, if not decades. Many in the church now recognize this. We need to be able to trust that our pastors recognize it, too.

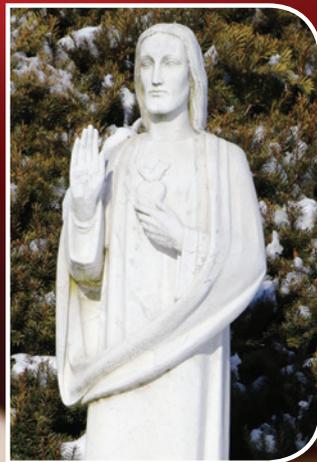
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# Vatican halts vote on accountability at U.S. bishops' fall meeting

By Michael J. O'Loughlin



Catholic bishops were shocked in November by a request from the Vatican to delay a vote until next year on proposals aimed at holding themselves accountable over sexual abuse. But judging by the uncertainty and disagreement that surfaced during floor discussions at the bishops' fall meeting in Baltimore, the Vatican may have saved bishops from further angering U.S. Catholics. That anger now seems directed toward Rome.

The proposals included opening a hotline to handle allegations against bishops of misconduct or mismanagement; standards governing the behavior of bishops; a laypeople-led review board independent of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to investigate claims; and possible sanctions for bishops who are no longer active in leadership because of sexual misconduct or mismanagement.

In floor discussion during the two-day meeting in mid-November, bishops articulated a number of other issues they believe need to be addressed in light of the abuse crisis.

Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, the head of the

Archdiocese of San Francisco, suggested that bishops study any link between gay priests and the sexual abuse of minors. He told his fellow bishops, "The correlation exists. To flee from it would be to flee from the truth and to be perceived as fleeing from the truth."

Other bishops criticized the media, suggested that the crisis is linked to the widespread rejection among the laity of the church's teaching on sexuality, and repeated claims that the public remains unaware of steps bishops have taken to combat abuse.

"Today outrage has become an industry. It's become an addiction," said Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami, who added that while he did not wish "to dismiss the real pain of the victims," he urged bishops "to maintain a certain perspective and do what we have to be doing as bishops."

Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas said, "There's a myth out there that nothing has happened since 2002, and that is simply not true."

The U.S. bishops adopted new protocols in 2002 (in the so-called Dallas Charter) to protect children in

◀ Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, O.F.M.Conv., of Boston looks over documents on Nov. 14 during a general session in Baltimore.

Catholic institutions, including better training of priests and church volunteers. But bishops have largely not been held accountable for how they handle allegations of abuse. The new proposals are meant to address this failure. But when it comes to specific steps, there does not seem to be agreement about how to proceed.

There was consensus among the bishops on the need for church leaders to address the case of former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, who was removed from public ministry earlier this year following revelations that he sexually abused a minor decades ago. He resigned soon after from the College of Cardinals after allegations that he had sexually harassed seminarians came to light.

Bishop Michael Olson of Fort Worth, Tex., urged bishops to make it clear that Archbishop McCarrick “is not welcome” to participate in the bishops’ conference, and Bishop Liam Cary of Oregon suggested that bishops formally censure Archbishop McCarrick. Cardinal Joseph Tobin, the archbishop of Newark, offered a brief update to the bishops, telling them that four dioceses, in addition to the Vatican, are currently investigating how Archbishop McCarrick’s rise through the hierarchy was possible even as complaints about him became known.

As for more general reform, the bishops seemed united in wanting to adopt some kind of specific action during the meeting to show the laity they understand the gravity of the crisis. Toward that end, Cardinal DiNardo announced that he had convened a task force of former presidents of the bishops’ conference to sort through suggestions.

Cardinal Seán O'Malley of Boston, who heads the Vatican's sex abuse commission, said bishops must come out of this meeting “with concrete action” or people will continue to lose faith that bishops can address the crisis in any meaningful way. He also asked if the third-party audits conducted of diocesan policies, which have given thumbs up to most U.S. dioceses in recent years, have lulled leaders “into a false sense of security.”

On Nov. 14, as bishops prepared to wrap up the public portion of their meeting, debate largely focused on the merits of creating an independent review board to handle allegations against bishops. Some bishops expressed skepticism about the need for such a move, suggesting instead that existing diocesan review boards be empowered to handle claims.

A number of protesters, victims’ advocates and church activists gathered in Baltimore during the conference. About 250 people took part in a rally next to the hotel where bishops met that was hosted by Church Militant, a group that has been critical of bishops and seeks to oust gay men from the priesthood. Activists from the groups Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests and Bishop Accountability also held protests in front of the hotel.

During his closing remarks, Cardinal DiNardo said that the task force of former presidents of the conference would work to refine proposals and bring them to Rome in February. “Moving forward in concert with the church around the world will make the church in the United States stronger, and will make the global church stronger,” he said.

But the founder of a new reform group, called Five Theses, said she is unsure that bishops understand what is needed to move forward.

“It’s not enough to set in place more stringent policies about reporting. All that is important, but it’s going to take a radical restructuring of the way decisions are made,” Liz McCloskey told **America**. “I am a little afraid they don’t all recognize that yet.”

That sentiment—that new processes alone are not enough—was echoed by Bishop Steven Biegler of Cheyenne, Wyo., who earlier this year led an investigation of one of his predecessors who stands accused of sexually abusing several minors.

“I do feel that we aren’t acting as guardians of the least,” Bishop Bieger said, describing negative interactions when pressing for an investigation from law enforcement, lawyers and other bishops. “I feel that we have no tenderness in our hearts to hear the cries that have come our way for mercy. I feel that we failed to work with co-responsibility for the laypeople.”

He said he fears that if the only changes to follow the abuse crisis are tweaks in canon law or even the creation of a new commission, rather than a change in how bishops view their roles, then lay Catholics will have been let down. “We need to address this need for conversion,” Bishop Biegler said. “It’s one of the places where people are really crying out for change.”

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

# U.S.C.C.B. report: Campus ministry virtually nonexistent at community colleges

The “dearth of campus ministry at community colleges” is one of the issues addressed in a report released in October by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which also calls for “greater pastoral engagement of diverse populations” and an updated certification process for Catholic campus ministers.

The report, from the U.S. bishops’ Secretariat of Catholic Education, estimates that while the church has a pastoral presence on about one-fourth of the more than 3,000 four-year colleges and universities in the United States, it serves only about 1.6 percent of the nation’s 1,500 community colleges.

Better integration of two ministerial approaches is another issue of concern. Most campus ministers are degree-educated professionals, but a large number receive only missionary training and typically serve only one or two

years. As the report’s authors state, “Their formation usually consists of several weeks of summer training.” The two types approach ministry differently. Degree-educated staff tend to emphasize public service and social justice, but missionary-trained staff are more likely to focus on students’ personal relationships with God.

According to the report, most campus ministers are open to receiving additional training. They rate “facilitating an encounter with Jesus,” “disciplining others in Christian living” and “accompanying people on their spiritual journey” as areas where they feel they have received effective formation but would like additional training. But though they rate their formation in “navigating diocesan and other institutional structures” and “creating and managing budgets” as subpar, they are less interested in receiving additional training in those areas.

## SCOPE OF CATHOLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY

**Catholic campus ministers serve at 816 campuses including Catholic, public and private non-Catholic institutions; DOWN FROM 1,157 IN 2007.**

## PROFILE OF CATHOLIC CAMPUS MINISTERS

Median age	<b>35</b>
Women	<b>43%</b>
Men	<b>57%</b>
Married	<b>31%</b>
Laypersons	<b>69%</b> Median age: 29
Ordained and religious	<b>31%</b> Median age: 54

**86% OF CAMPUS MINISTERS ARE WHITE NON-HISPANIC. 60% HAVE MINISTRY-RELATED DEGREES.**

## EFFECTIVENESS OF CAMPUS MINISTRY

**56%** OF ALL CAMPUS MINISTERS strongly agree that “campus ministry effectively prepares students for a lifelong relationship with Jesus”



“students are well prepared to be compassionate to those on the margins”

**49%** STRONGLY AGREE

**31%** STRONGLY AGREE “campus ministry effectively prepares students to discern a religious vocation”



## TRAINING AND PRIORITIES

Activities considered highly important	Missionary-trained campus ministers	Degree-educated campus ministers
Bible study	<b>91%</b>	<b>73%</b>
Evangelization	<b>90%</b>	<b>62%</b>
Service and charitable work	<b>56%</b>	<b>79%</b>
Social justice and advocacy	<b>36%</b>	<b>68%</b>
Ecumenical and interfaith activities	<b>25%</b>	<b>40%</b>

## CAMPUS MINISTRY MODELS

**Office-based (31% of surveyed programs):** Serving students and staff of all faiths. **Staffers’ average experience in campus ministry: 10 years.**

**Parish-based (14%):** Is affiliated with, or takes the form of, a traditional parish. **Average experience: 7 years.**

**Center-based (20%):** Provides pastoral care for Catholic students at non-Catholic schools (e.g., Newman Centers). **Average experience: 8 years.**

**Diocesan model (6%):** Coordinated programs with both clergy and lay ministers; staffers sometimes serve multiple campuses. **Average experience: 9 years.**

**Missionary organization model (24%):** An emphasis on one-to-one mentoring. Only 3 percent of staff have graduate degrees in ministry. **Average experience: 2 years.**

Sources: “A National Study on Catholic Campus Ministry,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The survey was sent in 2017 to 1,911 Catholic campus ministers across the United States, and answers were received from 1,117 of them. Infographic data compiled by Brandon Sanchez.



Supporters of president-elect Jair Bolsonaro celebrate outside his residence in Rio de Janeiro on Oct. 28.

## Brazil's hard-right turn. What role did religion play in Bolsonaro's election?

In his first speech after his victory on Oct. 28, Brazil's far-right president-elect Jair Messias Bolsonaro thanked God and praised voters for allowing the country to “march now on the right path.”

“I have been seeking [answers] in what many call the ‘toolbox to repair the man and the woman,’ which is the Holy Bible,” said Mr. Bolsonaro, during remarks made from his home in Rio de Janeiro that were streamed live on Facebook.

The candidate for the Social-Liberal Party (P.S.L.), he takes office on Jan. 1. His religion-themed campaign speeches resonated with Brazil's evangelical Protestants, an increasingly influential presence in Brazil, according to Magali do Nascimento Cunha, a communications professor at the Methodist University of São Paulo. On Facebook, the president-elect said that God reserves something special for him and his people. A sign of this, he said, is the fact that he was virtually reborn after an assassination attempt on Sept. 7. Mr. Bolsonaro was critically wounded when he was stabbed in the stomach at a political rally.

Mr. Bolsonaro, who has been dubbed the “Trump of the Tropics,” says he plans to make Brazil great again—“similar to the [nation] we had 40, 50 years ago.”

Ms. Nascimento Cunha said that Mr. Bolsonaro's explicitly retrograde agenda was welcomed by both evangelical and Catholic conservative voters. “This is a reaction to the advances we have seen since the 1960s in discussions about the family, the place of women, youth and sexuality. It is a Christian morality that tries to recover an idealized past,” she said.

Described by rivals as homophobic, misogynist and racist, Mr. Bolsonaro attracted voters who resist ideas that are associated with Brazil's political left—like offering more rights to L.G.B.T. people, normalizing abortion, revising the concept of family and redistributing private property.

Unlike evangelicals, who are mostly conservative, Brazilian Catholics are almost equally split between the po-

litical right and left. “While evangelical discourse is more focused on moral values, Catholics have looked at both social issues, such as the rights of the poor, and the same traditional moral values,” said Francisco Borba Ribeiro Neto, coordinator of the center for Faith and Culture at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo.

The National Conference of Bishops of Brazil has been critical of proposals that threaten both democratic rights and the pro-life agenda. The conference did not endorse either candidate and “is being faithful to what Pope Francis has proposed to the Catholic Church,” said Ms. Nascimento Cunha.

“Still, conservative Catholics have found themselves quite comfortable with some leaders who have shown explicit support to Bolsonaro. Some of them even repudiate the leadership” of Brazil's bishops' conference, she added. “The Catholic Church is experiencing a crisis in Brazil, a division that has always existed but which now appears within the perspective of this new government.”

Mr. Bolsonaro's hard line on crime during the campaign was supported by many voters. A former army paratrooper and a defender of the repressive dictatorship that ruled the country for 20 years between 1964 and 1985, Mr. Bolsonaro has signed on several ex-military officers as members of his government, appointments that raise questions about the preservation of human rights and individual freedoms under his rule.

At an election rally, Mr. Bolsonaro threatened to banish the “red criminals” of the Workers' Party from the country and promised to achieve “a cleansing never seen in the history of Brazil.” He also said that minorities have to bow to the will of the majority or simply leave the country.

Filipe Domingues *contributes from Brazil.*  
Twitter: @filipedomingues.



## The faithful deported: Study details impact of Trump's immigration policies

Guadalupe García de Rayos had been an active member of her parish in Mesa, Ariz., before she was deported last year to Nogales, Mexico. That is where she met Sean Carroll, S.J., the director of the Kino Border Initiative.

Father Carroll spoke with Ms. García de Rayos and her children last year. “I could see the anguish and suffering on her face, the pain of the family,” he said. “It’s through contact with people like Guadalupe that we’ve seen, time and time again, the harmful effects of deportation.”

Those interactions led Father Carroll and the Kino Border Initiative, the Center for Migration Studies of New York, and the Office of Justice and Ecology of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States to undertake a study to better understand the effects of deportation on immigrants and their families. They hope the study will, among other things, inform legislators ahead of a deadline for passing appropriations bills on Dec. 7.

Their study, “Communities in Crisis,” surveyed 133 deportees. It found that more than half of deported respondents had entered the United States as minors—and 21 percent were under age 10 when they arrived. A quarter of deportees surveyed had owned homes, and on average they had lived in the United States for nearly 20 years.

“One of the defining features of the [Trump] administration’s immigration policy is that it doesn’t meaningfully

prioritize” those who are deported, according to Donald Kerwin, the executive director of the Center for Migration Studies. “This has led to the increased deportation of persons who have lived for long periods of time in the United States, have developed strong family and other ties in the U.S., and either don’t have criminal records or have committed minor, nonviolent offenses.”

Mr. Kerwin noted that 78 percent of respondents had U.S. citizen children, 42 percent had U.S. citizen spouses or partners, and 96 percent had been employed, working on average nearly 10 years at the same job.

“Deportation really affected these ties, and we found that it really impoverished the affected families and the lives people had made in the United States,” he said, adding that on average immigrants had \$142 with them when they were deported. “Most reported that their spouse or partner didn’t have enough money to support their children in the U.S.—74 percent—or didn’t have enough money to live on.”

Also, three-quarters of respondents reported that they would attempt to return to the United States, a finding that did not surprise Mr. Kerwin, given their U.S. ties. Nearly half of the survey respondents reported they had not been convicted of any crime; a third reported committing minor traffic violations. Just over 20 percent said they were convicted of a drug-related crime. More than 60 percent re-



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and Homeland Security investigators raided an Ohio meat processor in June. More than 100 people were arrested for immigration violations.

ported that their deportation process began when they were arrested by police, arrests that occurred while driving, at home or at work.

“So really there is no safe space for immigrants,” Mr. Kerwin said. The degree to which local police stopped and arrested immigrants, often as a pretext to begin deportation proceedings, was particularly troubling, according to Mr. Kerwin. “This will almost certainly lead immigrants to avoid the police, including by not reporting crimes. It also isolates and further terrorizes immigrant communities.”

Joanna Williams, the director of education and advocacy for the Kino Border Initiative, hopes the study will lead the Department of Homeland Security to deprioritize the arrest and removal of long-term residents, individuals with family in the United States and those with no criminal records or only minor offenses.

