

America

JULY 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE



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1. During a congressional hearing in 1957, this U.S. senator and future president said that an article in **America** was wrong to claim that Catholic parents were excommunicated for not sending their children to parochial schools.

2. John Wynne, S.J., the founder of **America**, modeled the magazine on this British periodical, which shares a name with the newspaper of the Diocese of Brooklyn.

3. This former governor of New Jersey, who also served as a co-chair of the 9/11 Commission, is a subscriber and contributor to **America**.

4. Joseph A. Califano Jr., a former member of the board of directors of **America**, accompanied President Lyndon B. Johnson to the funeral of this prominent American prelate in December 1967.

5. Ethel Kennedy, an **America** subscriber, invoked the teachings of this medieval thinker to rebut the points the philosopher A. J. Ayer was making at a dinner at the White House in 1962.

6. The byline of this actress, who portrayed the wife of Ray Romano’s character in the CBS sitcom “Every-

body Loves Raymond,” appeared in **America** in 2017.

7. John LaFarge, S.J., fifth editor in chief, was a close friend of A. Phillip Randolph, the leader of the first predominantly African-American labor union. They successfully lobbied this man to ban discrimination in the defense industry in the spring of 1941.

8. The late Zbigniew Brzezinski, a subscriber and a graduate of the Jesuit-sponsored Loyola College in Toronto, served as national security advisor to this U.S. president.

9. This occasional contributor to **America** served as archbishop of Munich and Freising from 1977 to 1982. Later, he had a much bigger job.

10. Robert Hartnett, S.J., sixth editor in chief, published a controversial op-ed in *The Chicago Tribune* in 1957 in which he criticized this man for instituting a military staff system at the White House.

11. Robert I. Gannon, S.J., a frequent contributor to **America**, was assigned to reopen this Jesuit institution in 1930, which had been closed since World War I, and is still located in Jersey City, N.J.

12. Drew Christensen, S.J., the 13th editor in chief, grew up in this place, also known as Richmond County, N.Y.

13. This man, who was the last U.S. president without a college degree, wrote to **America**’s editors to congratulate them on the occasion of the magazine’s 40th anniversary.

14. For 50 years the editorial offices of **America** were located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, not far from the resting place of this U.S. president.

15. Msgr. James H. Murphy re-

ceived a letter from this woman in 1938, in which she thanked him for his review of her novel, *Gone With the Wind*, in **America** magazine.

16. Charlie Sykes, an occasional contributor to **America**, hosted a podcast for this conservative magazine, which was founded by Bill Kristol. It abruptly ceased publication in 2018.

17. Daily Double: This U.S. representative from Michigan was a contributor to **America**. At 59 years, he enjoyed the longest congressional tenure in U.S. history.

18. The editors of **America** initially took the wrong side in this conflict, which Ernest Hemingway covered for the North American Newspaper Alliance.

19. Maurice Timothy Reidy, **America**’s deputy editor in chief, graduated from this university in New Jersey, which the playwright Eugene O’Neill had also attended—before dropping out in 1907.

20. This man, the 14th editor in chief, portrayed Don Quixote in his high school production of “Man of La Mancha.” Some believe that he is still tilting at windmills.

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



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An image of Alfred Healy is projected onto the home of his daughter, Eileen Driscoll, left, in Holyoke, Mass., May 7. Healy, a U.S. Army Korean War veteran and resident of the Soldier's Home in Holyoke, Mass., died from the Covid-19 virus at the age of 91.

Cover: Maisie Brown, 18, helps lead a protest march over police brutality, Jackson, Miss., on June 6
AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis

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Recognizing racism in myself

In the spirit of this issue's lead essay by **America's** editor in chief, Matt Malone, S.J., "An Open Letter to My Fellow White Americans" (Page 18), we asked our readers to examine their own personal experiences and reflect on times when they have seen or recognized examples of racial prejudice in their own lives.

I found that I expressed my white privilege by saying things along the lines of, "My best friend is bi-racial, so I can't be racist" or "I'm colorblind—a person's skin color does not matter to me." I have only recently come to realize that anecdotal evidence of my relationships did not preclude internalized racism, and claiming to be "colorblind" was itself racist, being a form of erasure. By not "seeing color," I was othering entire communities and individuals in such a way that their identities would fit my own worldview. I sinned by failing to see and listen to others.

Robert Mcdonald

Richmond, Va.

I attended a conference in Baltimore. When it was over, I went to the parking lot to pick up my car. There was an African-American man standing by the attendant's place where the keys were kept. He was fairly well dressed. I went up to him and asked him to get my car.

Here, he was waiting for the attendant to return with his car. He told me he was a lawyer. Thank goodness he had a sense of humor; we chuckled and chatted a bit. That incident laid bare the unconscious racial prejudices deep within my soul.

Angelo Bucchino

Frostburg, Md.

I remember hearing someone speak once and saying, "I'm surprised a colored person spoke so well." I would not have thought that I believed this, nor would I have said it, but that came from inside of me. I am totally embarrassed to write this.

Sr. Joanne Roy

Saco, Me.

I live in Hungary. Even though racism has a different form here than in the United States, it still exists. The targets of racism here are people of gypsy origin. To be very honest, sometimes when I see them, I feel some distant disgust caused by their unique lifestyle. Even though I do everything not to make it seen (I try to be as kind and

friendly with them as possible), this feeling is still there. I try to focus on the fact that they have severe hardships in life because of racism; and even if I might not be able to help it, I try (at least with my actions) not to make it even more difficult for them. Thank you for being able to tell it to you.

Agnes Dorozsmai

Dunakeszi, Hungary

By sharing books such as *The Other Wes Moore*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Between The World and Me* with a friend who is the director of a member club of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America as a means to inspire children. My friend is black. I am sure now, looking back, he probably thought these kids don't need to be reminded how amazing they are; they need YOU and your white friends to realize this.

I should have been sharing all the gorgeous books, written by so many wonderful authors of color, that I have read with the white world. Note taken. Apology given. Behavior changing. I want to establish a rich library of black culture and history in my church community.

Lisa McGann

Bel Air, Md.

As a teacher, I remember thinking that I was being harder on students of color to "help" them see they could do better if they just put more effort forth.