“What they are doing is stopping and arresting people that shouldn’t be stopped and arrested,” Mr. Kerwin said. “They have been here, they are productive, and they are not threatening anyone.”

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J.D. Long-García, *senior editor*.  
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A fracking rig in North Dakota at night

## Seattle University plans fossil fuel divestment

Student activists notched a major victory when Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J., president of Seattle University, announced that the university plans to divest its endowment of investments related to companies holding fossil fuel reserves. The process will conclude by 2023.

“As a Jesuit and Catholic university we have a special obligation to address the unfolding climate change crisis,” Father Sundborg said in a statement released on Sept. 19. “In his encyclical ‘Laudato Si,’ or ‘Care for Our Common Home,’ Pope Francis calls us to view this as a social and ecological issue of grave urgency that is connected to all around us and that has especially devastating consequences for society’s most vulnerable.”

The fossil fuel divestment movement has become a mainstay of activism on college campuses, where student-led groups sponsor online petitions, education efforts and meetings with administration officials. While Seattle University is the first of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities to commit itself to complete divestment of fossil fuel holdings, other Jesuit institutions have modified their investment practices.

In June 2015, Georgetown University divested from coal companies, and in June 2018 its board of directors voted to divest from companies associated with tar sands oil extraction.

At Santa Clara University, members of the Santa Clara Community Action Program have been advocating for divestment for years. Students there learned, however, that divestment was impossible because the school’s endowment was in commingled funds—pools of money shared by multiple institutions that constitute “indirect investment.” Such investments have been cited by officials at other universities as a significant barrier to fossil fuel divestment.

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Brandon Sanchez, *O’Hare fellow*.  
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*Deployment to  
Iraq changed  
my view of God,  
country and  
humankind. So  
did coming home.*

By Phil Klay

The 8th Engineer Support  
Battalion in Amariyah-  
Ferris region, Iraq.  
Photo by Phil Klay

It started in the middle of the night. The U.S. Army surrounded the buildings, established perimeters and posted heavy weaponry at key positions, dividing the space around their targets into neat, geometric kill zones. But their targets were not terrorist hideouts—they were family homes. And so, instead of kicking down doors or blasting out locks with shotgun rounds, they knocked. They roused the families inside, woke husbands and wives, grandparents and young children. They pressed money into their hands and told them, “You have to leave. You have no choice. Pack.” And then the soldiers stood in families’ living rooms, watched as the families packed their things and left, carrying bags, sometimes leaving behind clothes and keepsakes in their haste.

Behind the army came the engineers. They built large earthen barriers, laid out concrete blast walls, placed sandbags around windows, set up radio and data connections to headquarters—in short, converting these former homes into small, defensible outposts. Where once children were raised, where husbands and wives argued and made love, there was now an armed camp of foreigners staring out from behind automatic weapons.

This was in April of 2007, in a series of small towns south of Fallujah in Iraq. The people there had lived through the American invasion, through the multi-sided insurgency, through the growing consolidation of power by the Islamic State. Recently, someone had taken 40 members of the towns, bound them, shot them and left their bodies in a mass grave. And now the people who remained—poor, rural people—had new neighbors.

When they woke up, the physical geography of their towns had hardly changed, but the social geography had undergone an earthquake. The old power structure in those towns was the Islamic State. It had

An Iraqi family. As Matt Gallagher, an Iraq War veteran, put it: "So little of Iraq had anything to do with guns or bombs or jihads. That's what people never understand. There was the desert. And the locals, and their lives."

controlled towns and cities and smuggling routes and black markets. It had offered jobs and opportunities—\$40 for laying a roadside bomb, more if that bomb blew up and killed or injured an American. It had offered the potential for a farmer or mechanic to work in an insurgent cell, rise up through the ranks, become a person worthy of power and respect. It had offered an ideological and religious appeal. It had offered a way to strike back at foreign invaders. And if you crossed it, it had offered torture and murder. Now it was being challenged.

But who, exactly, was challenging it? It may seem obvious that the American troops were the new power players in that region. After all, what was that night of forced displacements and rapid construction if not a show of power? A new boss was in town, and he wore an American flag on his sleeve, right?

That is what I thought at the time. I came in a military convoy two days later, looking out at the surrounding area from behind thick, bulletproof glass. When we arrived at one of these new combat outposts—COPs, they were called—I sat in on a briefing given by the leadership to discuss plans for moving forward. The essence of war is imposing order onto an inherently chaotic environment, and from inside the COP everything seemed very orderly, very controlled. We could look out at the surrounding town from towers covering every angle of approach with interlocking fields of fire. We had maps and satellite imagery and a Blue Force tracker that provided real-time data on the location of every friendly force in the region. We had an intelligence section that had mapped out every violent incident on every street and highway in the past couple of years. To the inhabitants of the town, perhaps, the changes we had wrought were bewildering and frightening. Perhaps they were looking on us in fear and confusion. But within the COP, behind our walls and weapons, stuffed full of data, sitting on some former townsperson's couch and listening to the briefing, there was no confusion. We could look out with what seemed like an objective, God's-eye view. We were in the town, of course, but not a part of it. The town was an object in our grasp. A text we could read.

But that feeling of power lasted only so long as you stayed inside the COP, surrounded by comforting maps and data. When it came time to leave, I walked outside the walls to where our vehicles were waiting and stood for a moment in the street. I looked at the Marines around me—performing their pre-convoy checks on their vehicles and weapons—and then turned to the town surrounding us.

There was a small road that intersected the main street we were on, and it ran straight for a bit before curving off into the distance. I felt a desire to start walking down that road, to just wander off from my unit and explore, a feeling somewhat akin to the odd desire one feels standing on a cliff or the edge of a tall building, where that little voice whispers, perversely, "Jump."

This moment of vertigo was an intimation that, perhaps, we were not quite the new boss in town I imagined we were. Certainly, we had the most firepower. The greatest capability for effectively wielding violence. Simone Weil once defined "force" as "that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing." Under that definition, you could certainly say that we were the dominant force in the town. What is much more disputable, however, is whether we were the dominant power.

Power and the use of force are often conflated. "Power grows out of the barrel of the gun," said Mao. "Only violence pays," claimed Frantz Fanon. However, there is another, very different conception. "All governments rest on opinion," James Madison claimed, a statement that, as Hannah Arendt has pointed out, is as true for democracies as for monarchies and totalitarian states. In this conception, the strength of a society, and thereby the degree of power its government can wield, relies on the consent of the governed far more than on the constant, looming threat of violence. Indeed, states that rely on that constant threat, like North Korea, are notable for their weakness, their crippling need to internally police dissent to keep the house of cards from collapsing.

What to make, then, of my situation, staring down a dusty side street in a tiny, poor town bordered by desert? I knew that, no matter all the information we had—the maps, the Blue Force trackers, the intelligence reports and timelines of significant events—and no matter the tremendous show of force the town had just witnessed, there was not a single Marine or soldier behind me who would feel comfortable walking down that road alone. That simple physical space, a road in a town, the sort of thing that to me had always seemed no more than poured and hardened concrete, took on a new depth. That road was not simply a physical part of the geography but the location of a complex social life, the setting for a set of relationships, customs, traditions, rituals, crafts, stories, songs and practices. All of which, of course, were foreign to me.

None of these factors seemed important until I stepped outside the walls of the COP. They only exist as long as they



Photo by Robert Morgan

are lived, and so they cannot be charted by a military intelligence cell, printed on a map and pinned to a wall. Nevertheless, they barred me from the town as surely as our blast walls and earthen barriers excluded the town from our COP. They were not only real, they were dangerous. As Mao also pointed out, insurgents “move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea.” Walking through a town without having an intuitive sense of the people, then, could feel like driving in a foreign country at high speed down a narrow highway, full of dark turns over steep cliffs, and suddenly realizing that you don’t know whether you’re supposed to drive on the left or right side of the road.

## II

In movies and on television, our recent wars tend to be portrayed in terms of violent action. Firefights and raids and slow-motion sniper bullets flying across the battlefield to kill the enemy. And it is understandable why. The exercise of violence, unlike the accumulation and use of power, offers a satisfying narrative structure. A raid is a morality play with a beginning, middle and end in which a set of brave warriors prepares for battle, strikes their objective and ends the life of a bad guy. No wonder, then, that in our deeply unsatisfying, never-ending wars, the most popular cultural offerings are movies like “Zero Dark Thirty” and “American Sniper,”

where we are treated to the spectacle of highly trained operatives killing undoubtedly evil people—bomb-makers and torturers and sadists and thugs of all stripes—while the communities in which these fights happen are rendered almost invisible. In “American Sniper,” there is barely a civilian to be found—even the young children in that movie are actively engaged in trying to kill Americans—so the viewer need not worry about the complexities of waging war in and around people’s homes. The city is not a social space but a hostile landscape, which the soldier must dominate through brute force. And once the army has rampaged through the whole of the city, and the enemies have been killed or driven away, well...that is victory.

This can be fun to watch on television. The problem is that in real life, it often does not work. In the Second Battle of Fallujah, Marines and soldiers fought their way through the city, block by block. Close to 2,000 insurgents, 800 civilians and 100 coalition forces were killed. It was the bloodiest battle involving U.S. forces since the Vietnam War. But by 2006 the city was once again firmly controlled by the insurgency. Aside from the structural damage visible everywhere, it was as if we had never fought our way through it at all.

And so, by the time I was in Iraq, the military had come up with a new strategy, formalized in the Army’s new counterinsurgency manual, *U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24*. This

# Power, ultimately, is not about control. It is about submitting to a complex system that is out of any one person's control. 🍀🍀

strategy emphasized knowing the cultural terrain, getting out and interacting with the people of your battlespace. “Sometimes,” it cautioned, “the more you protect your force, the less secure you may be.”

Some soldiers took this idea to extremes. In Afghanistan Major Jim Gant, an officer in the Special Forces, would occasionally stop military matters to play with the local children in the town where he had been stationed. He later claimed, “I would play with the children—for hours... I often thought that these play sessions did more for our cause in the Konar than all the raids we did combined.”

The idea was to introduce a sociological, rather than purely physical, conception of security. And this is the reason I was in that little town south of Fallujah in the first place. An alliance of Sunni sheiks had decided, for a complex mixture of reasons, to oppose the Islamic State and cooperate with Americans. This alliance, the Anbar Awakening, had successfully leveraged the overwhelming force and wealth of the American military in their bid to upend the power structure of Ramadi. Insurgents were suddenly fleeing the city to rural towns. The next step, naturally, was to expand to those rural towns.

Hence the operation I went on, where the military had set up outposts to force U.S. units into close physical proximity with the people of Iraq. Terrifying the village and kicking families out of their houses in the middle of the night was, perhaps, not the most auspicious start, but the general idea was that, over time, living in little Iraqi towns, patrolling the streets, getting an intuitive feel for the life of the community they were supposed to police, the military would become more than just a looming violent force in the region, but a power player enmeshed in the life of the community. As Matt Gallagher, an Iraq War veteran who served during this time, put it: “So little of Iraq had anything to do

with guns or bombs or jihads. That’s what people never understand. There was the desert. And the locals, and their lives.”

In practice, this meant not a series of clear-cut raids, in which good and brave soldiers kill bad and depraved terrorists and the world is made progressively safer one bullet at a time, but a series of complex negotiations whose success or failure depends on much more than the abilities of each side to conduct violence.

Here is an example: In 2010, a Special Forces officer named Ian Fishback was stationed in a section of Diyala Province when a group of Sunni tribesmen launched a few mortars at his base. Mortar attacks generally were not particularly serious—Major Fishback often slept through them—but in this case, the shrapnel from the rounds ripped out the throats of two service members, both of whom quickly bled to death.

Because of his knowledge of the area, Major Fishback was pretty sure he knew which tribe the mortar men had come from and who was the local sheik nominally in charge. Most U.S. commanders would have, at the very least, arrested the sheik, interrogated him for information and tried to bring people to justice. This is not what Major Fishback did.

He was operating in a volatile region and saw his job less as one of pacifying an insurgency than working out some sort of settlement between the competing groups that would allow them to live together peacefully. “The process was primarily political,” he told me, “with violence in the background. Most of it was about reconciliation and politics. I don’t think we ever killed anyone.”

On the one side were the Sunni tribes, who felt threatened by Kurdish incursions into their territory. On the other were the Kurds, who had controlled that region until the late '80s, when Saddam Hussein waged a genocidal campaign that killed up to 180,000 people and then resettled Sunni tribes in the devastated territory. The Kurds, understandably, were not particularly sympathetic to Sunni grievances.

And so, during his deployment, Major Fishback had served to open lines of communication between the various groups, operating as an outside force that could limit the uncertainty each side felt in negotiating with the other. He mapped out 550 nodes of power in the region, people with



Photo by Wayne Edmiston

# MAN OF WAR

The experience of war can be an assault not only on one's physical sense of safety, but on one's social, moral, and spiritual conception of the world.

influence who could play a role in possible reconciliation, and he worked to help the local leaders build institutions that could, in the event of U.S. departure, help keep the peace. And, he felt, it was going well. He had sheiks who had fought in the insurgency for almost 10 years and who had never met an American before who were willing to work with them. There was no descent into general violence. But then there were these mortar attacks. Two Americans dead. The sort of thing that requires a response.

Major Fishback called a meeting with the sheik whose men he thought were responsible, and the sheik agreed to come. Prior to the meeting, Major Fishback knew that the sheik probably had blood on his hands. He knew that the sheik probably knew who had launched the mortars, or at least knew enough to probably be able to help Major Fishback track them down. He also knew that the sheiks in the region did not have absolute control of their tribesmen, that the tribesmen often felt that attacking Americans conferred legitimacy, and that even tribal leaders who genuinely wanted to work with the Americans often turned a blind eye to the occasional mortar attacks, which rarely killed anybody and so were usually a harmless way for their men to get a shot in at the invaders. Usually.

"He came in, clearly very nervous," Major Fishback told me. "It was common practice among some people to detain sheiks during these meetings. But I was in the position of establishing the peace. Detaining him had the potential to undermine relations with the other Sunni sheiks. So I made it clear, if this happens again, we won't be friends. And he knew what that meant. The interpreter thought he was going to have a heart attack."

And that was it. Major Fishback made the decision to forgo a hard approach seeking justice for two needlessly dead Americans on behalf of the hope that continuing his relationship with the sheik would lead to better outcomes down the road.

This is not a great war story to tell at a bar. It does not have the clean trajectory of a sniper's bullet, the satisfying moral conclusion of the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound, or the awe-inspiring display of

# MAN OF

force that was the Second Battle of Fallujah. It is not even really possible to know whether it was the right choice, whether that particular sheik was as reconcilable as Major Fishback thought he was, or whether any of it really mattered in the long term. That year Iraq would have bitterly disputed elections followed by the Shiite prime minister going after Sunni politicians, igniting yet another round of vicious sectarian warfare in which ISIS was able to successfully woo the support of Sunni tribesmen.

Once you move outside the realm of physical force and into the realm of social power, you move into the realm of uncertainty. Each action of yours sparks a chain of reactions among the people you are trying to influence, reactions that all the social science in the world and all the mapping of nodes of power cannot predict. As Hannah Arendt points out, “The reason why we are never able to foretell with certainty the outcome and end of any action is simply that action has no end...the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation.” There is no sure guide for action, no rulebook that will tame a population, because populations are composed of free people with choices of their own to make. The exercise of power, then, means not dominating an external world but weaving yourself into a web of relationships in such a way that those around you begin making choices that take your wants and desires into account. This means that power, ultimately, is not about control. It is about submitting to a complex system that is out of any one person’s control.

So Major Fishback cannot say for sure that he made the right choice, though he feels that he did. “I think it did well for the people,” he told me, “I think it did well for the prospects for peace.” Even if those prospects would not come to fruition.

When he left the area the Sunni sheiks cried. They told the Americans that the reason no one was killed was because of Major Fishback’s team and the way the team conducted itself. On that deployment Major Fishback and his men had not killed anyone, had not exerted force and turned people into things; but in their own way, they had exercised power.

### III

Major Fishback’s work, however, was very different from

my day job as a media officer. I ran a team of Marine correspondents, assisted professional media moving through Anbar and served as an advisor on communications. Every morning, I had to brief my commanding general on the three biggest news stories out of Iraq, and in those early months they were never good. It was all chlorine gas attacks and assassinated political leaders and bombers using children as decoys. Eventually, the chief of staff called me aside and said: “Phil, you’re doing good work, but...your morning briefings are kind of depressing. How about we add an extra, positive news story at the end of each briefing to, you know, pep things up.”

This was the beginning of the Positive News Story of the Day, or, because the military loves acronyms, the PSOD, as it came to be called. I would have three horrible stories of violence and despair...and then tell the general, “But, for our PSOD, we have an article in The New York Times where John McCain says we’re making progress.”

Some days, though, the news was so overwhelmingly bad there was almost nothing I could find. “No idea what the PSOD’s gonna be,” I’d tell my chief as I pored through the dregs of the internet, coming up with things so pathetically threadbare it was often worse to include them. “Well sir,” I’d tell the general, “We’ve got a suicide truck bomb that killed 47 people, the assassination of a tribal leader, a U.N. report saying that the Iraqi government has engaged in widespread torture and, for our PSOD, from freedom-mom.blogspot.america.com, look at this adorable photo of a Marine who went on patrol and took a selfie with a baby goat.”

I am not sure whether the PSOD ever made anybody in the briefing feel better about things. In fact, searching for a PSOD on a dark day was downright troubling. There were some times when trying to put a positive spin on a story felt obscene.

At one point during those early months, a Marine squad raided a house near my base where an execution was taking place. The insurgents had captured a couple of Iraqi soldiers, brutally beaten them, taken a power drill and drilled through their ankles, and then set them up in front of a video camera to be beheaded. It was then that the Marines burst in, killing or capturing the insurgents and freeing the Iraqis, who were given medical care and sent to the military hospital on my base.

A senior officer reached out to me and told me that this was a really dramatic story that spoke well of the Ameri-



can military, and I should head to the hospital, talk to the doctors and see if one of the Iraqis was willing to do an interview about what he had experienced and how grateful he was to U.S. forces for saving him. And so, naïvely, I walked over to the hospital and asked to speak to one of the surgeons who'd worked on the tortured Iraqis. When I explained why I was there, it took him a moment to respond. This doctor, he had spent time with these men, with their broken bodies that would never be fully whole again. At first he did not quite understand what I was after. The notion that this was a good news story was inconceivable. It was one of the worst things he had ever seen in his life. Evil, written on the body. "You don't understand," he said in a strangled voice. "They're in really rough shape." I left ashamed of myself.

#### IV

During this time, as I struggled through these emotions about myself and the place I was in and the work I was doing, I went to church and I went to confession. And, in confession, I mostly talked about my sense of my own inadequacy. Here I was, in a site of deep moral concern. People were dying. People were being tortured to death. And I had joined the military to be of service. In high school the Jesuits had taught me to be a "man for others," the Marine Corps had promised me a way to do that, and so here I was. And yet, as a staff officer, especially as a staff officer with a job related to media, it was difficult to square my day-to-day activities with the life and death stakes all around me. I did not even know if I was helping or hurting the cause. Most of the journalists I hosted from major news organizations in those days tended to report only bad news. All I knew was that I had a safe job in a dangerous place, the sort of place where moral heroism was needed, and where I had not the slightest clue what that kind of heroism would even look like.

Faith, for me, has always been a place to register a sense of doubt, of powerlessness, of inadequacy and uncertainty about my place in the world and how I am supposed to live. You kneel before a crucifix. Before a broken, tortured and humiliated human body. You face human frailty, and human cruelty. You call to mind your sins. All that you have done, and all that you have failed to do, in a place where nevertheless you know you are accepted and forgiven. Those early days in Iraq were so busy it was easy to get lost

in the constant flow of work. But my time at Mass, and particularly my time in confession, were when time stopped for me; and I tried to imagine ways of reordering myself in relation to this very disordered, broken world. Then I poured out my doubts, received reconciliation and went back to my confusing day job.

However, on April 29, a week after I came back from those little combat outposts in those little towns south of Fallujah, The New York Times ran a story about the Anbar Awakening by Kirk Semple, a reporter I had briefly hosted. The article, "Uneasy Alliance Is Taming One Insurgent Bastion," was the first major piece of reporting from a reputable source on the Anbar Awakening, the alliance of Sunni sheiks that was reordering the power structure of Anbar Province. In it, Semple did a careful job of explaining what the Awakening did and did not signify, pointing out that the alliance was an uneasy marriage of convenience, that many of the sheiks had participated in the insurgency, that governance remained a wreck and so on. The article ended with the suggestion that barring an eventual political settlement between the Shia-dominated national government and the Sunni tribes, the long-term effect of the Awakening might simply be to arm and organize a potential enemy to the Iraqi state. Nevertheless, he noted that in Ramadi the insurgency was on the run. At that time in the war, for an article in The New York Times, that was a PSOD. That was as PSODey as it got. And so my war started to turn.

Soon, more and more journalists were passing through Anbar Province, interested in covering the changes in Ramadi, or in the operation that would soon start in Fallujah. A steady stream of casualties still passed through our base, but it wasn't like before. Mortar attacks stopped. At a certain point, I could not remember the last mass casualty event. I saw fewer injured children. And I went from hope that we were winning to certainty.

It became a matter of statistics. How many patients coming into our military hospital? How many people dying in attacks across Anbar? Looking at the figures, it was easy to imagine a rough, utilitarian calculus in which my service was overwhelmingly justified by the changes wrought on the ground. It was, seemingly, an empirical question: Did fewer people die in Iraq because of the surge? If the answer was yes, then according to that strictly utilitarian, consequentialist calculus, I was right and noble while the antiwar folks who opposed the surge were guilty of risking Iraqi lives.

# I tried to imagine ways of reordering myself in relation to this very disordered, broken world. ☹️

Students continue to attend school in Habbaniyah, in the midst of the war zone.

Clausewitz, the great German philosopher of war, might have disagreed. For him, immaterial forces are often the most important forces in war. Spirits that “seek to escape from all book-knowledge, for they will neither be brought into numbers nor into classes, and want only to be seen and felt.” Since war is waged against “a living and re-acting force,” mechanical laws and rules will, be “perpetually undermined and washed away by the current of opinions, feelings, and customs.” Such arguments did not seem to matter at the time—the sheer power of the data suggested we had indeed found a rulebook in which the spirits permeating war had been quantified and tamed. It would be only a few years, though, before those spirits would rebel and changing social and political conditions in Iraq would lead to the rapid collapse of the Awakening and the rise of ISIS.

But that was in the future. Not knowing the future, I knew the statistics. The numbers of the dead. The continual decline of violence. Statistics are wonderful. Like force, they turn people into things. For example, in January 2008, the last month I spent overseas, 554 Iraqis were killed. This is a horrible number if you think about it in terms of specific people. If you think of the woman with Down syndrome who on the 31st, the last day of that month, walked through a checkpoint to a pet market. She claimed she had birds to sell but, in fact, she had bombs strapped to her body, bombs she may not have even been aware were there. Within minutes, a remote triggerman detonated her in a flash of fire and blood and feathers. Survivors would describe awaking from the blast covered in blood, not knowing whether it was their blood or human blood or the blood of animals. One man searched for his friend Zaki amongst the various species of corpses until he passed out and woke up in a hospital bed. This incident left 46 dead. But when I thought of them, I did not think of the individual experiences and lives. I imagined a spreadsheet counting Iraqi casualties.

A spreadsheet in which those 46 dead were numbers 482 to 527. A later blast, also from a bomb-carrying woman with Down syndrome, would bring the total for that month to 554. And when stacked against the previous January’s 1,802 Iraqi deaths, this was a relatively low number. Which is the most pleasant way to think about it.

So I left Iraq, untroubled. Confident. I came home, untroubled, confident. Yes, soldiers had died. Yes, civilians had died. Yes, bodies had been torn and rent and I had even seen some of those bodies. There were images that stuck in my mind, like a man’s eyeballs flattened and covered in reddened cloth. Like a father and mother holding an injured baby and looking on her with sorrow and love. Like a young Marine’s tattoo as he lay on a trauma table. But from my secure vantage point as an officer, on a general’s staff, following the big-picture news of the war, it was easy to anesthetize myself to such things, or think about them in a sentimental, instrumental way. The soldier, whose name I did not know, was sacrificing for a good cause. The injured civilians, whom I did not know, were an example of why that cause was so good and our enemy was so evil.

In theory, war is supposed to enhance one’s faith, or at the very least force a deep sense of reflection upon spiritual matters. The experience of war, and trauma more generally, can be an assault not only on one’s physical sense of safety, but on one’s social, moral and spiritual conception of the world. Recovery, as the psychiatrist Judith Herman has described it, challenges the “ordinary person to become a theologian, a philosopher, and a jurist,” who must reconstruct a view of faith, society and ethics that will not merely collapse into the emptiness of the evil they have faced. Faith in God, faith in people, faith in the immaterial aspects of life that we rely on to go about our day-to-day existence needs to be rebuilt. And though many do not turn to God seeking aid in the process, for those who do, their faith can emerge stronger than ever.

But this was not my situation, which was comfortable, not particularly traumatic and seemingly justified by external events—even if those events did not have much to do with my own actions. And so I stopped going to Mass. It was not a conscious decision. It would be a year before I would admit to a woman I was dating that I no longer believed in God. It was more that I simply stopped feeling the need to trouble myself about my spiritual life.

As the numbers went more and more in the right direction, I felt less and less as if I was in a place of mystery and confusion, but in a rational, controllable world where the



correct application of right thinking and right technique could tame chaos, tame the wild spirits of war and civic life, and move us closer toward a progressive, technocratically managed ideal of democracy and peace. I was less bothered by the war, by my place in it and by the challenge of living justly in response to tragedy than by what I viewed as the shallow and wrongheaded political debates about the war back home and by the politicians I thought were lying about the facts—from Rahm Emanuel accusing General David Petraeus of using “creative statistics” to Hillary Clinton suggesting it took “a suspension of disbelief” to accept what he was telling Congress.

My understanding not simply of the war but of myself shifted. I was not a fallen creature in a broken world reliant on grace, but a Marine in a successful army that had all the answers. I was justified not by a cross, but by an interpretation of public policy, not by the cruel and barbaric torture and murder of an innocent man, but by politics. If the surge had saved lives, turning a monthly death toll of 1,802 to 554, then the month of January did not just make me right and the antiwar folks who had opposed the policy wrong, it made me morally better than them by exactly 1,248 dead Iraqis.

It did not occur to me that I could be right about public

policy and still be a sinner, or wrong about public policy and still be redeemed. And so I set aside the moments of doubt. I set aside the experiences that gave me pause. Like, for example, that moment I stood in that small Iraqi town, the town I thought I knew everything about, stared down a street and heard a voice, my voice, saying: *I do not know where I am, or what I am doing or what we are doing, and none of the Marines around me do either.*

## V

In 2009, I left the Marine Corps and returned home. Very quickly, I developed a sense that something was missing in my life in New York. In an odd way, it was similar to that invisible force I had felt in that small town, the force that separated me from the town and its inhabitants.

Joining the Marine Corps, you see, is not just taking on a new job. It is about entering an entirely different culture, one that in many ways echoes the nature and character of religious life. “Modern man may well find his monastery in the military,” Samuel Huntington wrote in 1957, and I certainly found that to be the case. Like a novice monk, I was given new clothing, new standards of dress, a new haircut, as well as a distinct role within a broader community.



I was given a list of virtues I was meant to embody—virtues like honor, courage and commitment taking the place of the Christian virtues of hope, faith and love. I went through rituals that mark the stages of life and the passage of power—swearing the oath of office, promotion ceremonies, award ceremonies and, of course, memorial services. I was given a formalized language to use in chants and songs and shouted group responses. I was told that class, wealth and race do not make a difference here. I was told to embrace austerity and mortification of the flesh. I was submerged into communal living, told that all were expected to give their bodies and their lives. I was given the stories of military saints—men and women who risked their lives under enemy fire, who jumped on hand grenades to save their buddies, who held faith with their fellow prisoners of war during years of torture. And the whole thing was sanctified with the blood of sacrificial figures, the fallen Marines who came before and gave their lives to the cause.

Out of the Corps, I was deprived of that community and not yet fully absorbed into the civilian world, which has its own rites and rituals and myths, many of them accepted unconsciously. I was alienated, as so many veterans have been before. There is nothing new or even especially dramatic about this. Plenty of veterans have come home and felt the same. Here are these incomprehensible people living absurd lives, without a thought in their head about the real world. And the real world, for some reason, did not mean the lives and families and hopes and dreams of ordinary men and women—it meant the war. It meant the stuff I cared about. As one Vietnam veteran put it:

I could not fathom how Vietnam could be anything to all Americans but the central concern of their lives; how it could be anything less than the dark sun around which we were all in unbreakable orbit as its doomed and somehow hopeless satellite.

To walk through a city like New York upon return from war, then, felt like witnessing a moral crime. Much as, in Iraq, we were frustrated that the Iraqis didn't just give up their own lives and goals and adopt our vision of a democratic society, I was frustrated, coming home, that the American people did not embrace my vision of war.

This was something I wanted to solve by writing fiction. I wanted to tell the oblivious American public what

they needed to know. Here, my grand ideas were primarily psychological and moral and political. I thought I would write a novel about PTSD and thereby show a shamefaced nation what they had asked their Marines to bear. I would write about the dramatic suffering of soldiers and contrast that with the empty materialism of modern American life. I would write about the apathy of the broader American public about issues of war and peace. I, the authoritative returned veteran, would deliver my hard truths to a public that had failed in its civic duties. This was not about reconciling the civilian and military worlds, much less about reconciling the narrow experience of war within the broader social reality of the towns and villages where that war was fought, but about preaching from a great height.

It is somewhat amusing now that I thought, at the time, that those were the things missing from the public conversation. The public conversation in America at the time was full of those things, frequently written by people with a lot more knowledge than myself. But, like many young writers, I was eager to regurgitate the culture back at itself.

So that was one motivation. But there was another, messier motivation that I could not quite have articulated at the time. It was less about a message to unload upon my reader, and more about a group of unquiet memories that hung around in my head, cluttering up the place without serving as fodder for an easily digestible moral of the sort I wanted to impart. They were memories like the following: how funny it could be to talk about dead bodies, what it looked like seeing dirty soldiers back from a patrol eating cherry cobbler in the TQ mess hall, the voice of that doctor as he told me what it had felt like treating those two tortured Iraqis, watching a man shepherd a group of sick sheep with mucus hanging from their snouts, and the adjustments men made in the summer months to deal with ball sweat.

And because I was writing fiction, and not weekly opinion pieces, the odd, unquiet memories began to win. Fiction is strangled by simple messages, by notions of justice dependent on statistics where, as Gabriel Marcel put it, every individual is “reducible to an index card that can be sent to a central office.” Or, he might have added, to Facebook's algorithm. But fiction thrives on sick sheep and ball sweat. Stories are things that happen not to ideas or statistics but to people, people with bodies, living in specific places. And so, unconsciously, and simply by the form that my writing took, I began to undermine my own certainty.