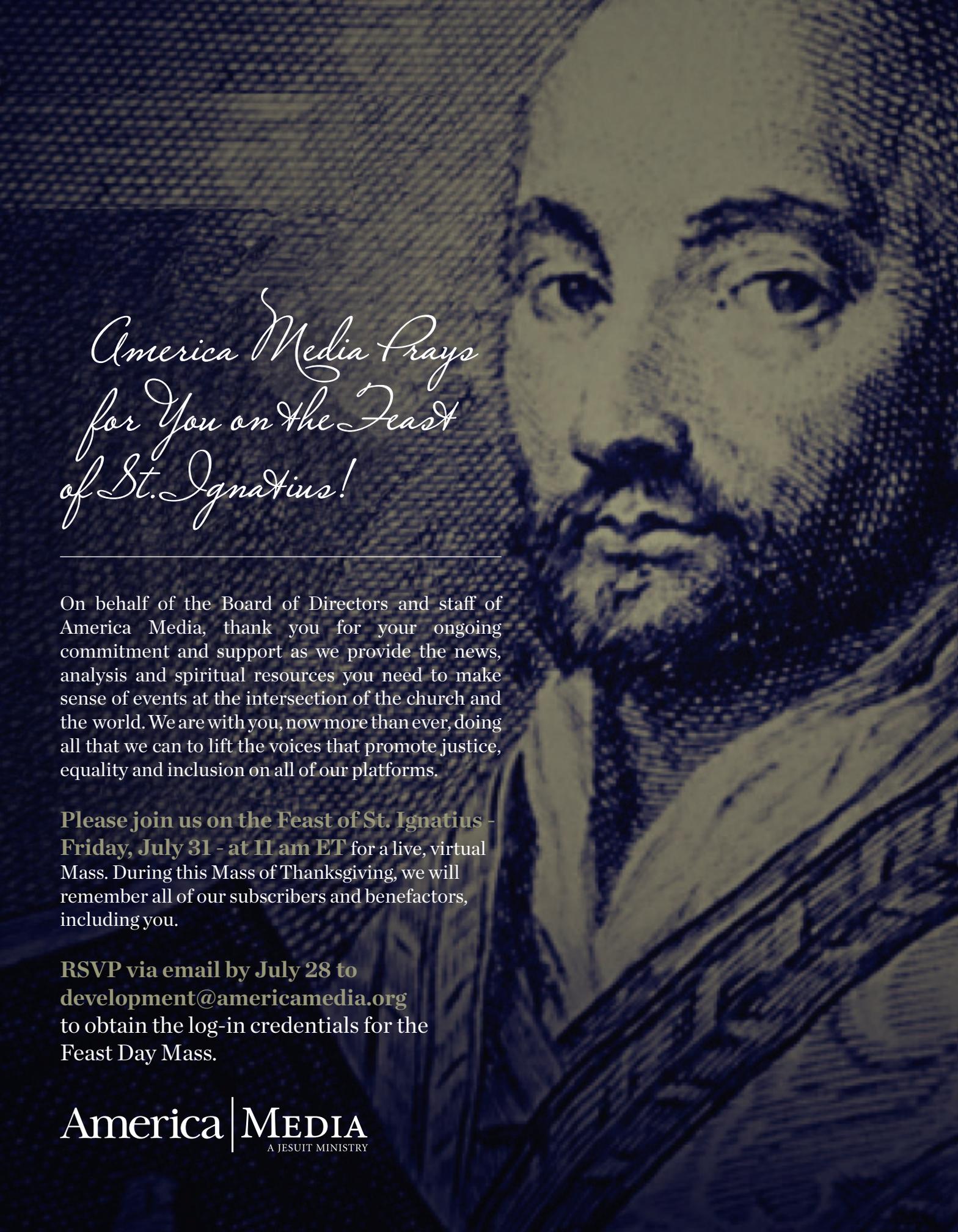
Christine Lauster

Clyde, N.Y.

I have not initiated real mutual relationships with African-American people, relationships that grow into friendships, sharing our lives in a continuous way.

Juxith Ryan

Seattle, Wash.



*America Media Prays
for You on the Feast
of St. Ignatius!*

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of America Media, thank you for your ongoing commitment and support as we provide the news, analysis and spiritual resources you need to make sense of events at the intersection of the church and the world. We are with you, now more than ever, doing all that we can to lift the voices that promote justice, equality and inclusion on all of our platforms.

Please join us on the Feast of St. Ignatius - Friday, July 31 - at 11 am ET for a live, virtual Mass. During this Mass of Thanksgiving, we will remember all of our subscribers and benefactors, including you.

RSVP via email by July 28 to development@americamedia.org to obtain the log-in credentials for the Feast Day Mass.

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Americans Are Still Capable of Sacrifice for the Common Good

The conventional wisdom goes something like this: The foundations of American civic life are buckling. Polarization drives our national life, from cable news to the lecture halls to the conversations at Thanksgiving dinner. Trust in nearly every institution, government, the media and religion has plummeted. In a certain light, it seems as if Americans have given up on the idea of a common project or the common good.

Yet the events of 2020 have revealed that even in the face of concurrent political, economic and public health emergencies, the American people still have deep reservoirs of patience, prudence and concern for the commonweal.

The coronavirus continues to deal a heavy blow. More than 100,000 of our neighbors have died. We have lost family, friends, millions of jobs, along with the normal order and sacred rituals that organize our responses to moments of hardship and loss. Life as we knew it has effectively ground to a halt. And that has required us to temper our individual actions (even if in vastly varying degrees) for the health and safety of all.

Some of these measures were imposed by the power of the state, but individual Americans were taking precautions seriously before they were legally obligated to do so. A poll in March found that 90 percent of Americans had ceased going out and had started to practice social distancing. GPS data from Cuebiq, a private data company, confirmed that in every state, Americans were staying home before stay-at-home orders were issued. We will need this spirit of sacrifice again when the epidemic spikes or returns in a second wave.

If widespread compliance with stay-at-home orders—despite the cost to livelihoods and mental health—evinced a latent commitment to the common good, the mostly peaceful responses to the killing of George Floyd have also called forth our better national instincts, as Americans were again reminded of the plight of those who have been denied prosperity and justice for far too long. While the proper balance between social distancing and protesting was not immediately clear, the widespread use of masks in the protests made it clear that Americans were concerned about both, but many judged that the need for justice was urgent enough to require immediate response.

In a letter to **America** in the days following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jeane Joseph Daly, C.S.J., of St. Louis, expressed her hope that “the example of his life and the shock of its tragic ending [would] summon all white Americans to join our black brothers in completing the work he was not permitted to finish.” Tragically, many white Americans did not heed the call—not then, nor even after the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland and so many others.

Yet in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, there are signs of a new solidarity. Canvassing by researchers shows that there are significant numbers of white men and women among the protesters marching throughout the country. Citizens are organizing to demand greater accountability from corporations and public figures, as well as meaningful action instead of the customary posturing on social media and through public statements. Books opposing racism

have shot to the top of best-seller lists; and documentaries like “13th,” released in 2016 and directed by Ava DuVernay, are among Netflix’s most-streamed offerings.

Just as the pandemic requires our continued vigilance, we must maintain the momentum toward social and political change. Bob Moses, an icon of the 1960s civil rights movement, recently told *The New York Times* that George Floyd’s murder “has opened up a crevasse, so to speak, through which all this history is pouring, like the Mississippi River onto the Delta. It’s pouring into all the streams of TV, cable news, social media.... And the question is, can the country handle it?” Mr. Moses concluded soberly, “We don’t know.... [The United States] can lurch backward as quickly as it can lurch forward.”

If the pandemic and the swell of protests have shown that Americans are still capable of heeding the call of their better angels, it has also exposed the flaws and deficiencies of our political leadership.

As St. John XXIII pointed out in his encyclical “*Mater et Magistra*,” individual citizens and the state “must work together in harmony, and their respective efforts must be proportioned to the needs of the common good.” But when individual citizens fulfill their end of the bargain while “the good offices of the state are lacking or deficient, incurable disorder ensues: in particular, the unscrupulous exploitation of the weak by the strong.”

To be sure, there have been a few profiles in courage throughout these days, leaders like Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, who has led the federal response to the pandemic, and Keisha Lance Bottoms,

the mayor of Atlanta, who has rallied her city to the standard of justice and public order. But there are too few examples of such leadership. President Trump seems incapable of viewing events through any lens save that of how it might affect his own political survival. But the crisis also extends beyond the White House gates.

Our leaders were given early warnings and ample time to address the coronavirus. Yet their actions were often too timid and too late to save more lives. Sustained protests against racism have rallied widespread public support for substantive reforms to policing and the criminal justice system. Yet some of our political leaders seem content to wait for this moment to pass, anticipating, perhaps, a return to the status quo.

But the country will not return to the status quo, nor should any American wish for it to do so. The world has been changed by these events, and we are only beginning to grasp fully the implications. More dramatic change is surely coming. If that change is to be positive and far-reaching, then the country will need civic leaders who embody the selfless spirit and true concern for the common good that its people have thus far amply demonstrated.

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How to ensure that racial justice vigils do justice to their cause

“Today, we are here to affirm that all human lives are sacred,” announced the priest presiding at a vigil for George Floyd in Boston in June. The 30-minute vigil never included the words “black” or “African-American.” I stood in the back of the almost-all-white crowd, watching one white person after another step up to read Scripture and offer prayer intentions to “end all violence.”