Around this time, people I knew were injured. A few people I respected were betrayed by the Marine Corps, treated badly and callously and cruelly. A few Marines I knew and liked experienced periods of homelessness. A bitterly disputed parliamentary election in Iraq threatened recent security gains. And so, without quite knowing why, I went back to Mass for the first time in years. And I thought about how the world was not quite meeting my hopeful expectations. And Christ, looking back at me from the cross, blood dripping from the thorns in his crown and the wound in his side and the nails in his hands and feet, asked, “What on earth convinced you that it would?”

## VI

In the book of Job, after the hero has been stricken with illness, suffered the death of his children and his servants, he asks to make his case before the Lord, to ask what he has done to merit such suffering. And the Lord does respond to him, speaking out of the whirlwind. But instead of giving him answers, God offers rhetorical questions. At first, they are about what Job knows of the world—“Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its size? Who laid its cornerstone?” And then God switches to a set of questions about what Job can do, what he can control, if he can thunder with a voice like God’s, if he can humiliate the proud, bury them in dust. And God ends with the famous image of the Leviathan, later used by Thomas Hobbes as an image of the state itself, that vast conglomeration of people that form a civic body. God asks:

Can you lead Leviathan about with a hook,  
or tie down his tongue with a rope?  
Can you put a ring into his nose,  
or pierce through his cheek with a gaff?  
Will he then plead with you, time after time,  
or address you with tender words?  
Will he make a covenant with you  
that you may have him as a slave forever?  
Can you play with him, as with a bird?  
Can you tie him up for your little girls?

It increasingly seems to me that the certainty of earlier life was based on fantasies of an orderly future in a rational, controllable world, fantasies that were no

more than the wish that the Leviathan might one day be tied down by force. That man, with his ever-increasing sophistication and technology, could come up with a set of rules about how states are to be built, how societies are to be governed, how men are to be made to live, that would allow us to lead the Leviathan of the state, the city or the town with a hook, tie its tongue down with a rope, and make of it, and men, a slave.

And so, though I struggle with faith, faith not only in God but in my country, my church and my fellow men, I go to Mass. I return to doubt, and confusion and uncertainty. I return to a social gathering. To a meal. To the experience of music, to the image of our tortured God, to the recitation of words. To that moment when everybody in the church trips over the phrase “consubstantial with the Father.” To the hands of my fellow congregants offering me peace. To the inscription of the sign of the cross on the forehead, lips and heart. I return to the physical expression of a broader social body that proclaims itself a mystical body, each one of us branches emanating from the vine that is Christ. I return to a place designed to pull me out of my individualistic American brain and situate me back inside my skin, and inside a community, with all the raucous contradictions and odd harmonies that implies.

Paul tells us, “the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.” And, at times, I think I can feel that power around me. Catholicism is not, or should not be, a religion of force. Not of hard mechanical rules, but of stories and paradoxes and enigmatic parables. It is an invitation to mystery, not mastery, to communion, not control. It is a religion that fits with what I know of reality, that helps me live honestly, and that helps me set aside my dreams of a less atavistic world in which men follow rational orders and never rebel. Perfect obedience, after all, comes not from men, but machines. Fantasies of control are fantasies of ruling over the dead. And my tortured God is not a God of death, but of new life.

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The painting depicts the Virgin Mary seated on a bed, looking thoughtfully to the left. She is wearing a blue robe over a red dress. Her hands are clasped in her lap. The room is dimly lit, with a warm, golden light illuminating the bed and the woman's face. The background is a deep red wall.

# A Pregnant

"The Annunciation," by Henry Ossawa Tanner:  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with the  
W. P. Wiltach Fund, W1899-1-1



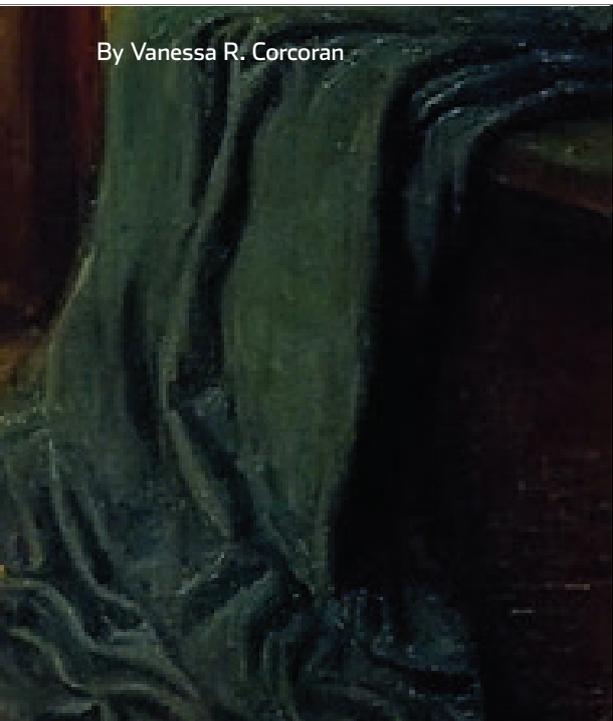
One of the most memorable passages from the Gospel of Luke is Mary's *fiat*: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word" (Lk 1:38). Her assent to God's will represented her unflagging devotion and became a model for Christians. At Christmastime and again when Christians observe the feast of the Annunciation on March 25, we celebrate Mary's *fiat* but also ruminate on Mary's hesitation at the annunciation, when she "was troubled at his saying and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be." It is arguably one of the most famous pauses in history.

Surprisingly, the Virgin Mary, the most famous woman in Christianity, spoke on only four occasions in the entire New Testament (Lk 1:26-38, 1:46-56, 2:41-52 and Jn 2:1-11). Those brief remarks, amounting to under 200 words, inspired innumerable prayers, hymns, sermons and other devotional practices, perhaps none more than her words at the Annunciation.

# Pause

## Mary's *Fiat* and the Annunciation

By Vanessa R. Corcoran



### **The Origins of the Feast Day**

Within the Gospel of Luke, written around 80-100 C.E., we meet Mary as a young virgin betrothed to Joseph. The Annunciation story, only 12 verses long, not only defined Mary as obedient to the will of God but became a scene reimagined both in visual illuminations and written devotional materials. Luke was often referred to as "the painter of the Virgin" because he supplied the most details about Mary and became the model upon which others built to characterize the Mother of God.

When the "Anno Domini" calendar was first introduced in 525 C.E., March 25, which would later become the date of the feast of the Annunciation, was made the first day of the year. Dionysius Exiguus, a Scythian monk, argued that this event commenced the age of grace. The first recorded instance of its celebration was at the ecclesiastical Council of Toledo in 656. Today, the feast of the Annunciation is observed throughout Christianity, including within Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, Catholicism and Lutheranism.

It is nearly impossible to consider Catholic devotion to

# Mary's hesitation at the Annunciation is arguably one of the most famous pauses in history. 📖📖

Mary without thinking of the Annunciation, as the angel Gabriel's greeting to Mary, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women," became the beginning of the Hail Mary prayer. The angel's greeting to Mary also became incorporated into the Angelus, a prayer recited three times a day in monasteries, convents and churches. The Annunciation would be second only to the Passion in terms of representation in pre-modern Western art.

## The Medieval Fascination With Mary's Response

Amid an extensive corpus of late medieval Marian theological commentaries, there emerged a rich tradition of devotional sources that produced glosses on the Annunciation passage. The French abbot and Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), well-known for his prolific writings on Mary, wrote the following commentary on Mary's initial taciturnity:

Answer quickly, O Virgin. Reply in haste to the angel, or rather through the angel to the Lord. Answer with a word, receive the Word of God. Speak your own word, conceive the divine Word. Breathe a passing word, embrace the eternal Word. Why do you delay, why are you afraid? Believe, give praise, and receive. Let humility be bold, let modesty be confident. This is no time for virginal simplicity to forget prudence. In this matter alone, O prudent Virgin, do not fear to be presumptuous. Though modest silence is pleasing, dutiful speech is now more necessary.

Bernard urges Mary to abandon her usual prudence and instead to respond quickly. He encourages her to speak in order to demonstrate her trust in God. Bernard of Clairvaux's Marian writings were so influential that for centuries he was referred to as the "eminent preacher of the Virgin Mother's glory," the "Marian Doctor," as well as the "Troubadour of Mary."

Sermons were not the only medium theologians used to reflect upon Mary's response to Gabriel. Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1230-98), a Dominican archbishop, wrote the *Golden Legend*, one of the most influential hagiographical works of the Middle Ages. The *Golden Legend* represents the effects of centuries of intertwining canonical, apocryphal and medieval legends about the lives of the saints, including Mary. As he reflects on the Annunciation, Jacobus comments on the significance of Mary's apprehension:

Here we see that the Virgin was worthy of praise in her hearing the words and her reception of them, and in her pausing to think about them. She was praiseworthy for her modesty when she heard the words and remained silent, for her hesitancy at receiving the words, and for her prudence in her thoughtfulness, because she thought about the sense of the greeting.

Jacobus underscores Mary's modesty, praising her initial hesitation as a sign of her sanctity. Even though medieval texts praise Mary for pausing to reflect upon Gabriel's pronouncement, complete silence without an eventual answer would have been unacceptable.

Some late medieval devotional materials emphasized Mary's literacy as evidence of her sacred knowledge. Images of the Annunciation featured Mary reading Scripture when the angel Gabriel appeared to her: This symbolized the incarnation of Christ as the Word made flesh (Jn 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us"). Medieval devotional sources emphasized Mary's special relationship with the Word and praised her sophisticated understanding of the impact of Christ's ministry and resurrection. Many artists depicted the Annunciation scene within a contemporary medieval setting, as if to suggest that Mary's words of obedience transcended time and space.

In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, the 12th-century bishop Bruno of Segni (d. 1123) praised Mary's contemplative reflections throughout Christ's life:

O thou truly wise mother, alone worthy of such a son! All these words she pondered in her heart (cf. Lk 2:19, 51), keeping them for us and committing them to memory, so that afterwards, she herself having taught, narrated and accounted them, they might be spoken and preached throughout the world. For the apostles heard these things from her.

Bruno of Segni connects Mary's reflection ("all these words she pondered in her heart") as significant to her role as *magistra apostolorum* ("teacher of the apostles"), a popular Marian title in the Middle Ages.

The Annunciation was not just the subject of many medieval sermons and extensive illuminations, but was depicted in other artistic mediums as well. Liturgical dramas, broken into distinct pageants that illuminated Christianity's most memorable accounts, reshaped the Annunciation story to suit a medieval audience. These mystery plays were performed for lay audiences in urban settings throughout Europe. Two of the most famous Marian pilgrimage shrines of the later Middle Ages, Our Lady of Walsingham in England and the Holy House of Loreto in Italy, were also deeply connected to the Annunciation story.

The legend of the Walsingham shrine was that in 1061 the Virgin Mary appeared to a widow named Richeldis and entreated her to rebuild her Nazareth house in England. Similarly, the origin story of the Holy House of Loreto was that angels had carried Mary's house from Nazareth to Italy. For centuries, streams of pilgrims have visited both shrines connected to the moment when Mary obediently accepted God's will.

### Mary's 'Yes' in Modernity

Mary's initial silence and eventual assent to God's will has remained a compelling moment within theological commentaries on the Annunciation. In his 2006 homily on the Annunciation, Pope Benedict XVI remarked:

The icon of the Annunciation, more than any other, helps us to see clearly how everything in the Church goes back to that mystery of Mary's acceptance of the divine Word, by which, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the Covenant between God and humanity was perfectly sealed. Everything in the Church, every institution and ministry, including that of Peter and his Successors, is "included" under the Virgin's mantle, within the grace-filled horizon of her "yes" to God's will.

Like so many other theologians, Pope Benedict viewed Mary's acceptance of God's will as the springboard for the church's entire ministry. While speaking on the Fourth Sunday of Advent in 2017, Pope Francis noted, "We admire our Mother for her response to God's call and mission." He has also referred to the Annunciation as a "feast of 'yes'" and said that Mary's response is the lynchpin to this crucial moment in salvation history.

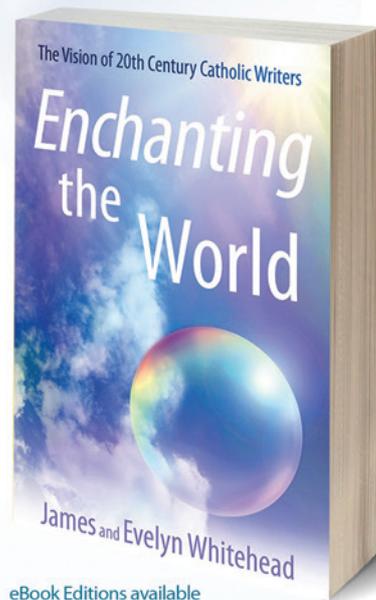
We live in a sound-bite world, replete with snappy headlines and quickly drafted tweets that encapsulate the briefest of human responses. Yet one of the most reimagined moments in the Bible captures silence: Mary's pregnant pause, full of anticipation and wonderment. When we listen to the Annunciation story, it is evident that inner contemplation has always been an integral aspect of Christian devotion. We would all do well to imitate Mary with such thoughtfulness in our own challenging moments.

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Vanessa R. Corcoran is an academic counselor in the office of the college dean at Georgetown University. She holds a Ph.D. in medieval history from The Catholic University of America. Twitter: @VRCinDC.

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# Women in the Bible

## Leaders at Critical Moments

By Richard J. Clifford

The record number of women who will be serving in Congress following the momentous 2018 midterm elections may not be aware that the Bible supports their initiative to serve in this important political moment.

Normally, women in the Bible appear in subsidiary roles, for the action most often takes place in the public square, the exclusive domain of men in the ancient world.

But “normally” does not mean “always.” There is an important and often overlooked side to biblical history: It does not move forward in an unbroken stream but rather bumps along and in critical moments turns in new directions. In those turning points, women, surprisingly, take on leadership roles.

Consider three such turning points in biblical history. In each one, male leadership fails or is absent and women take up the slack, employing wit and courage rather than recognized authority and power to lead the community. The three turning points are the transition from one elect family (Abraham’s) to one elect nation (Israel); the transition from the failed rule of tribal chieftains (the Book of Judges) to Davidic kingship; and the climactic biblical moment—the transition from Jesus’ crucifixion to his resurrection as risen Lord.

### From an Elect Family to an Elect Nation

In Exodus 1 and 2, Abraham’s family of 70 members fled famine in Canaan and found refuge in grain-rich Egypt under the patronage of a welcoming pharaoh, a friend of the patriarch Joseph. When that pharaoh died, “there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph” (Ex 1:8), who adopted a policy that both exploited and decimated the Hebrews. There is no mention in the text of the Hebrews praying to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Instead,

they “groaned,” watching in horror as family members were enslaved and their male children were exterminated. There is also no mention of a leader in Exodus 1-2 except Moses, who is distrusted by his fellow Hebrews because he could not answer their question: “Who made you a ruler and judge over us?” (Ex 2:14).

In this political and moral vacuum, five women emerge as leaders—the two Hebrew midwives named Shiprah and Puah, the mother and sister of the infant Moses, and the pharaoh’s daughter. The midwives, unwilling to follow the pharaoh’s orders to kill the Hebrew infants, invented the excuse that Hebrew women were so vigorous they gave birth before the midwives arrived. Another pair of women, Moses’ mother and sister, figured out how to literally obey the pharaoh’s order to throw every baby boy into the Nile while utterly subverting it. They “threw” the infant into a seaworthy basket and shrewdly positioned it to float by the pharaoh’s daughter while she was bathing in the Nile. Pharaoh’s daughter, recognizing the child as a Hebrew, defied her father by seeing to it that Moses was brought up as a proper Egyptian in the pharaoh’s household. Each of the five women stepped up in the crisis and enabled Abraham’s family to survive and become a mighty people.