Standing before the Catholic church in a majority-black neighborhood, I couldn’t help but ask: Where are the black voices in this vigil? Where is the affirmation that black lives matter?

Many Catholic parishes and communities are holding vigils and prayer services for the black lives lost through racialized violence, but they can miss the mark. Vigils must speak truth by naming the sins of racism and police brutality. They must speak truth with precision of language. Catholic leaders must place black experiences of life, death and injustice at the center of these vigils.

A week before the Boston vigil, my alma mater, the University of Notre Dame, hosted a vigil called A Prayer for Unity, Walk for Justice. The university’s president, John Jenkins, C.S.C., opened his remarks with a condemnation of the violence of the racism perpetuated against black Americans. But he soon transitioned to expressing gratitude for police officers: “Whatever our reaction to Mr. Floyd’s death, it must not be to smear the work and reputation of the thousands of good officers who serve us.” I wondered: Where was the call for racial bias training and increased accountability for campus and municipal police officers?

Father Jenkins also cited the nonviolent protests of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s to warn that “we should not allow violence and hatred into our hearts.” This is a good principle, but we should remember that the earlier civil rights movement was widely seen as uncivil, subversive and even violent at the time. We must be careful not to romanticize it in such a way that any mistakes by the protesters of today—or any instances of violence by opportunists who do not have social justice at heart—are used to condemn the act of public protest itself.

Vigils can also inadvertently perpetuate myths about racism. I saw a rosary procession online in which a priest proclaimed, “We offer this time of prayer in reparation for all the sins of racism committed by all races in the United States of America.” Such a statement perpetuates the myth that people of color are responsible for reverse racism against white Americans.

Not all vigils miss the mark. On June 1 in El Paso, Tex., Bishop Mark Seitz and 12 other priests knelt in silence for 8 minutes and 46 seconds—the length of time that the Minneapolis police officer had knelt on George Floyd’s neck—and Bishop Seitz called upon Catholic leaders to listen to the grievances voiced by centuries of black Americans. In Boston on May 31, an ecumenical coalition of Protestant and Catholic clergy organized a prayer march for racial justice, led by black clergy members. The march concluded with calls for justice, such as the prosecution of those involved in recent killings and a more equitable distribution of resources that prioritizes historically marginalized communities.

There are specific ways to ensure that vigils do justice to those whom they commemorate. First, amplify black voices in the community. If your community does not have black members, read an excerpt of writing from a contemporary black writer on racial justice. Alternatively, spread the news about black clergy-led vigils in the area rather than organizing a separate event.

Second, use specific language that centers the black experience. Vigils for black lives must name the reality of racism and anti-black violence. Vague calls for the protection of all lives further conceal the reality of racism that white and non-black Catholics must confront.

Third, conclude the vigil with a concrete call to action. Commit to some of these actions on the parish or community-level, such as a racial justice-related movie screening or a letter-writing campaign to local representatives.

Standing among the majority-white crowd in Boston, I lamented how a vigil intended to mourn deceased black lives had inadvertently silenced living black voices—their voices of grief and holy anger, their calls for justice and social change. During the brief moment of silence for George Floyd, I prayed for a day when vigils of remembrance become calls to repentance. Only when vigils compel white and non-black Catholics to repent of their sins of racism and their participation in structures of privilege, can we begin to pray for and imagine a church in which black lives truly matter.

Flora x. Tang recently received a master's degree in theological studies from Harvard Divinity School.

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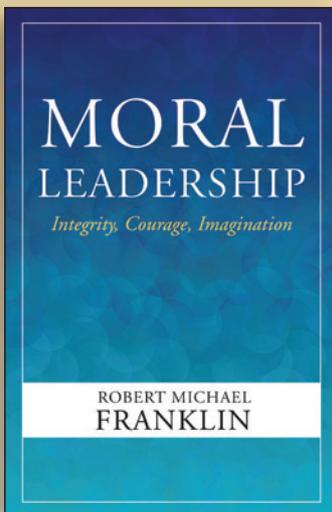
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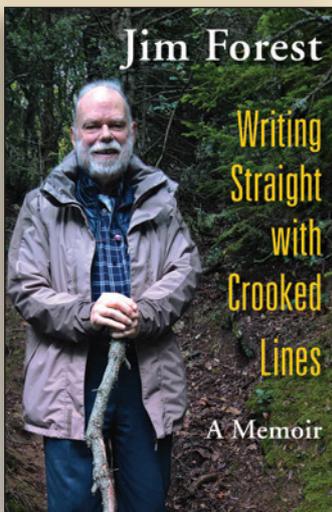
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 A photograph of a priest in a red cape performing a ritual in a church sanctuary. The priest is kneeling on a wooden floor, holding a golden censer. In the background, a woman stands at a podium, and the altar is decorated with a large cross and potted plants. The scene is lit with warm, ambient light.

In San Jose, the church recovers from Covid-19

By J.D. Long-García

It is not uncommon to see a Tesla or a Lexus among the cars in line for food donations at parishes in the Diocese of San Jose, Calif., according to the Rev. Jon G. Pedigo, director of advocacy and community engagement for Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County.

Catholic Charities is coordinating weekly food “drive thrus” to address needs during the Covid-19 pandemic. Together with parish chapters of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, they sometimes feed as many as 1,000 families in 90 minutes, Father Pedigo told **America**. The collaboration with parishes reaches 50,000 people every week.

“What we’re helping to do is set up an infrastructure,” he said, noting that volunteers register those who come for follow-up calls. Catholic Charities is pivoting from relief to recovery.

The goal is to move from the food program to person-to-person care, and Catholic Charities bands together with other nonprofit agencies to offer comprehensive service. They are piloting a program at Our Lady of Refuge to bring together accompaniment teams that serve clients for 120 days, helping them navigate available resources. The program brings parishioners from wealthy and low-income parishes together.

“Once you are at the table with a fellow person of faith and you have the *encuentro*, there’s a mutual transformation,” Father Pedigo said of the encounter. “We’re creating a network of people to see each other. We’re never going to go back to the same siloed lives we had before. The questions and conversations will be different.”

Santa Clara County is in California’s Bay Area, which has the highest income inequality in the state. Billionaires live next to the poor in Silicon Valley. “Shelter-in-place has caused an even greater disparity,” Father Pedigo said.

While California put in place a moratorium on rent, many families had been living from paycheck to paycheck before the pandemic and will be unable to pay back rent once it comes due, he said. Some families share apartments, with 12 to 20 people living together, meaning “they don’t have a safe place to shelter in place,” he said.

Recently, Bridget Balajadia, project manager with Catholic Charities, met a man who rents a corner of a shed for \$200 a month. The man, who is over 65, shares the shed with three other men. The state moratorium on rent does not protect people in his situation.

“I just need a job,” the man, an immigrant from Vietnam, told Ms. Balajadia. He had worked in factories all his life.



CNS photo/courtesy Diocese of San Jose

Bishop Oscar Cantu celebrates a Palm Sunday prayer service in a nearly empty St. Joseph's Cathedral on April 5.

“There are so many people that we aren’t even aware of,” she said.

Catholic Charities clients are struggling with fatigue, increased anxiety, financial trouble and child care, Ms. Balajadia said. Some parents are no longer able to work because their children are at home.

Suicide rates have also increased during shelter-in-place, she said. In Walnut Creek, doctors are reporting more suicides than Covid-19 deaths. Santa Clara County has also seen an increase in fentanyl overdoses during the pandemic.

While some in Silicon Valley ruminate about working from home going forward, Ms. Balajadia said low-income workers in supportive industries would

suffer for it. “All of those people won’t have jobs to return to if people stay remote,” she said. “The disparity is going to get even bleaker.”