### From Tribal Chieftains to Davidic King

A second example of female leadership in a critical time is narrated in 1 Samuel 1-3, which in the Hebrew Bible comes immediately after the book of Judges’ vivid depictions of misrule by tribal chieftains. The final chapters of Judges show the self-centered leadership of Samson and the moral and social chaos of a people adrift. Change was urgent if Israel was to be a people worthy of the Lord.



Unsplash

In this crisis, the agent of change was Hannah, a woman with the stigma of childlessness in a culture that revered motherhood. Weeping one day over her plight at the shrine at Shiloh, she interpreted the priest Eli's conventional response to her prayer as if it were an ironclad promise: "May the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." Upon becoming pregnant, she uttered her Song (1 Sm 2:1-10), similar to Mary's much later Magnificat, and gave birth to Samuel, the prophet who would in the course of time anoint David as king, establishing a dynasty that would last forever.

That transition in the Old Testament from chaos to effective kingship became a template for the Gospel of Luke's depiction of a similar transition to the rule of Jesus, son of David. Women play a prominent role here, too. The parallels between the coming of David's kingship and the coming of Jesus' kingship are hard to miss: the miraculous birth of Samuel to the barren Hannah and the miraculous birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary; Hannah's Song in 1 Sm 2:1-10 ("My heart exults in the Lord") and Mary's Magnificat in Lk 1:46-55 ("My soul magnifies the Lord"); and the nearly identical comment on Samuel's character in 1 Sm 2:16 ("young Samuel was growing in stature and in worth in the estimation of the Lord and the people") and on Jesus' char-

acter in Lk 2:52 ("And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man").

Further, the priest Zechariah's deficient response to the angel's birth announcement in Lk 1:5-20 parallels the deficient leadership of the priest Eli. Finally, it should be noted that in both Samuel and Luke the wives, not the husbands, act and speak: Hannah, not her husband Elkanah, Elizabeth, not her husband Zechariah, and Mary, not her husband Joseph.

It is clear that the author of Luke's Gospel, searching the ancient Scriptures to validate Jesus' claims to kingship, found confirmation in the transition from tribal chieftains to Davidic kingship in Judges and Samuel. As James Kugel has pointed out, Bible readers of the time "assumed that, although most of Scripture had been written hundreds of years earlier and seemed to be addressed to people back then, its words nevertheless were altogether relevant to people in the interpreter's own time.... Its prophecies really referred to events happening now" ("Early Jewish Biblical Interpretation" in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*).

### **From the Death of Jesus to His Resurrection**

The most momentous transition in the Christian Bible is Jesus' passage from death to resurrected life, which

# In the time between Jesus' death and resurrection, women, not men, exercised leadership. ●●

is detailed in the Gospels, announced in the Acts of the Apostles and preached by Paul. During this three-day crisis, women, not men, exercised leadership. Of the women, one was extraordinary during the entire period when men, the expected leaders, withdrew.

All four Gospels tell the same story: Mary of Magdala (identified by her hometown rather than by the name of her husband or son) accompanied Jesus through his suffering and crucifixion (Mt 27:56; Mk 15:40; Lk 23:27-31; Jn 19:25) and was the first witness to Jesus' resurrection (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:1; Lk 24:10; Jn 20:1, 11-18). At the resurrection, Jesus chose her to announce the news to the disciples. According to Jn 20:11-18, she had the privilege of seeing the risen Jesus before anyone else. Truly appropriate is the epithet tradition has bestowed on her, *apostolorum apostola*, "apostle to the apostles."

For centuries, she was mistakenly identified with the unnamed sinful woman in Lk 7:36-50, and her faithfulness went unnoticed. In recent years, however, Mary has been recognized as the model of a faithful and courageous disciple, stepping up in a crisis and embracing the task of announcing that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Mary's greatness consists not only in her presence at Jesus' passage from death to life but in defining Christian discipleship as both witnessing to Jesus' death and resurrection and announcing the good news to others.

These instances in which the Bible portrays female leadership at critical moments are not just acknowledgments that women were present or filled out the scene. In each case, they proved instrumental in moving the history of Israel forward, and what they did had an enormous influence upon subsequent events. Leadership by males

proved inadequate for a new era; another kind of governance was called for, and it was done by women. Their stories illustrate vividly what Paul meant when he asked his congregation at Corinth to look around and see if they could find among themselves "the wise" and "the strong" of this world. Paul concluded, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1:27).

In moments of such "weakness," when conventional structures fall away, the divine intention becomes visible in unexpected ways. The Bible catches such moments with characteristic subtlety and expresses them with memorable flair.

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

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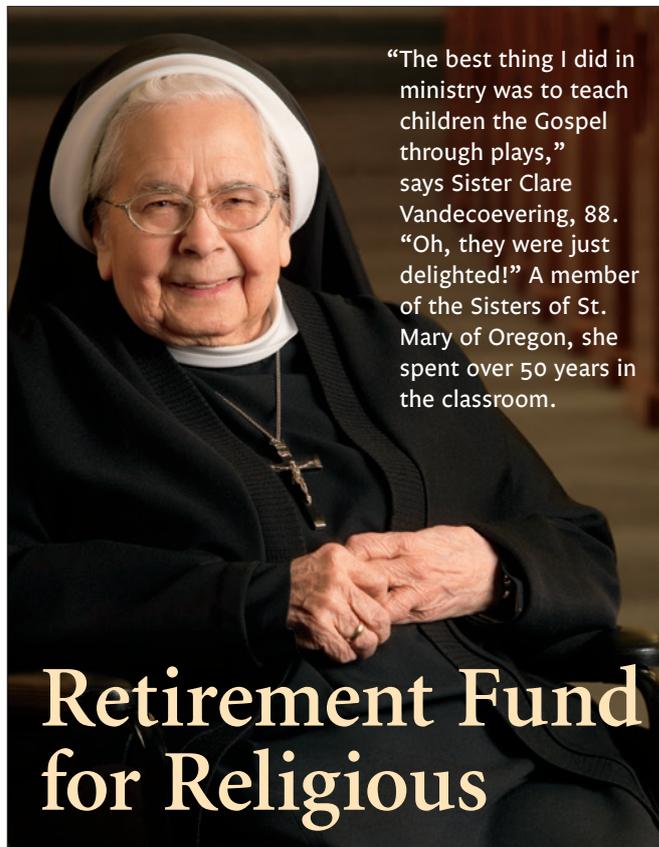
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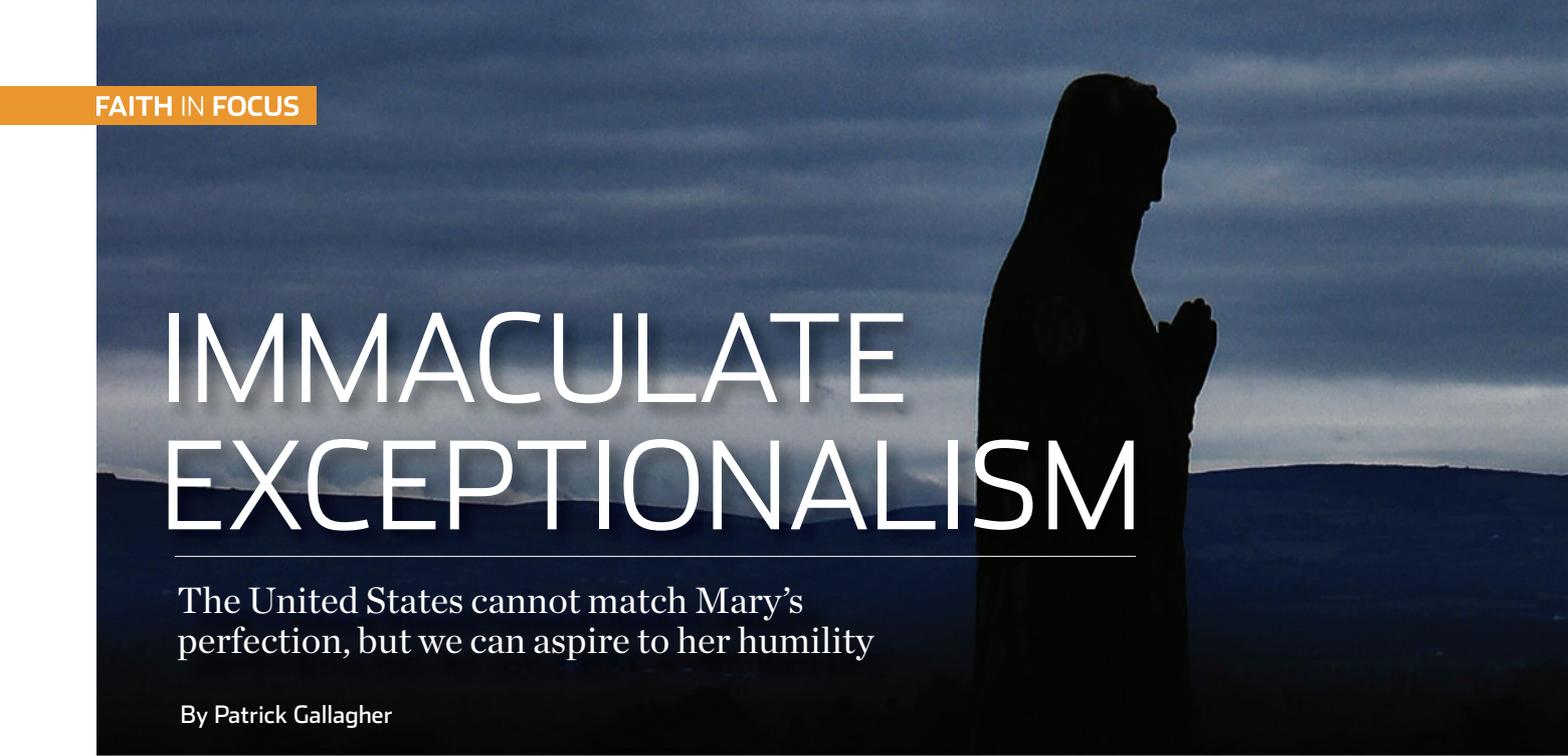
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# IMMACULATE EXCEPTIONALISM

The United States cannot match Mary's perfection, but we can aspire to her humility

By Patrick Gallagher

In 1846, the American bishops proclaimed the “Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without sin, as the Patroness of the United States of America.” Patronages can sometimes be ironic. Is it conceit or coincidence that a saint who was conceived without sin is the patron of a country that believes the same about itself?

The belief that Mary had to have been sinless from conception to be the mother of God had developed over hundreds of years before it was declared church dogma in 1854. Similarly, the conviction that the United States was specially ordained by God precedes the nation's founding, starting perhaps with the 17th-century Puritan John Winthrop preaching to his fellow settlers about creating a “city upon a hill”—uniquely blessed and therefore burdened with the responsibility to model virtue to the rest of the world.

In time, American exceptionalism became an academic subject, and Seymour Martin Lipset, one of its chief scholars, called it a double-edged sword. American freedoms and individualism bring opportunity, prosperity and a “high sense of personal responsibility,” he observed, but also problems like high rates of crime, litigiousness, poverty and “disregard for communal good.” In other words, Mr. Lipset argued, American exceptionalism means different, “it does not mean better.”

Except when it does. Except when it means best. For some, American exceptionalism has become synonymous with patriotism.

When the bishops named Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception as patroness, they were continuing a tradition of New World devotion. In 1792, the first U.S. bishop, John Carroll, had declared Mary patroness of his diocese—that is,

the whole country at the time. Pope Clement XIII, in 1760, pronounced Immaculate Mary patroness of Spain and all its possessions, which included much of the Americas. In 1492, a man commanding a ship whose full name was Santa Maria de la Inmaculada Concepción “discovered” the continent. Thus, those 19th-century bishops were not equating sinless Mary with the nation, in which anti-Catholic prejudice was rampant and which fostered such condemned principles as separation of church and state and freedom of religion. The bishops hoped U.S. Catholics would “practice the sublime virtues” of which Mary was the “most perfect example.” They might also have sought her intercession on behalf of their flock of second-class citizens.

The latter appeal to Mary appears to have succeeded. Catholics in the United States assimilated and gained influence but not without tension. In “Our First, Most Cherished Liberty,” their 2012 document on religious freedom, the U.S. bishops wrote, “To be Catholic and American should not mean having to choose one over the other.” Apparently, however, many U.S. Catholics seem to have chosen country over creed. A 2011 Gallup survey found 88 percent of U.S. Catholics identified “very” or “extremely” strongly with their country, compared with 55 percent who said the same for their religion. Other polls routinely show that American Catholics' opinions mirror those of the general public, another sign of assimilation. Often seen as a swing vote, in most recent presidential elections the Catholic vote frequently matched the final outcome. In 2016, they swung both ways, either, according to exit polls, going 50 percent for Trump, in a margin smaller than the electoral vote, or on later analysis 48 percent for



Photo by Alex Gordin on Unsplash

Clinton, in a slightly larger margin than the popular vote.

A 2015 Gallup poll looked at assimilation from a different angle. When asked about their willingness to vote for a Catholic for president, 93 percent of U.S. adults said they would do so, the highest response for any candidate's background tested in the survey, which included female, black, evangelical Christian, Muslim, atheist and socialist.

Not surprisingly, tensions remain—both between the church and society and within the church. The almost hedonistic American quest for personal satisfaction in nearly all pursuits—financial, material, sexual—frequently

conflicts with Catholics teachings. At the risk of using convenient but overbroad labels, pro-life Catholics contend with widespread disregard for life, while social justice Catholics contend with a Darwinian economy. Adopting their nation's polarities, Catholics often fail to meet on what should be broad common ground. Mirroring partisan flexibility, progressive opponents of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI now mock the traditionalist critics of Pope Francis who formerly attacked progressive Catholics. The opposing camps—or at least their principals—view each other with suspicion, seeing in the other a tolerance for, if not the outright embrace of sin. The certitude leaves little room for mercy, contrition or humility.

Should this surprise us? Humility today is heretical. America's business, sports, celebrity and social media cultures demand self-promotion. Politics follows John Wayne: "Don't apologize. It's a sign of weakness." Witness the criticism of U.S. presidents for actual or perceived apologies for this nation's actions on the world stage. In 1988, then-vice president and presidential candidate George H. W. Bush said on the campaign trail: "I will never apologize for the United States of America. Ever. I don't care what the facts are." Donald J. Trump also said he is "not going to apologize for America." Being exceptional means never having to say you're sorry.

Humility is central to the Scripture and tradition around Mary (her apparitions almost always occur to the lowly—her word). Would an American exceptionalist tolerate the United States adopting its patroness's humility? And then there is the provocative Magnificat:

*He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones  
but lifted up the lowly.*

*The hungry he has filled with good things;  
the rich he has sent away empty.*

Mary's celebration of God's justice and mercy should alarm the proud and powerful. (Lifted the lowly, filled the hungry, sent away the rich? What would Ayn Rand say?) The bold Magnificat seems to foreshadow Thomas Jefferson—"I tremble for my country when I recall that God is just." Imagine a president saying that today.

The United States cannot match Mary's perfection, but we can aspire to her humility. Would the world—would we—be worse with an America that did "talk softly"? A dozen years after his father, George W. Bush as a candidate saw value in promising a "humble" America. Admittedly, what that means in practice is hard to imagine. What would a humble approach to Russia and North Korea or income inequality and racism look like?

Humility needn't preclude boldness of conviction or action if informed by compassionate analysis. Imagine if, when considering competing and complicated interests in domestic and international affairs, our leaders not only considered polling data and troop strengths but the effects of this nation's policies on the "lowly" and the "least ones"?