In Gilroy, St. Mary Church feeds 3,000 families a week through St. Joseph Family Center, the pastor, the Rev. Michael Hendrickson, told *America*. That includes curbside pickups and a team that drops off food boxes at family homes. “That’s the biggest impact—preventing mass starvation,” he said.

Rental assistance is another great need, Father Hendrickson said. “Once the moratorium on evictions is lifted, it’s going to be really bad,” he said.

“If you can’t work from home, it’s so much worse,” he said, explaining that many of his parishioners work in service, food processing and retail industries. “My parishioners have been badly hurt. It’s frustrating as a priest to have this situation, and you can only do so much.”

Father Hendrickson said he has been overseeing fewer funerals, though he is not sure why. “Anointing of the sick is way down,” he said. “It’s nearly impossible to anoint someone with Covid-19.”

There are about 20,000 Catholics in his parish, most of them from Latin American backgrounds. His youth minister, Carlos Barba, hosts weekly Facebook Live events in

English and Spanish.

Every weekend, Father Hendrickson celebrates an English and a Spanish-language Mass, which are both live-streamed. The parish also streams daily Masses, which alternate between English and Spanish each day.

“Livestream can’t replace the priest and assembly worshipping together and receiving the Eucharist,” he said. “We’re a community church with many multigenerational families. We’re looking forward to reopening.”

The financial impact of the pandemic led the Diocese of San Jose to reduce operating expenses through voluntary retirements, reduced hours and layoffs, though a spokesperson would not say how many people were affected. But at least for the time being, there are no plans to close any of the 26 elementary schools or six high schools.

Principals and teachers have increased their hours during the pandemic, said Caroline Sliney, associate superintendent. “Principals and teachers feel closer,” she said. “They’re collaborating and pulling together resources to serve students.”

Access to online education has been an ongoing concern in some families, Ms. Sliney said. Some students do their homework, including essays, on their phones.

“It’s a balance for families and teachers,” she said. “Half of it is getting the technology and half is walking with the parents at home.”

Some parents have to figure out how to schedule video conferences for themselves as well as a number of children.

“It was very much a testament to our team and to the kids regarding what we preach—that we are always learning and growing and supporting each other in what we do,” Ms. Sliney said. “It’s always what we do in Catholic schools, but we’ve done it more now.”

“We of course want our kids back to school, but we have to do that safely,” she said. The last day of class was June 4, and schools are already preparing for both online and in-person classes next fall.

“Our goal is to stay as creative and innovative as possible and be there for what our kids need,” Ms. Sliney said. “As much as it has been challenging, the spirit of community has been really beautiful.”

J.D. Long-García, *senior editor*.
Twitter: @jlonggarcia.

Covid-19 hits African-American, Hispanic and Native American communities the hardest

The coronavirus epidemic claimed more than 120,000 lives by late June, and its effects have been felt in communities across the country—but not equally. Emerging data show that people of color, especially African-Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans, are dying at higher rates than white Americans. In particular, African-Americans are dying at a rate three times greater than their population share.

Contributing factors to the disproportionate health outcomes among people of color include diminished access to health care and paid sick days, higher exposure to pollution, lower rates of employment in positions that could transition to telecommuting and a disproportionate share of jobs in food and grocery, transportation and janitorial positions deemed essential to the running of the economy during the crisis. Nearly a quarter of employed Hispanics and African-Americans work these front-line service industry jobs, compared with 16 percent of white Americans, putting them at elevated risk of infection and death from the coronavirus.

For many, housing conditions, whether in urban neighborhoods, agricultural communities or on Native American reservations, have made social distancing nearly impossible. Because of the lack of affordable housing, multiple generations sometimes have to live under one roof, heightening the risk of transmission among family members and particularly endangering older adults.

In large cities, pollution poses further health risks. Studies show that African-Americans and Hispanics bear a “pollution burden”: they are exposed to far more pollution than they create, in part because they are more likely to live near power plants and heavy industry. The disproportionate exposure leads to long-term respiratory issues that can put them at higher risk of mortality from Covid-19.

Finally, ethnicity and race affect access to health care. Hispanics and African-Americans are far more likely than white Americans to be uninsured, but they also must contend with the biases of medical professionals. One study of implicit bias found that 70 percent of doctors showed a preference for treating white patients over African-American patients, subtle discrimination that can lead to fewer tests and subpar treatment and health outcomes.

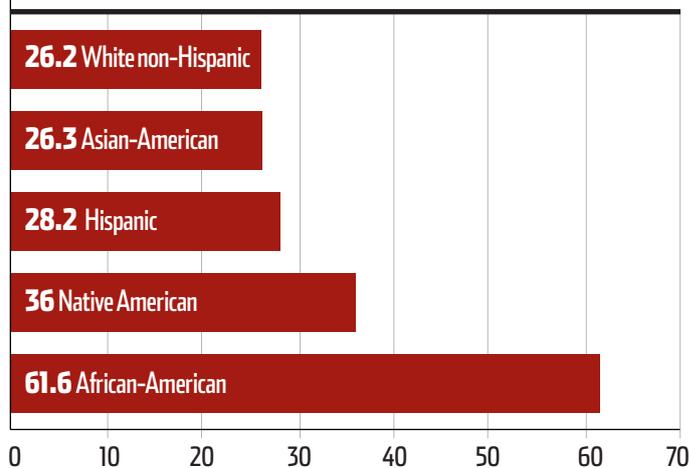
Gaby Guerrero and Maeve Orlowski-Scherer, *editorial interns*.



Dr. Ala Stanford speaks with volunteers ahead of the opening of a barrier-free Covid-19 test location outside Pinn Memorial Baptist Church in Philadelphia on April 22. Dr. Stanford and other doctors formed the Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium to offer testing and help address health disparities in the African-American.

AP Photo/Matt Rourke

Covid-19 deaths per 100,000 Americans*



Inequities escalate risk

Compared with whites, Hispanics are almost **three times more likely** to lack health insurance; African-Americans are almost **two times more likely** to be uninsured. African-Americans are nearly **70 percent more likely** to live in a zip code with a shortage of primary care physicians. Native Americans make up more than a third of the Covid-19 cases in New Mexico, but represent only **9 percent** of the state's population.

Sources: American Public Media Research Lab; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; The Atlantic: “Poor and Hispanic Workers Are Least Likely to Have Sick Days,” March 5, 2014; Economic Policy Institute; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Science Daily: “Low-income, black neighborhoods still hit hard by air pollution,” August 10, 2019; International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health; Kaiser Family Foundation. * Figures recorded June 9.



Anne Preble/Unsplash

Covid-19 disruptions may force 'buy local' food alternatives

The Covid-19 global pandemic has disrupted food production on farms and in packing and processing plants as workers take sick leave and resort to strikes to demand better conditions. For now, there is plenty of food for the nation's dinner tables, but experts expect acute shortages in certain food products, especially processed meat, in the near term, and poor countries could face broad shortages.

The biggest threats to food systems are a reduction in supply caused by labor shortages and a volatile demand that makes it hard to run a food-related business. Heavily mechanized crops like corn and wheat face fewer disruptions, but from coffee beans in Brazil to mangoes in India, anything that needs picking, plucking, cutting and carving by human hands is at risk.

U.S. consumers may be forced to buy food closer to where it is grown or processed, and they might lose access to avocados and mangoes imported from afar and marketed year-round. In that disruption, however, there is an opportunity to adapt consumer habits to align more closely to some of the precepts on consumption that derive from Catholic social teaching.

"Commodity chains hide the relationships that sustain us," said Vincent J. Miller, a professor of theology at the University of Dayton. Contemporary life in the United States obscures the experience of the agricultural and food processing workers who maintain "the conditions for our survival."

Deprived of that knowledge, it is hard to develop a moral concern for the people who manage the supply lines, Mr. Miller said. "There's a sacramental advantage to be in more direct relationship with people who produce our food," he said.

That pandemic-enforced transition from global to local has already affected a small community in Winthrop, Minn., 90 minutes west of Minneapolis. At Sloom Family Farm, Harry Sloom faced a dilemma. His main customers, including Tyson Foods, were not buying his hogs. As work-

ers fell ill to Covid-19 and processing facilities had to be decontaminated, processors had been forced to shut down or slow operations.

Mr. Sloom decided he had to change his small piece of the U.S. food supply chain. His daughter created a website. In a week, the Slooms sold the meat from around 600 hogs right to consumers—many through the family's Catholic church community.

"We're getting a lot of contact from customers who want to source their food directly," Mr. Sloom said. "It got people's attention when they went to the grocery store and saw empty shelves. It's one thing to run out of toilet paper; it's another when you can't feed your family anymore. They want to make sure they know where they can find their food."

Corporate restaurants that depend on long, intricate agribusiness conduits have sometimes struggled to locate supplies and staff all their outlets, and restaurants are getting crushed by the crisis. Instead of dining out, Americans are eating at home. That has meant a boom for grocery stores and raised pressure on farms to produce more store shelf staples.

Sean Gilbert, who owns a 4,000-acre fruit farm in eastern Washington, said apple sales briefly doubled this spring because of stockpiling runs at supermarkets. Mr. Gilbert is worried that new federal social distancing guidelines to respond to the pandemic will mean that he will hire significantly fewer workers at harvest.

Those emergency labor conditions may mean shortages could result in agricultural sectors that rely on large numbers of workers at harvest. Farmworker groups say the pandemic has highlighted existing concerns about farmworker pay and health care.

John W. Miller contributes from Pittsburgh.
Twitter: @jwmjournalist.



Chokeholds banned and police budgets cut

What's next for the Black Lives Matter movement?

Black Lives Matter protests that followed the killing of a handcuffed and helpless George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25 have led to swift changes across the country.

“With the support of the world at large, local B.L.M. activists have finally scored the monumental changes that they were seeking,” said Shannen Dee Williams, an assistant professor of history at Villanova University, responding by direct message to queries from **America**.

Noting the decision of the Minneapolis public school system to terminate its contract with the Minneapolis Police Department and a commitment from the city council to “dismantle” the existing force, she added, “I don’t think the question is: ‘How does B.L.M. move from a protest posture to authoring/influencing policy and legislation. The question is whether legislators and institutional leaders will respond to the clear demands of B.L.M. leaders and the community at large to dismantle white supremacy in all American institutions.’”

After weeks of protests, cities across the United States—and overseas—swiftly committed to reassessments of police budgets and outlawed chokeholds and neck restraints during arrests.

Tia Noelle Pratt is the executive director of the Martin de Porres Foundation and a former scholar-in-residence

at the Aquinas Center in Philadelphia. “This is an exciting time,” she said, “but no, it’s not going to be over in a month because...true liberation is going to take longer than that.”

Dr. Pratt added that a civic dialogue of reform that began around policing would inevitably have to move beyond that initial crisis. “We need to talk about jobs,” she said. “We need to talk about banking and mortgages and education. We need to talk about all of our systems.”

Maria Haberfeld teaches police training and leadership at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. A long-time proponent of police reform, she is alarmed by broad talk of defunding or dismantling departments.

America’s politicians, she charged, “are in a state of panic.”

“They are not listening to people who have a knowledge of police professions,” Dr. Haberfeld said. “They’re not listening to all the stakeholders. They’re just responding based on the pressure from the community, and they make one mistake after another.”

Dr. Haberfeld attributes the problem of police violence to foundational errors in police recruiting. Many departments accept candidates, she argues, who are too young or poorly educated, or damaged goods bounced out of other departments.



Days before another fatal police shooting, reaching across the divide in Atlanta on June 1



A SOMOS medical tent at Holy Spirit Catholic Church in the Bronx on June 6

GOODNEWS: Somos partners with church to bring Covid-19 testing to hard-hit N.Y.C. neighborhoods

Somos Community Care, a network of more than 2,500 medical providers in the New York City area, announced on June 15 that it planned to offer free Covid-19 testing in partnership with the Archdiocese of New York. Somos planned to send health workers to more than 50 churches in predominantly Latino communities in and around New York City that have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus.

Mayor Bill de Blasio said in early April that 34 percent of those who had died in the city because of Covid-19 were Latinos, 29 percent of the city's population. He said African-Americans—22 percent of the population—made up 28 percent of the city's deaths.

Dr. Ramon Tallaj, chairman and founder of Somos, said, "It is our people, our communities that are hurting the most from this virus, and houses of worship can be a haven for community members as part of our recovery process.

"This partnership with the Archdiocese of New York furthers our mission to care for the most vulnerable."

"We do need healing and unity in a time of incredible strife...in our city, our country and our world. We have got to refocus on our most vulnerable—the poor, the immigrant, the sick—as treating the sick is essential to our faith. And community doctors are the essence of that work as we try to heal and unify," Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York said about the effort.

Rhina Guidos, *Catholic News Service*

In the end, she said, hurried reforms "will just create more conflict because once people are told that there will be changes, they want to believe, right?" And when "the same thing happens over and over again...the anger just aggregates."

Dr. Pratt has a different concern. "What I don't want to see is this period of history...slip through our fingers because of a failure of imagination," she said.

"Let's imagine what our society could be like if [for example,] instead of the police responding when someone has a mental health crisis, that we have in our community a properly staffed, properly funded, rapid response team for mental health issues."

And the U.S. Catholic Church cannot exempt itself from this process, Dr. Pratt added.

It is "absolutely time" for the church to conduct an institutional examination of conscience regarding racism and its role in the toxic history of slavery in the United States. "It's hundreds of years past time for the church to start doing that work," she said.

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

AN OPEN LETTER TO MY FELLOW WHITE AMERICANS

By Matt Malone

FACING OUR HISTORY

Dear Friends:

As a sophomore in college, I watched Los Angeles burn on a black-and-white television in my dorm room. The verdict in the Rodney King trial had been rendered. Many of you probably remember that moment, or earlier events from the 1960s or '70s. The images filling our screens now may feel like some disturbing déjà vu—history repeating itself.

I did not know what to do back then—only that I wanted to do something. So I asked one of my professors, an African-American man whom I greatly respected, whether we could get together to talk. “I’m happy to talk, Matt,” he said. “But the conversation you need to have is not with me, but with your white brothers and sisters.”

I have never forgotten those words, which prompt me to write to you today—not to admonish, cajole or moralize, certainly not to pick a partisan fight, but to open up a conversation. There is something we need to talk about, my friends. Even more, there is something we need to do.

I know that we are not the same. We are different ages and different ethnicities; we come from different classes and belong to different religions. But there are at least two things we do have in common: We are white and we are Americans. I would like to talk with you about that, starting from my own experience.

...

I grew up in Massachusetts in a white middle-class family, the fifth of six children. We were Catholics. We lived on Cape Cod but we were not wealthy. We were not members of the country club; we worked there. My parents were Irish-Catholics. My grandparents were Irish-Catholics. You would be hard pressed, in fact, to find a non Irish-Catholic branch in my family tree.

I had good, loving parents—a true gift. Their greatest achievement was to break the patterns of brokenness that had characterized their family histories. My parents were not perfect, but I never doubted that I was loved, nor that I had a duty to love.

I really knew only one of my grandparents. My grandmother was a Celtic tour-de-force, an exacting matriarch who was quick to judge. She was capable of great acts of kindness, some of which she bestowed on me. She also had another side. An alcoholic who stopped drinking but never really sobered up, she was tormented by her own history. Somehow she had internalized the anti-Irish bigotry that determined the social order of turn-of-the-century Boston, and it shaped her self-worth for nearly a century. She even denied that she was Irish, admitting that fact only in her 91st year, just days before her death.