Humility is easier said than done, particularly by a nation-state. But the indispensable nation ought to have confidence in some fundamental principles—the rule of law, respect for sovereignty, democracy (provided the ground under them has not become too unsteady)—and employ them with more of Mary's humility. It is not unheard of.

Two decades after the bishops' pronouncement in 1846, Abraham Lincoln was in the midst of the war foreshadowed by Jefferson's "tremble" of four score years earlier. Despite his own conviction about the war's justness, when asked if he thought God was on the side of the United States, this country's greatest president had the temerity to say something that seems to complete Jefferson's thought: "My concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right." Even defending a just cause, Lincoln had the humility to know that "our side" is not by definition "God's side."

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Patrick Gallagher lives in Aberdeen, S.D., where he works for a community development nonprofit.



# Grappling With an Unholy (Family) History

By John W. Miller

A few years ago, Cheryl Benedict, an education administrator and historian from Virginia and my first cousin, discovered on Ancestry.com that our great-great-grandfather, a Texas farmer named Augustus Foscue, had owned 41 slaves.

I was saddened, not surprised. Although I grew up in Brussels, the child of American musicians who did not inherit great wealth, my family is white and middle class, with branches rooted among the pre-revolutionary English immigrants who accepted slave-holding as a way of life.

My first thought was that I should research our family history more—and then write about it. My ancestors had done something wrong. It had not been known. Now it was. Shining a light on the truth, followed by some

sort of atonement, seemed the right thing to do, especially at a time of rising and relegitimized white supremacy in the United States. Truth-telling as atonement.

It would also be an education. Growing up, I attended Belgium's *écoles communales*. In school, I did not learn about U.S. history. For me, as a kid, America was more cultural and commercial than political or historical: baseball and Mark Twain, musicals and McDonald's.

My attitude was naïve and ill-considered. As editors rejected draft after draft, it became clear that I was getting something important wrong.

My mistake, typical of white Americans, was treating slavery as if it were a mystery buried in the past. I had not known about my ancestor

Augustus. My family had not talked about slavery. Now we did.

But confession is not atonement. And as one African-American historian or economist after another pointed out to me, slavery is not a mystery, and it is not past. What white Americans treat as a historical curiosity—something to investigate if we choose to—is to black Americans a cruel, unavoidable ghost that haunts this nation's cities, schools, hospitals and prisons.

This lack of understanding about slavery's immanence is why white acts of private atonement are considered “conscience salves that do little to close the black-white gap,” William Darity, an economist at Duke University, told me. He calls symbolic actions “laissez-faire reparations” and argues that people who discover they have

As the author researched his family's history of slaveholding, he realized slavery is not a mystery, and it is not past.

slave-owning ancestors are morally obliged to campaign for national reparations.

Because slavery was a societal institution, enshrined in the Constitution, and had societal consequences that have not been fixed, its reparation must be societal.

Still, with the internet revolution unveiling more family histories and efforts at a federal reparations movement stalled, there is a small but growing group of descendants of slave-owners conducting private efforts at atonement.

People I talked to are funding scholarships for black youths, putting up plaques in honor of people their families enslaved and engaging in dialogue aimed at promoting racial healing. They are writing books and making movies and documenting how the devastating inequalities set up by slavery were maintained during Reconstruction and the establishment of Jim Crow laws and the post-civil rights era. Universities, banks and other institutions are owning up to their past involvement with slavery.

What to make of their efforts? Are they really useless? Isn't something better than nothing? Do good intentions count for anything?

Guy Mount Emerson, an African-American historian who is part of the scholarly team that recently uncovered the University of Chicago's historical ties to slavery, says that "symbolic action, even if it's symbolic, may have the potential to heal current relationships."

But Mr. Emerson, who has lectured on reparations at the University of Chicago, says that according to reparations theory, it is up to the people who were harmed to determine what might constitute sufficient restorative action. "It's up to black folks to say when this is enough," says Mr. Emerson. "It's a very hard question: How do you forgive the unforgivable? How do you repair the irreparable?"

Under President Trump, white interest in private reparation efforts has been on the rise, says Tom DeWolf, a director at Coming to the Table, a non-profit based at Eastern Mennonite University that brings together the descendants of slave-owners and enslaved people. Since the 2016 election, the number of monthly visitors to the organization's website has increased from 3,000 a month to over 13,000. The number of affiliated working groups has multiplied. They aim to inject more awareness into the public space about links between slavery and current inequalities.

This year, Coming to the Table released a 21-page guide on how to atone privately for slavery. It has over 100 suggestions, including donating to the United Negro College Fund, hiring African-American lawyers and doctors and contributing family archives to genealogy websites like Our Black Ancestry and AfriGeneas. African-American genealogies are often incomplete because enslaved peoples generally were not named in census documents until 1870.

"We suggest that before acting, European Americans should take their cues from African Americans as to when and how to approach and

implement reparations," the guide suggests. "African Americans may wish to engage in some of these activities so as to ensure that trust, healing and true reparations of the harms are achieved."

The reparations guide also recommends supporting H.R. 40, a bill for which Representative John Conyers Jr., Democrat of Michigan, has been campaigning since the 1980s. The bill, named after the 40 acres of land that newly emancipated African-Americans were promised and never given after the Civil War, would establish a commission to study the impact of slavery and suggest remedies.

Mr. DeWolf, who has written two books on the subject, is a descendant of a Rhode Island family that once controlled one of the country's biggest slave-trading enterprises. Since the DeWolfs shipped 10,000 people from West Africa, they shaped the ancestries of as many as 500,000 African-Americans. In 2008, a DeWolf family member named Katrina Browne released "Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North," a riveting documentary that highlights slavery in Northern states and chronicles members of the family traveling to New England, Ghana and Cuba and their anguished debates over privilege, legacy and reparations.

"White people should think of reparations as a poker game where somebody has been cheating," says Ms. Browne. "If somebody said I've been cheating the whole game and now I'm going to stop cheating, wouldn't you want your money back?"

Whether your family owned slaves is "a question that anybody with South-



Phoebe Kilby, center, recently met the writer Betty Kilby and her brother, James, descendants of people her family had owned as slaves.

ern roots should probably ask themselves,” says Christa Cowan, who has researched slavery for Ancestry.com. The 1850 and 1860 censuses, available online, are valuable because they include so-called “Slave Schedules” that list the numbers, genders and ages of enslaved people. “Even if your family wasn’t wealthy, it’s worth checking,” says Ms. Cowan, who is white and discovered her own slave-owning ancestry and black cousins through census records. It is also a question for Americans from Northern states: In the 17th and 18th centuries, millions of Northerners owned slaves.

To be sure, even if the truth is available, many white Americans still do not like to confront slavery—and, when they do, they do not feel guilty about it. “Everybody likes to talk about how their ancestors fought in the Confederacy, but nobody likes to talk about how they owned slaves,” Bruce Levine, the author of *The Fall of the House of Dixie*, a history of the 19th-century South, tells me. “You can’t have one without the other.” A survey in 2016 by political scientists found that 72.4 percent of white Amer-

icans questioned felt “not guilty at all” about “the privileges and benefits” they “received as white Americans.”

Growing up in Baltimore in the 1950s, Phoebe Kilby never heard about her slave-owning ancestors. A decade ago, she found documents online that proved that her family had owned enslaved peoples. Further research led her to meeting several descendants of people her family had owned as slaves, including people to whom she was genetically related. She has befriended her black relatives, helped obtain funding for a Virginia State historical highway sign that honors civil rights activists in the family and endowed scholarships for their grandchildren. “We could wait for Congress, or we can listen to the expressed desires of our African-American cousins and respond directly ourselves,” she says.

The African-American writer Betty Kilby, one of Phoebe’s relatives and a plaintiff in a school desegregation case in Virginia in the 1950s, says she had “mixed emotions” when Phoebe contacted her, “but I had promised to fight against hate, so I had to meet

her.” They are now close friends and speak together at churches, colleges and community groups. Ms. Kilby says she supports national economic reparations and says private initiatives could offer a template for a wider political initiative. “What Phoebe has done is provide scholarships for the descendants of the people her family enslaved, that is restitution,” she says. “Maybe that’s the model nationally.”

Some black thinkers say symbolic gestures are meaningless if not accompanied by a demand for political and economic reparations.

“It’s not a matter of personal guilt, it’s a matter of national responsibility,” says Mr. Darity, the Duke University economist. The persistent structural inequality in the United States is why even white Americans not descended from slave-owners should support reparations, because they have benefited, says Mr. Darity. Reparations, he says, “should go to anybody who has an ancestor who was enslaved and anybody who has identified as black for 10 years or more.”

A growing body of academic research has firmed up the links between slavery and current inequalities. A lot of racism in the United States “developed after slavery,” says Sven Beckert, the author of *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* and a professor at Harvard. African-Americans “were free, but they faced harsh discrimination in labor, property and education markets, among other things.” Mr. Beckert compares the slow and still unfilled reckoning of American whites with slavery to that of Germany’s resolution of its guilt over Nazism after World War II.

The difference, says Mr. Darity, is that “the U.S. is not a defeated nation in the aftermath of a great war seeking to restore its legitimacy in the international community.”

In a recent paper, “Slavery, Education, and Inequality,” two European academics, Graziella Bertocchi and Arcangelo Dimico, studied the influence of slavery across U.S. counties.

They found that counties that once had rates of high slave ownership are not always poorer, but that they consistently had unequal rates of educational attainment. Current inequality, they wrote, “is primarily influenced by slavery through the unequal education attainment of blacks and whites.”

Over time, Ms. Bertocchi tells me, “even after accounting for many other factors, slavery remains a persistent determinant of today’s inequality.”

There is no mystery: Our wrong is present.

---

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

## Self-Portrait in Daylight

By Barbara Buckman Strasko

My mother’s lamps have better light than mine:  
with three settings, they sit on tables at the best angles.

Even though much of my time is spent reading,  
I’ve never understood how to make things comfortable.

I wanted to live my life split open, awake,  
walking through the slanted light and hard rains.

When as a child I almost drowned, I didn’t know it,  
so I rose to the top then sank back down again,

curious about underwater things. Later, I cooked  
brown rice and brewed huckleberry tea,

swam in the Delaware canals near New Hope,  
and when the accident at Three Mile Island occurred,

I wrote a letter, *Dear Sir or Madman*:  
Many days I wanted to end my life

but when my diagnosis came, I only  
wanted to live.

At dawn today the frogs at the lily pond

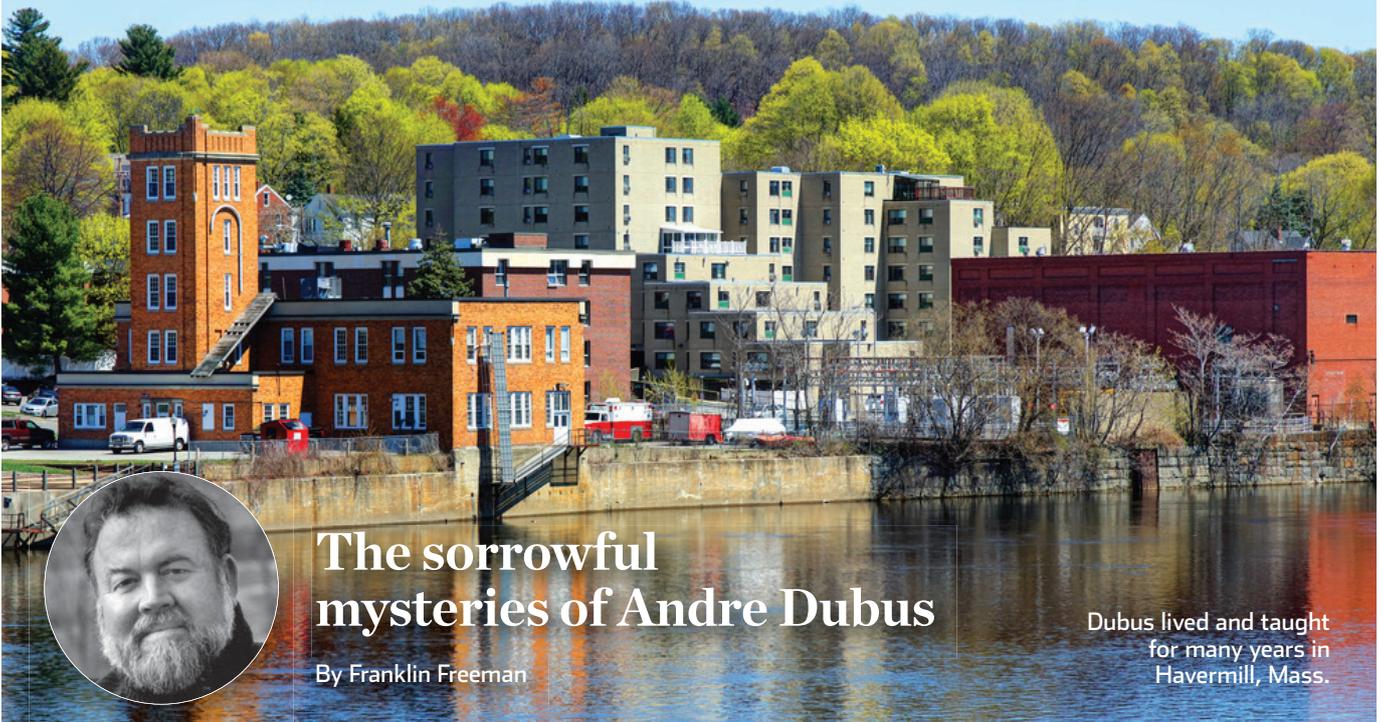
clear their throats as if they have not  
spoken in a thousand years.

In their voices I hear pain, knowing no one  
listened to me when I spoke long ago

I see the day rise outside my window—  
light on the edge of garden shears I hold.

---

Barbara Buckman Strasko serves as the Poet in the Schools for the Poetry Paths program of Lancaster, Pa. Her poems have appeared in *Rhino*, *Nimrod*, *Brilliant Corners* and the anthology *Best New Poets 2006*. Her book of poems, *Graffiti in Braille*, was published in 2012.



## The sorrowful mysteries of Andre Dubus

By Franklin Freeman

Dubus lived and taught for many years in Haverhill, Mass.

In reissuing the work of Andre Dubus, something he has never done with any other author, David Godine has shown himself to be a publisher's publisher—just as Dubus was often called “a writer's writer.” The latter, in the words of the series editor Joshua Bodwell, is a “double-edged compliment...at once both high praise and an intimation of authorial obscurity.”

Godine, the only person willing to publish Dubus's work in book form without the promise of a follow-up novel, was loyal to Dubus and the writer's own vision of his work. And Dubus was loyal to him. When presented with opportunities with other publishers, Dubus refused. And when, late in his life and in desperate need of money, he worked with other publishers, he checked with Godine first.

Dubus needed money because of the care he required after being struck by a car on July 23, 1986, while trying to help another driver whose car had

broken down. His left leg had to be amputated below the knee; the right leg was useless. As Tobias Wolff wrote in his introduction to *Broken Vessels*, Dubus's essays are “driven by the conviction that the possibility of freedom and grace, even heroism, abides in every life.”

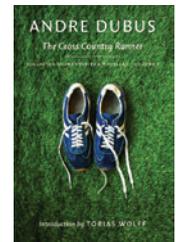
Born in 1936 in Lake Charles, La., to an Episcopalian French father and an Irish Catholic mother, Dubus was raised Catholic and attended a Christian Brothers' school. After a stint in the Marines aboard an aircraft carrier, he attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he studied with Kurt Vonnegut and Richard Yates. After reading the stories of Chekhov, whom he considered his master, he devoted himself primarily to the short story. He moved north to Haverhill, Mass., and taught creative writing at Bradford College until he burned out as a teacher and had to retire shortly before the accident that crippled him. He was married

three times and had six children, four from his first marriage and two from his last. His son, Andre Dubus III, won fame with his Oprah-endorsed novel, *House of Sand and Fog*.