You might think that my grandmother’s personal experience of bigotry and discrimination would make her sympathetic to those in

CNS photo/Shannon Stapleton, Reuters



A man in Manhasset, N.Y., protests police brutality on June 6. Nationwide demonstrations were held after a white police officer in Minnesota was caught on a bystander's video on May 25 pressing his knee into the neck of George Floyd, an African-American, who was later pronounced dead at a hospital.

similar situations. It did not. Hurt people hurt people, they say. The same kind of bigotry that others had directed toward her my grandmother directed toward others. She was a racist. Her views and her remarks about African-Americans, Jews, Hispanics—almost any group of whom she disapproved—were cutting, searing, even for her time. As a boy, these statements only confused me. As I matured, I followed the lead of the people around her and stayed silent when she said such things. I regret that, not only because what she was saying was wrong but because my silence denied her an opportunity to change.

I loved my grandmother, though it was sometimes hard for me to understand why, apart from the significant fact that I owed my existence to her. I am inescapably a part of her and she is a part of me. “I am a part of all that I have met,” Tennyson wrote. “Though much is taken, much abides.”

I need to remember this heritage, especially when I am tempted to believe that my experience with racism ended with my grandmother.

It did not.

YOU MIGHT THINK THAT I HAVE LIVED A LIFE FREE FROM PERSONAL COMPLICITY IN PREJUDICE AND RACISM. THAT IS NOT TRUE.

...

Because I had loving parents who did not display the bigoted attitudes of the generations before them, you might think that I have lived a life free from personal complicity in prejudice and racism. That is not true. Our family histories are not the only histories we inherit. In addition to being sons and daughters, we are neighbors and citizens of the United States. We were born into that history, too, which includes much that is noble and true, and also includes slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, lynchings, discrimination, assassination and police brutality.

Most of us did not directly cause those things. We were not even alive for much of it. Most of us do not wear white hoods and burn crosses. We do not believe that any race is superior. And yes, most of us believe in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of a country where people are "judged not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

But we do not live in such a country, not yet anyway. And as a white man, that fact gives me a certain power. I do not believe that because I am an ideologue or an activist,

or because The New York Times or my Twitter feed tell me so. I believe it because I have lived it. I have often been judged, not by the content of my character, but by the color of my skin, and that judgment has nearly always redounded to my benefit.

How? That is a fair question. A few examples come to mind.

I once had an assistant who was African-American and whom I asked to make a purchase for me at a local store. I wanted my assistant to purchase some gift cards that I could give to business associates as Christmas gifts. My assistant did not get the cards, and I wondered why. It was a couple of days before my assistant explained that the purchase would have to wait for a day when a white colleague could go to the shop. The clerk at the store would not sell my assistant the gift cards.

I am sure that most of you know that this kind of discrimination is wrong. But here is the part that I did not know until it happened: During the days while I waited for an explanation from my assistant, it never occurred to me that racial discrimination might be the reason why my assistant could not make the purchase.

Why? Because it is inconceivable that such a thing would ever happen to me. Not only would a store clerk not refuse to sell me the cards but, judging me by the color of my skin (not to mention my sex), the clerk might very well assume that I have plenty of money and might even try to sell me more cards. And because I will never be in the position my assistant was in, I will also never experience the humiliation of having to explain to my boss that I cannot complete a task because of discrimination against my race.

Another story, one more proximate perhaps. Surely you have used a public restroom. Strangely enough, public



A demonstrator holds a sign during an anti-racism protest in London on June 10, following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25. CNS photo/Hannah McKay, Reuters



Police officers in Atlanta kneel with protesters advocating for racial justice on June 1. CNS photo/Dustin Chambers, Reuters

restrooms are hard to find in Manhattan. When I need one, I have learned to look for a hotel because there is usually a men's room just off the lobby. Over the years, I have walked into the lobbies of more than a dozen hotels in Manhattan and used the men's room. I have been stopped exactly once.

On that occasion, I entered the lobby with a friend who is black. He was just behind me. The white concierge nodded when he saw me, assuming, I suppose, that I was a guest or on my way to a business meeting. But my friend was stopped and was not allowed to proceed until I informed the concierge that he was with me.

Like me, you probably see the injustice in that. The only reason the concierge stopped my friend was because he is black. Again, here is the part I did not grasp at first: The only reason I was not stopped was because I am white. In that lobby, my friend and I were each judged by the color of our skin. The difference is that this judgment created an advantage for me and a disadvantage for him. In fact, it resulted in a humiliation for him, one he has experienced many times but something I had never really given a thought to until that night.

Was the concierge a racist? He certainly did not say anything like what my grandmother might have said. He even seemed a little embarrassed when I told him what was up, as if he might have known that he had done something wrong. He might have acted out of some conscious bigotry, but I do not know for sure; I knew the man for only 45 seconds.

What I do know, however, is that the concierge also inherited a history from his family, his community, his country. He, too, is a part of all that he has seen. That history might have even formed a reflexive bias in him, an automatic response, something that surprised even him. If so, I

know something about that.

Which brings me to the harder part. Those last two stories were easy to tell. This next one is not. But this is what we need to talk about and somebody needs to go first. Since this is my letter, I will.

I was in college, around that time that Los Angeles was smoldering. I had just bought a new car and as I pulled out of a supermarket parking lot, I turned to check the traffic when I saw a black man walking toward me. I immediately locked my door. He was not doing anything to suggest that he would harm me, or try to take my car, so why did I do that?

I locked my door because he was black. I am ashamed to admit that, but it happened and denying that it happened is obviously no way to make sure it will not happen again. Where did that reflex come from? I mean, in those days I was a red-flag-waving liberal. I thought I had all the right ideas and intentions. I thought I was a pretty nice guy. But that instinct to lock the door—that surprised me. And yet it did not come out of nowhere.

A few of you might say, I suppose, that this sort of crime is committed by African-Americans at disproportionate rates, so I may have been in some way justified. Even if that were true, it is beside the point. Three-quarters of all securities fraud is committed by Caucasians, but I do not hide my stock certificates every time I see a white guy. No, I did not lock my door after running some mental calculation and concluding that there was a one in a 100,000 chance that this man might mug me. There was not that much thought involved. I locked the door because he was black. It is that simple. And that means that



Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Tex., kneels at El Paso's Memorial Park holding a "Black Lives Matter" sign on June 1. After "taking a knee" during that demonstration in solidarity with George Floyd, Bishop Seitz received a call of support from Pope Francis. CNS photo/Fernie Cenicerros, courtesy Diocese of El Paso



Catholic priests from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis join African-American clergymen on June 2 to march and pray at the site in Minneapolis where George Floyd was pinned down by a police officer. CNS photo/Dave Hrbacek, The Catholic Spirit



not only do I not live in a country where people are always judged by the content of their character, but I have myself judged people according to the color of their skin.

Does that mean I am a bad person? Maybe, but not necessarily. What it definitely means is that I am a person, a human being. Like all human beings of every race, I have biases and prejudices, many of which I inherited, some born from my personal history.

But it is also more than that. I am not just any person, but a specific kind of person: I am a white man who came of age in the last quarter of the 20th century, in a country with a long history of racism; a history so deeply entrenched, so pervasive, so pernicious, that it structures my now, my habits, my thoughts, my worldview in ways I do not even know and do not always want to see.

•••

Forgive my presumption, but I think I know something else that you may be thinking: “Lots of people face hardships and challenges. I had to overcome great disadvantages. Why is race more important than anything else?” I will admit that I have asked a similar question from time to time. Here is how I think about it.

I did not have many advantages growing up, other than the singular advantage of loving parents. My father had lost his business and our family was on public assistance during the year I was born. We did face hardship, as generations of my family did before me. But the fact that my family’s history includes discrimination, adversity and hardship; the fact that I personally had to overcome illness and loss

to make something of my life; the fact that I was not born into wealth or to parents who went to Harvard; those facts, which are important, do not change the fact that as a white man, I have benefitted from living in a country where people are often judged by the color of their skin.

I have just recounted a few stories that are evidence of that fact. I am sure that you have similar stories, moments when you witnessed racism or when you recognized how prejudice factored into your choices. It is impossible to be a white person in this country and not have such stories. Maybe your stories involve big events; or maybe, like mine, your stories concern relatively small events, involving just a few people. Regardless, all of those stories appear to be chapters of an even larger story. Here is what I mean:

The poverty rate among black Americans is more than twice the rate for us, for white people. African-Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of white people. They are more than twice as likely to die at the hands of a police officer, as George Floyd did. There are many forces at work in all that, but ask yourself this: Is it likely that those big stories, those big statistics, are completely unrelated to those relatively small events, the kinds of stories I just told you? Is it not more likely that if racial prejudice is at work in places like that hotel lobby and in my Volkswagen and at the corner drugstore, then it is also at work in much larger ways, in much larger parts of our society? Does it not stand to reason that this might be a big reason why those statistics are what they are?

Racism is a big issue with a million stories. It is so big



Catholic priests from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis join protestors on June 2 in an effort to advocate for racial justice.

I HAVE WALKED INTO THE LOBBIES OF MORE THAN A DOZEN HOTELS IN MANHATTAN AND USED THE MEN'S ROOM. I HAVE BEEN STOPPED EXACTLY ONCE.

that we have a hard time getting our heads around it. But when I begin by looking at my own story; when I think it through from what I know I have experienced, then I can start to see that, as big a problem as it is, racism is not so big that I cannot begin to understand it; to see how I am a part of it; to begin to do something about it.

I do not know how to solve all these problems. What I do know is that not talking about it is not working. And while it might seem that we are always talking about race, are we? Do we white people really talk honestly with each other, let alone with our black brothers and sisters? I do not mean posturing or moralizing, or tweeting or giving lectures or writing op-eds, but talking candidly about our lives—the kind of candor that hurts. For if we find it easy to talk about race, then we are probably not really talking about it, not in an honest way, for that kind of honesty often hurts.

Yet if we cannot speak honestly, then we cannot listen generously. And that, my friends—listening—is even more important. We need to listen to our African-American fellow citizens, to all people of color. Our stories have much in common: universal experiences of sin and grace, life and death, triumph and tragedy. It is where our memories diverge, in those places where we tend to stop listening, that we need to listen most, for memory is the soul of conscience and conscience is the motive force for change.

•••

You may recall that my grandmother denied that she was Irish until nearly the day she died. For whatever tragic reason, she was ashamed of herself. I do not feel that shame, at least not in the same way. I am proud to be of Irish descent; proud of the Irish community's many contributions to this country and to my church. My grandmother was not racist because she was Irish. Yet I also know that prejudice toward non-whites is a part of the Irish experience in this country; its effects are real and they are still with us. At the same time, many of those police officers out there today—the vast majority of whom are serving with honor—are of Irish descent. So I guess, somehow, it is complicated. And yet, somehow, it is not.

I write this letter to you, my friends, because I love this country. I believe in Dr. King's dream. I want America to make his dream come true. Our fellow Americans are asking us to change, to make his dream a reality. You know as well as I that lasting change requires radical honesty. So let us be honest. You and I are a part of this problem, whether we like it or not, whether we chose it or not, whether we know it or not. This is not about left or right. It is about right and wrong. It is painful, but there is reason to hope: We have the witness of countless black and white Americans across the centuries who have shown us how to know the difference between right and wrong and how to act on it. That is our history too.

A few months after those riots in Los Angeles, I traveled to Washington, D.C., for the presidential inauguration of Bill Clinton. From the steps of the U.S. Capitol, I listened as the poet Maya Angelou recited her work, becoming the first black poet to appear at a presidential inauguration. This is what she said: "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived. But, if faced with courage, need not be lived again."

Have courage, my friends. It is long past time to face history, what we have done and what we have failed to do. It is long past time to act.

Lift up your hearts.
Be not afraid.

Matt Malone, S.J., is the president and editor in chief of America Media.

INSIDE AMERICA

HIGHLIGHTING WHAT IS HAPPENING INSIDE AMERICA MEDIA • THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Starting this month, with our July issue, America will shift its print frequency from biweekly to monthly with two bonus issues—a total of 14 issues a year. Our mission is unchanged—to bring you in-depth news, analysis and spiritual resources in these pages and every day on our website.



THANK YOU FOR COMMENTING

I remember John Howard Griffin speaking to our high school student body in 1965 as if it were yesterday. Thank you for the chance to be reminded. He should be recognized as one of the church's saints. - Bob Satterstrom, "Remembering John Howard Griffin at 100"

It's baffling that folks become threatened that a historically oppressed and disenfranchised group dare express a desire for dignity and for equal treatment. - Odion Okojie, "How Catholic vigils for racial justice can center the black experience"

The church has seriously failed to teach moral responsibility especially in matters of sexuality to its youth. It is not the court's job to legislate morality but to decide on the application of the law. Helen McCaffrey, "L.G.B.T. discrimination protections are not a catastrophe for Catholicism."



PETE HOLMES

JUNE 6 - ACTOR, COMEDIAN & PODCASTER

JESUITICAL PODCAST

AMERICAMEDIA.ORG/PODCASTS



Join Matt Malone, S.J., for a weekly review of prominent events in the church and the world. New livestream video episode every week. Also available on America Media's Facebook page and YouTube channel.



WELCOME TO THE AMERICA MOVIE CLUB!

The Catholic Movie Club is a place where smart, funny, spiritual people can come and chat with other smart, funny, spiritual people about movies. It's a bit of an experiment; we're all going to learn as we go, and hopefully have some great adventures in the process.

So turn on the popcorn popper. Cue the overture.  And someone get ready to pull the curtains up. facebook.com/groups/americanatholicmovieclub



WHAT ARE WE SAYING



Colleen Dulle
@ColleenDulle
The Vatican has been tight-lipped when it comes to responding to Viganó. On **@InsideVaticanPod** this week, **@gerryorome** and I explain why.



Mike O'Loughlin
@MikeOLoughlin
Wear masks, discourage singing, and don't distribute Communion. Dr. Anthony Fauci tells me in an interview what he thinks churches need to do to reopen safely.



Matt Malone, S.J.
@Americaeeditor
George Murry was a help and inspiration to so many. Grateful to have called him a brother. RIP



An investigation into the untold stories of AIDS and the Catholic Church in the 1980s and 90s. America's national correspondent, Michael O'Loughlin, discovers the complexity, suffering and compassion of people who fought, worked and grieved their ways through a trying time. The six-episode series builds on Michael's years of research and dozens of interviews and asks, What lessons from this time can inform the conversation taking place among L.G.B.T. Catholics today?

Working together, our advancement and advertising teams secured funding for the production of this six-episode series. "Plague" was made possible by **Mark A. McDermott, Esq.** and **Yuval David**, and was sponsored by the **Catholic Health Association**.

To promote the podcast to the media community, America Media held a press event on Dec. 5. Hosted by James Martin, S.J., a Q. & A. with Michael J. O'Loughlin addressed the development of the series as well as insights into the people interviewed and featured in the episodes. The series continues to spread through talks in several cities, podcast discussion clubs and use in college classes.