Dubus was an irascible, loyal, loving, smoking, hard-drinking, hard-punching, tender man, who demanded much of himself and others and, according to at least one friend, did not realize how much. He was also a devout Catholic, attended daily Mass whenever possible and had a profound devotion to the Eucharist and the reality of the sacraments—both the official church sacraments and the sacraments of daily life. He dissented from the church's positions on contraception and sexual morality; but despite his dissent, the only writer I have read whom I could think of as “more Catholic” would be Flannery O'Connor.

The first volume in the new series, *We Don't Live Here Anymore* (David R. Godine. 400p \$18.95), consists

The works of Andre Dubus are hard to read because they face life and love so starkly.



of Dubus's first two books, *Separate Flights* and *Adultery and Other Choices*, and is introduced by Ann Beattie. After noting how Dubus highlights his characters at the beginnings of his stories in a "devotional moment," and how often he writes from a woman's point of view, she gives a sharp summary of Dubus's work: "The stories are about how people must make accommodations once they find out there's no winning."

In one story, "The Doctor," which first appeared in *The New Yorker*, a doctor goes on a run through his neighborhood and comes across a person whose life he cannot save. To give the details would ruin the story but, as Beattie points out (in reference to another story), the story does not end where most writers would end it, in "a paradoxically bleak exhilaration," but in something more life-affirming, more, in a sense, real.

Volume Two of the series, *The Winter Father* (David R. Godine. 400p \$18.95), includes the books *Finding a Girl in America* and *The Times Are Never So Bad*; the introduction is by Richard Russo. After learning from co-workers that Dubus at times "dated" his attractive female students, and reading of Dubus's treatment of his family reported in Andre Dubus III's memoir, *Townie*, Russo says that he started to read Dubus in a personally critical way. (Russo's father, like Dubus himself, was largely absent from his son's life.) The only answer to reading Dubus in this manner, he ultimately realized, is forgiveness. "We

read Dubus's stories," Russo says, "the same way we read *Jude the Obscure*, not to find out what happens next but rather to watch our deepest fears—about ourselves and a brutal, uncaring world—realized."

In one story, "Sorrowful Mysteries," Gerry Fontenot, growing up in southern Louisiana, wrestles with segregation and, after giving a black teenager his extra baseball mitt in a sandlot baseball game, is devastated by the execution of a black man accused of rape—which, his father says, would never happen if it were a white man and a black woman:

On the March night Sonny Broussard will die, Gerry lies in bed and says a rosary. It is a Thursday, a day for the Joyful Mysteries, but looking out past the mimosa, at the corner streetlight, he prays with the Sorrowful Mysteries, remembers the newspaper photographs of Sonny Broussard, tries to imagine his terror as midnight draws near—why midnight? and how could he live that day in his cell?—and sees Sonny Broussard on his knees in the Garden of Olives; he wears khakis, his arms rest on a large stone, and his face is lifted to the sky.

*The Cross Country Runner* (David R. Godine. 400p \$18.95), Volume Three of the series, includes the last two Dubus books Godine published,

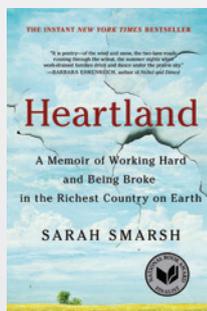
*The Last Worthless Evening* and *Voices From the Moon*, as well as previously uncollected stories. Tobias Wolff gives a very personal introduction that gives us a picture of what Dubus was like in person; it reminded me much of Robert Duvall's portrait of Bull Meechum in the movie "The Great Santini."

What many call Dubus's masterpiece, *Voices From the Moon*, is about a teenage boy, Richie, who goes to daily Mass and wants to be a priest. When Richie tells the local priest about his father (who is seeking to marry his own former daughter-in-law), the priest says, in what could be the ultimate point of all Dubus's work: "It would be far better if they had fought their love before it grew. But there are much worse things than loving. Much worse, Richie."

The works of Andre Dubus are hard to read, even though they are beautifully written—combining the simplicity of Hemingway with the fullness and fluidity of Faulkner—because they face life and love so starkly. Which is why, after almost every story and novella I read, I had to put the book down and wait before starting another. I had to let it settle into my soul before going on. And just that—the act of going on—is what Dubus encourages in us as we read him, to go on no matter how terrible and, in cyclical fashion, how glorious, life gets.

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Franklin Freeman, a frequent contributor to *America*, lives in Maine.



**Heartland**  
A Memoir of  
Working Hard  
and Being Broke  
in the Richest  
Country on Earth  
By Sarah Smarsh  
Scribner  
304p \$26

### Cycles of poverty

“We can’t really know what made us who we are,” Sarah Smarsh declares in *Heartland*. “We can come to understand, though, what the world says we are.”

Smarsh is an intellectual tornado and *Heartland* a narrative prairie fire. As a fifth-generation Kansas farm girl, what does Smarsh learn she is? She answers by interrogating the corrupt origins of the term “white trash,” finding in its etymology that “the term was first favored by white-supremacist politicians in the South, who aimed to pit poor whites against poor blacks.” *Heartland*’s detailed description of Smarsh’s lived experience is a refreshing departure from our cultural habit of homogenizing individuals’ experiences according to racial categories.

“The American narrative of a hard-luck individual working hard, doing the right thing, and finding success for it is so deep in me, my life story so tempting as potential evidence for that narrative’s validity,” Smarsh writes, “that I probably sometimes err on the side of conveying a story in which I’m an individual beating the odds with her own determination.”

*Heartland* offers a portrait of

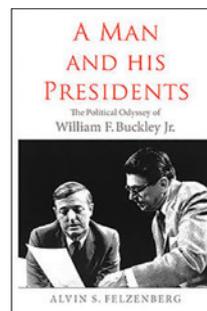
those odds, and a riveting excoriation of how government programs and the American Dream are “two sides of the same trick coin—one promising a good life in exchange for your labor and the other keeping you just alive enough to go on laboring.”

*Heartland* is addressed to its author’s permanently imaginary child: the daughter born to the teen mother Smarsh will never be. By this narrative flourish, Smarsh opens multiple lenses into how she has eluded a cycle of rural poverty, into her female relatives’ stifled rage and into the U.S. economy’s relegation of young single mothers to poverty. On a sentence level, *Heartland* is lyrical, homespun, plainspoken and eloquent. Smarsh is a poet.

An exegesis of hard work is at the core of *Heartland*: “If a person could go to work every day and still not be able to pay the bills and the reason wasn’t racism, what less articulated problem was afoot?” Smarsh could have written either a table-flipping philippic on how economic policy of the last half-century has decimated the American working class, or a jaggedly beautiful memoir of a childhood on a Kansas farm. Instead, she wrote *Heartland*, which is both.

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Laura Goode is the author of the novel *Sister Mischief* and the collection of poems *Become a Name*. Twitter: @lauragoode.



**A Man and His Presidents**  
The Political  
Odyssey of William  
F. Buckley Jr.  
By Alvin S. Felzenberg  
Yale University Press  
448p \$35

### Standing athwart history

Who was William F. Buckley Jr.? Alvin Felzenberg studies the various facets of this complicated man and public figure in his attempts to answer this question in *A Man and His Presidents*.

Buckley is well known as the founding editor of *National Review*, the premier conservative magazine in the United States over the past six decades. But as Felzenberg reveals, Buckley was more than a prolific writer and editor. He was the brains and coalescing force of a post-World War II philosophy that gradually became known as the conservative movement.

The book begins not with Buckley but with his grandfather and his father’s family and upbringing, tracing Buckley’s elite Catholic roots and involvement in politics and laying the foundation for some of Buckley’s views as he grew older. From there, Felzenberg describes in detail the young Buckley’s life at boarding school, first in England at the Jesuit-run St. John’s Beaumont, then in the United States as World War II drew closer.

But where Buckley really came into his own was at Yale. There he was the chair of the *Yale Daily News*, participated on the debate

team and was a member of the Skull and Bones society. His experiences at Yale—where he was often at odds with students and administrators—would lead to his controversial book *God and Man at Yale*, published in 1953.

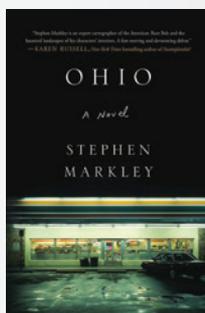
After Yale, Buckley continued to raise his media profile and served as a nexus between right-leaning politicians and the conservative intelligentsia. With the establishment of National Review, Buckley positioned himself as the gatekeeper of U.S. conservatism and ostracized the movement's anti-Semites, crackpot conspiracists and eventually (although, as he later admitted, slower than he should have) pro-segregation, anti-black racists.

Buckley's labors to build a conservative movement culminated in Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency in 1980. Buckley had established a friendship with Reagan in the 1960s when he was the governor of California. Buckley was never a formal adviser, but he certainly helped to shape Reagan's worldview. In some ways, Buckley's political odyssey ended after Reagan's presidency, though his mission to entrench his conservative principles in society found great success by any measure.

Felzenberg's look at the life and legacy of Buckley makes for excellent reading for ideological friends and foes alike.

---

Dominic Lynch is a writer from Chicago. He has appeared in *The Chicago Tribune* and *RealClearReligion*.  
Twitter: [domineeringDon](#).



**Ohio**  
By Stephen Markley  
Simon & Schuster  
496p \$27

### Stuck in the middle

There is a smugness to post-election coastal journalism that wants to “figure out” what happened to the Midwest. Everyone has an explanation: opioids, globalism, machine automation, racism, Fox News, nationalism and being angry at people who don’t “Respect the Flag.” They’re afraid. They’re economically anxious, and they voted for *him*.

Stephen Markley’s debut novel, *Ohio*, does not seek to answer the question of Trump’s rise—even if others will read reasons into it. Other reviewers will undoubtedly call it the *Hillbilly Elegy* novel. (Do not believe them.)

*Ohio* is an intimate, long look at a single night in New Canaan, a fictional “corn and rust” town set somewhere between central and northeast Ohio. The narrative revolves around four natives of New Canaan, who have all moved away and are returning for disparate reasons. There is Bill Ashcraft, the cocky coked-out and burned-out activist; Stacey Moore, an English Ph.D. candidate confronting a former friend and lover’s parent; Dan Eaton, a three-tour veteran who can’t get over a high school love (none of them can do this); and Tina

Ross, whom everyone vaguely remembers as the high school tramp.

The New Canaan they return to is different from the one of their childhood. “Zanesville Road, once nothing but fields, had vanished under pavement and parking lots. Gas stations, pet stores, tanning salons, Pizza Hut, AutoZone, Ruby Tuesday, Staples, Dairy Queen, Discount Tire, and finally a new crop of pre-fab homes, each one a clone of some original vinyl-sided patient zero.”

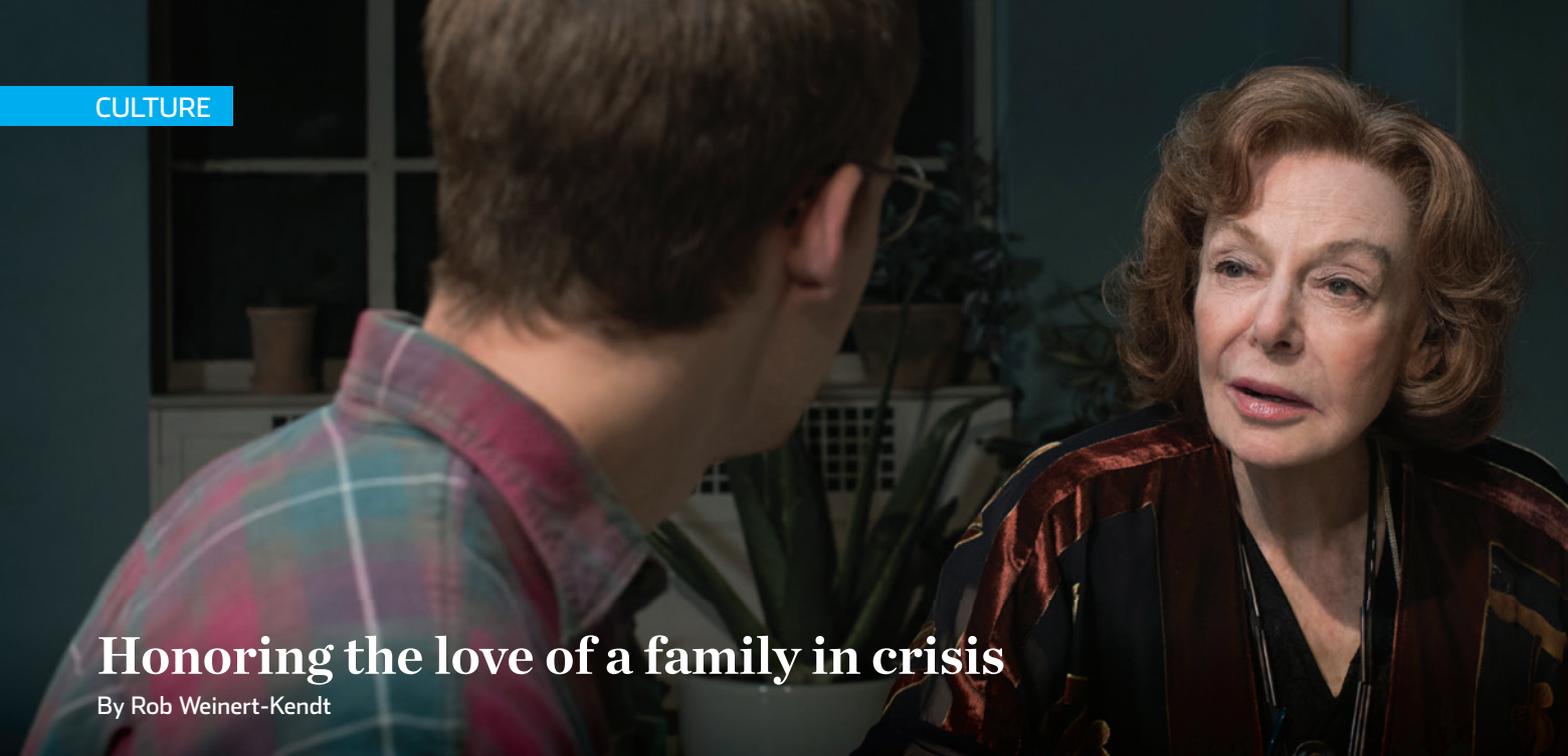
One of their classmates is dead from overdosing, another killed by a sniper in Iraq, another hasn’t been heard from since fleeing for South East Asia days before graduation. The pregnancies, layoffs and suicides of their classmates await them.

At times, I felt like I was reading a novel written for me. I grew up in and around the towns on which New Canaan is based. Markley has penned a love letter to my home and his—but anyone who has left their hometown will see their own home in this novel. Markley writes, “Even if you’ve traveled the world and seen better sunsets, better dawns, better storms—when you get that remembered glimpse of the fields and forests and rises and rivers of your home meeting the horizon, your jaw will tighten.”

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Zac Davis, *associate editor*.  
Twitter: [@zacdayvis](#)

 Full book reviews at [americamagazine.org/books](http://americamagazine.org/books)



## Honoring the love of a family in crisis

By Rob Weinert-Kendt

As with voiceover narration in a fiction film, in which a lead character explains the meaning of what we are seeing from the comfortable distance of a recording studio, when a character in a play steps out of the action onstage to speak to the audience about it, a red flag often rightly goes up. Isn't this a kind of cheating—a way to tell what the playwright can't figure out how to show, to shoehorn novelistic observation into a dramatic medium? It's true that two cornerstones of American drama, "The Glass Menagerie" and "Our Town," break the fourth wall to break it all down for us, but they are more the exception than the rule.

I initially had this concern about Kenneth Lonergan's "The Waverly Gallery," a nearly 20-year-old play now getting its belated and brilliant Broadway debut. In telling the autobiographical story of Lonergan's own family in the late 1980s, the play opens with its young protagonist, Daniel (Lucas Hedges), sitting in the modest Greenwich Village gallery of the title with his chatty grandmother, Gladys (Elaine May), as she regales him with

stories and queries we soon come to realize he has heard many times.

About the time it becomes clear that Daniel is essentially babysitting his discursive elder, he turns to us to fill in some details about the gallery—a small storefront in a hotel that the landlord lets Gladys occupy to keep her, well, occupied—and about his grandmother's deteriorating mental condition. Did we really need to hear spelled out what seems to be unfolding clearly before us onstage? I wondered.

But Lonergan relies on this device relatively sparingly throughout the play's unhurried action, as we see Gladys's advancing condition drive the rest of her family batty over dinner at the home of her daughter, Ellen (Joan Allen), and her second husband, Howard (David Cromer). Though there is an incipient conflict about the gallery's future and a sad-funny subplot about a mediocre artist, Don (Michael Cera), who has taken up residence in the gallery along with his paintings, the show's narrative engine is Gladys's inevitable deterioration. Much of the show's slow-motion heartbreak piles

up as we watch her family argue in her presence over what to do with her, talking about her as if she were not there, which in a way she is not. When they fitfully address her and her repetitive requests—to feed an offstage dog, to find her keys—it is with a mounting hostility that is both understandable and excruciating.

This may sound like grim pickings, but the play's quietly relentless rhythm makes room for plenty of Lonergan's comic grace notes. Much of it is in the familiar vein of we're-all-in-analysis New York humor, but the play also lets us know that these folks' intermingled neuroses and their occasional despair are finally no joke.

It also helps to have a smashing cast. As Gladys, May—the great comic writer-performer, once famously partnered with Mike Nichols—is a convincingly frail 86, and in a return to stage acting after decades, she seems, like Gladys, both slightly out of place and utterly at home. Hedges is an excellent, utterly transparent emotional lightning rod, while Cromer and Cera each etch distinctive portraits of



Photo: Joan Marcus

Elaine May, pictured with Lucas Hedges, returns to stage acting after decades in "The Waverly Gallery."

annoying but lovable men.

But it is Allen, as the matriarch in the middle, just barely holding it together with pursed lips and a racing, pent-up mind, who emerges as the play's secret weapon. In a wrenching final scene, after Gladys has been packed off to her next chapter, Daniel reaches out for his own mother, unable to believe that she, too, may one day recede from him. She seems to know better, as mothers do, and the two hug hungrily, as if storing up affection for the estrangement and separation to come.

And then Daniel turns to us and delivers what felt to me like a short homily on human perseverance and struggle, and all my misgivings about the play's direct address were forgotten. "I never want to forget what happened to her," he tells us. "I want to remember every detail because it really happened to her, and it seems like somebody should remember it." Honoring the intense love that has both bound and cursed Gladys and her family, he concludes, "It makes you think it must be worth a lot to be alive."

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

## John Cheever's sad Christmas story

The Dec. 24, 1949, issue of *The New Yorker* included a story by John Cheever, "Christmas Is a Sad Season for the Poor." While the dramatic, suffering-filled narratives that accompany Lent are perfect fodder for literature, Advent is comparatively spare. The liturgical and spiritual season is, overall, one of joy, not always the best ingredient for storytelling. There is the classic Charles Dickens tale "A Christmas Carol" and even Ernest Hemingway's Parisian essay "Christmas at the Roof of the World," but most Christmas tales are Hallmark fare. Not John Cheever's story.

"Christmas Is a Sad Season for the Poor" is about Charlie, an elevator operator in New York City, who wakes at six in the morning on Christmas Day. Unlike the "millions and millions [who] were sleeping" that holiday morning, Charlie leaves his room in a boarding house, eats breakfast and takes an elevated train uptown to Sutton Place, where he has been working as an elevator operator for the past six months—a job he has been doing in various buildings for a decade.

Charlie thinks of the thousands of miles that he has traveled in a "six-by-six elevator cage"—how he really has not gone anywhere over the years. He fantasizes about rising out of the

building and riding the elevator car "through the mists above the Caribbean" and landing "on some coral beach in Bermuda." Those reveries are cut short by the monotony of his job and the refrain of his sadness.

Charlie reaches his lowest point when he begins telling the elevator riders that he has children: four living, two deceased. "The majesty of his lie overwhelmed him." Soon the residents begin bringing Charlie drinks, food and gifts: an alligator skin wallet, steak knives, even gifts "for his imaginary children." Charlie feels guilty, but he washes it away with drink.

Cheever was a lifelong Episcopalian with a stern formality to his conception of faith—possibly an attempt to counter to the struggles of his life. His grand conception of God meant the real world—city or suburb—often felt inadequate. Perhaps Cheever felt the same melancholy as Charlie. What Charlie wanted more than food or frills was to be cared for; he wanted to find peace. Cheever's story offers us a reminder about Advent: to give is better than to receive, but to love is best of all.

Nick Ripatrazone has written for *Rolling Stone*, *The Atlantic*, *The Paris Review* and *Esquire*.



Cheever was a lifelong Episcopalian with a stern formality to his conception of faith.

AP Photo

# Swept Away

Readings: Zep 3:14-18, Is 12:2-6, Phil 4:4-7, Lk 3:10-18

“His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” It is arresting to hear Luke call such statements “good news.” The words strike many as harsh because few who read them today long for the world around them to come to an end. The world’s economic and social realities serve the basic needs of many today, and losing those structures would cause great hardship.

This was not the case in Jesus’ day. The Roman overlords of first-century Palestine imposed the kind of economic and political structure that we would now call imperialism. The primary beneficiaries were distant officials in Rome or province capitals. Below them were local collaborators who benefited in small ways from the wealth they gathered or the submission they enforced. The rest of society labored to secure these benefits for them. Members of this remainder group came from a variety of backgrounds. Some had significant wealth or social standing but refused to collaborate. Others were quite poor and suffered constant insecurity. Either way, the structures of the world as they understood it did not serve their basic needs. Many dreamed of an apocalyptic day when God would sweep these realities away.

Social structures begin in the human imagination. People with access to wealth or power can project their imagination deep into the material world. Sometimes their imagination provides great gifts; sometimes they simply use it to exploit. John the Baptist’s call for transformation and repentance was a call for a world in which human imagination would work in concert with God’s. And God’s dream bore little resemblance to the world the Romans had created. God demanded that slaves be freed, debtors forgiven and foreigners welcomed.

Entering God’s imagination requires inner conversion and external signs that a transformation has occurred. Throughout Luke’s Gospel, this is easiest for the poor, who have everything to gain if the structures of empire give way to the imagination of God. It may come as a surprise to us that

*‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’ (Lk 3:16)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How do you use your gifts to serve God’s dreams?

If the world ended today, would you feel loss or relief?

tax collectors and soldiers too sought John’s baptism and trusted him to recognize in their obedience to his direction (not taking more than what is legally theirs, not harassing or blackmailing people) a sign of their conversion. Roman rule may have looked invincible, but the readiness of these “local enforcers” to hear a different message reveals its shaky foundations. They also sought a different world.

The structures of the world may serve the needs of a much wider group of people today than they did in Jesus’ day, but they still impoverish and exploit many. Luke identifies the comfortable classes of his day as the ones most resistant to the Gospel. Christians today must discern carefully whether they have fallen prey to the same temptation to resist Jesus’ preaching for the sake of their own comfort. Even if the world serves their needs, the Gospel calls them to be at the side of those who would feel relief if the present world were swept away.

When Christ comes again, may he find his disciples comforting a victim of human trafficking, giving encouragement to a homeless addict, repairing the damage inflicted on an abused spouse or mentoring an abandoned child. By these signs he will recognize their transformation. These disciples will be the wheat he gathers into his barns.

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

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# Recognizing the Presence

Readings: Mi 5:1-4, Ps 80, Heb 10:5-10, Lk 1:39-45

Mary's visit to Elizabeth, recorded only in Luke's Gospel, is a masterpiece of narrative writing. By focusing on the expressions of joy at Mary's arrival, Luke took an everyday encounter and turned it into a study of contemplation.

Luke wrote his Gospel in part to teach his readers how to pray and passed on some of the most beautiful prayers of the early church. Some of these endure today in the church's liturgy. Mary's great prayer that we call the Magnificat, for example, which appears in the passage that immediately follows this Sunday's Gospel reading, is prayed every day as part of the church's evening prayer.

In addition to these words of praise, Luke hoped to teach his audience internal dispositions of prayer. Luke recounts that Jesus withdrew regularly into the wilderness to pray (for example, Lk 5:16), and that it was on one of these wilderness retreats that he taught the disciples the Lord's Prayer (Lk 11:2-4). Luke also highlighted the spiritual exercise that today we call "discernment." Mary encountered grace when she "kept all these things in her heart"

(Lk 2:51). The disciples at Emmaus recognized their encounter with the risen Christ only after they came to trust their hearts, which had been burning within them (Lk 24:32). Teaching Christians to cultivate similar awareness of grace was among Luke's goals.

It is one thing to find such grace in dramatic events; it is quite another to catch sight of God in the everyday. In this Sunday's Gospel reading, a poor traveler arrives, and an unborn baby stirs in the womb as his mother greets the traveler with joy. This account contains little drama, but in Luke's recounting, grace saturates the scene. Luke wrote to remind his audience never to stop seeking the divine presence. Even the simplest moment has in it a world-changing significance for anyone who is ready to find the work of God.

"Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" Luke never explains how Elizabeth recognized the grace before her. She cries out with sudden insight like Moses' sister Miriam and the other prophetic women of the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps Elizabeth knew that any moment of joy provided a matrix for grace. As she looked into the depths of the joy she felt at Mary's presence, she recognized in it the presence of God.

Luke's emphasis on prayer and his ability to find God in overlooked places suggests a lifelong habit of attention to daily gifts of grace. More than any other New Testament writer, Luke draws his readers to Christ's three arrivals among humanity. The first arrival was the nativity, the second occurs daily among his disciples in the Spirit, and the final appearance will usher in the end of time. It is that second, daily, arrival that Luke highlights in this Gospel passage. Encountering Christ in this way was the fruit of Luke's own prayer.

Luke shows us how to be just as attentive. In her joy, Elizabeth recognized the world's redemption. Just so, we must seek the latent grace in every encounter. Thus recognizing God at work, we will learn to find the infinite potential of every joy.

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

*'Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.'* (Lk 1:45)

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How has grace come to you in everyday events?

What practices help you cultivate awareness of God's presence?

When has joy revealed God's presence to you?

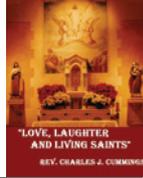
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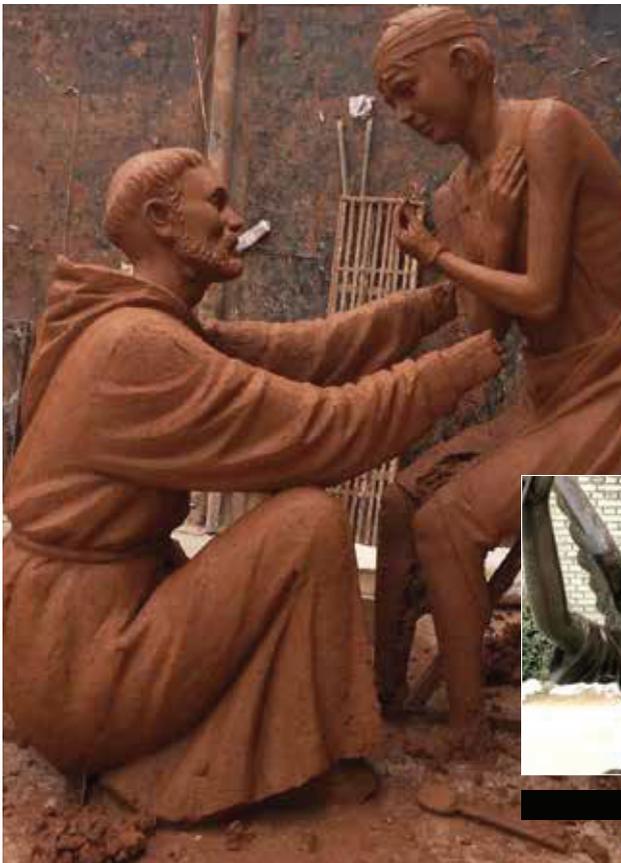
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# His Healing Love

*How trauma can bring us closer to God*

By Miriam James Heidland



The human heart is a beautiful mystery. Within each of us is a captivating story of hope and sorrow, trial and triumph. Part of my story is that I am a recovering addict and a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. These wounds fracture a person to the very core of their being and cry out for restoration and justice. My experience has been a long and important journey to regain wholeness, innocence, beauty and peace. I have learned that our interior world is full of dreams and visions, setbacks and stumbling blocks. Yet, in it all, we each have a deep desire, if only “seen dimly as in a mirror” (1 Cor 13:12), for an abundant life of eternal communion, joy and love.

Nearly all of us hold a great deal of pain within our hearts, and we often struggle with unanswered questions and unexplored chapters of our own story. We are connected to others by technology but still feel incredibly lonely. The desire for deep and meaningful connection is part of what it means to be human, but many times, we do not know how to begin the process of building relationships or how to be appropriately vulnerable with the ones we love the most.

For the past 10 years, I have been able to share my journey of encountering God’s healing love and mercy at conferences and retreats with audiences of all ages and backgrounds across the nation.

As people experience the love and mercy of God, it allows them to open their hearts and share their stories of sorrow and resurrection as well. So often in life all we really want is someone to listen to us, to behold our hearts and to remind us of who we are—that we are not alone, that suffering is not the end of the story and that our deepest identity is found in being sons and daughters of God, who makes all things new.

To begin that process, however, we must honestly admit what has been lost. Recovering means to regain strength, balance, composure. Perhaps to put it more simply, it is the regaining of oneself, a journey that will not take place until we take an honest and ongoing inventory of the damage done to us, admit where we have gone astray in darkness and have the courage and willingness to be transformed, no matter the cost. True recovery is all in. Nothing will be accomplished by living in half measures.

Advent is a wonderful time to enter more intentionally into this journey of healing. Jesus Christ comes to us as a small, vulnerable child to show us how to be human and how to trust. What are the areas in our lives that are shrouded in darkness? Where do we fear vulnerability and trust? It is in these very places that Jesus waits to encounter us and bring us new life.

The area of deepest need is precisely the human heart where God dwells. God is for us, and he desires our lives not to

be hidden behind facades and shadows but to be lived transparently in the light of his love. As we begin the honest journey of opening up all the chambers of our heart to God and to people in our lives whom we trust, new life begins to grow and bloom.

This is what I witness as I see people encounter Jesus in their lives. I see them regaining new life and new hope even in the midst of suffering. They are regaining their very selves in Christ. Jesus shows us what it means to be human: to have a heart fully open to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. May it be so for each one of us. The journey is worth it. And so are you.

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*Miriam James Heidland is a member of the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity and resides in Texas. She is the author of *Loved As I Am* and speaks regularly at conferences and retreats across the nation. She hosts the podcast “Abiding Together.” Twitter: @onegroovynun.*

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