"Worth a Listen": the religion reporter Michael O'Loughlin complicates the conventional wisdom"

The New York Times

"Top 25 Catholic Podcasts You Must Follow"



"The Best New Podcasts"



"This Podcast Will Challenge Your Understanding of AIDS and the Catholic Church"



"Religion Podcasts to Check out Right Now"

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DISCERNING OUT

Leaving the seminary or religious life can evoke feelings of freedom, disorientation, rejection or clarity. But it is not failure.

By Simcha Fisher

Joe Heschmeyer was once so sure of his vocation to the priesthood that he forgot he was supposed to be discerning it.

Everyone around him thought he should be a priest. His mother, he discovered later, had offered him to the Lord as an infant the way Hannah did in the Old Testament. Mr. Heschmeyer wrote about his vocation frequently on his blog Shameless Popery, speaking of his ordination as if it were inevitable. Things were going so well, he lost track of the idea that he was in seminary to test and explore his vocation.

“Pretty soon after I entered [in 2011], I stopped asking God if this was what he wanted. I felt like the question had already been answered. My grades were good; I was well esteemed; everything internal to the seminary felt successful. That felt like enough validation. I forgot to ask, ‘Are we still on the same page?’” Mr. Heschmeyer said.

It was not until friends and family had already bought airplane tickets and reserved hotel rooms for his ordination to the diaconate that he began to feel some doubt. He tried to assign his misgivings to “last-minute jitters,” but a black cloud of unease hung over his head.

He described riding on a bus on the way back from a retreat.

“The archbishop has an open seat next to him. A sort of rotating spot, where you can share whatever’s on your heart. It’s usually pretty short, out of respect—a 10-minute thing. I was there for half an hour, pouring out all these difficulties,” he said. The archbishop immediately reassured him that if he had any doubts, he should take more time before making a final commitment.

“It was a tremendous load that had been lifted off my shoulders. It was an illuminating and painful experience. I realized I was happy I wasn’t getting ordained. It wasn’t what I wanted to feel, or expected to feel,” Mr. Heschmeyer said.

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He decided to take time off and then consider rejoining—a plan which, according to the Rev. Matt Mason, the vocations director for the diocese of Manchester, N.H., is not uncommon. But nine days into a 10-day retreat, Heschmeyer knew for sure he was not meant to be a priest after all.

Leaving the seminary or religious life can feel like freedom followed by disorientation, or like rejection followed by clarity. For many, the experience eventually bears fruits of self-knowledge and a more profound relationship with God. But first comes suffering.

“Discerning out” is a widely and wildly misunderstood process, and many Catholics see it as a sign of failure, rather than what it is: a way to answer God’s call to some other vocation. According to a report by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, about 74 percent of the seminarians in the class of 2019 completed four years of college seminary, which means that 179 of the 695 men who began





Seminary was something to try on, a time to discern; and many men did leave.

advanced theology study in 2015 did not continue their studies. According to Father Mason, most people who leave the seminary do so after two or three years. “Being in seminary is not the equivalent of being married to the church,” said Father Mason. “Leaving the seminary might be considered like a divorce, but you’re not really in that kind of relationship yet. It’s more akin to a dating relationship.”

And it is a relationship that either party is free to break off, he said.

Men training to be diocesan priests typically spend six to eight years in the seminary (then spend a “pastoral year” working in a parish as a deacon) before ordination, and women usually spend five to seven years (with some exceptions) living in a religious community before their final profession of vows. It is meant to be a time of formation and discernment, a time to learn about the life they may take on permanently, and, with spiritual guidance, to decide whether God wants them to stay for good or is calling them to something else instead.

Mr. Heschmeyer was embarrassed as he faced telling his family, friends and blog readers he was leaving seminary. “It probably looked like I was having a crisis of faith, even though it was doing what it seemed like what God was calling me to do. I was taking a step in faith that would not look like a step in faith. It would look like the opposite,” he said.

A Time of Transition

For Magdalene Visaggio, leaving the seminary was the first step to an even bigger transition. As a seminarian she identified as male; several years and difficult choices later, she now identifies as female. Ms. Visaggio, now a comic book writer with a television show that aired on the SyFy Channel in 2020, once fully intended to become a priest, or at least to find out if she should. Her time in the seminary was short; but leaving did not happen for lack of trying.

“I get people who act like I ditched the church as soon as it got hard. That’s not true. I did the work. I tried to stay.

I couldn’t,” Ms. Visaggio said.

She was speaking of her ultimate decision to leave the faith, but many men and women use similar words as they speak about their decision to leave religious life. It was agony to decide to leave; it brought both shame and relief; they were met with both support and condemnation; and even when they knew it was clearly the right thing to do, it wasn’t clear what to do next.

“The last time I went to Mass was Easter 2017. The next day, Monday, I was walking home from work. It was a bright, shining day. I sat on the steps of Good Shepherd in Inwood [Manhattan] and had a breakup talk with God,” Ms. Visaggio said.

For Ms. Visaggio, joining the seminary was an attempt to be decisive after years of drifting. She had converted to Catholicism as a teenager. A self-described “autodidact” who was heavily involved in lay ministry when she still identified as male, Ms. Visaggio said more and more people suggested she explore the seminary. After 10 years of vacillating, Ms. Visaggio took the plunge.

Her semester-and-a-half at the seminary “started off very positive and increasingly slid into misery,” she said.

“The instruction [we] received was excellent. The liturgical life was robust. I loved doing the [Liturgy of the] Hours. I loved the morning and evening Masses. I loved Night Prayer and some of the sacraments. I loved adoration,” Ms. Visaggio said. But she was mercilessly bullied and felt intensely out of place, socially and spiritually. This sense of not belonging highlighted her growing need to grapple with her identity, and she knew she could not do that at the seminary.

One bright spot: The rector made it clear, early and often, that leaving was not failure. Seminary was something to try on, a time to discern; and many men did leave.

“There was never any shame or judgment in it,” Ms. Visaggio said.

When the Decision Is Not Yours

That is the ideal. But, just as in dating, when only one party wants to break things off, the process may be painful even when it is appropriate.

Jessica Packard, who now runs the group and youth programs at the Kansas City Zoo, was given no choice about her future when she was a novice. “Basically they sat me down and kicked me out. It was very much like a





Jessica Packard loved many aspects of life in the convent, but frequently clashed with her superiors and questioned the written and unwritten rules of convent life. Eventually her community asked her to leave. She sees now that she did not belong with the order, and that she had probably joined them for the wrong reasons.

breakup, ‘it’s not us, it’s you’ conversation. I was completely blindsided,” she said.

Ms. Packard now sees that she did not belong with the order, and that she had probably joined them for the wrong reasons. The oldest of seven children, she had spent her first year of college drinking and partying, and burned out spectacularly. She thinks her urge to join a convent was partially an overcorrection for her excesses and partially a desperate attempt to avoid responsibility.

Her impression of religious life was that “once you join, you’re good for life. You’re given your work assignments. Just whether to wear a long-sleeved or a short-sleeved shirt was your biggest decision. In the end, I think I was running away from decision making,” Ms. Packard said.

At the start, her decision to join seemed pre-ordained. She kept noticing little connections to the order’s founder in her daily life; they started to feel like irrefutable signs from God. Shortly before she sold her car and gave away her clothes, she texted the vocations director and joked that she felt like the founder was stalking her.

“I’ll make this one big decision, and be done,” she told herself.

She lasted 61 days.

She loved many aspects of life in the convent, but frequently clashed with her superiors and questioned the written and unwritten rules of convent life. Unwilling to admit to herself how wretched she felt, Ms. Packard was shocked when sisters in leadership in her community told her she must leave. During rosary, they asked her to step into the laundry room, where important meetings happened, and told her their decision. She was not allowed to say goodbye to her friends. One of the sisters brought her a cup of soup to eat alone.

“That was at 5 pm. They said, ‘We’re gonna wake you up at 6:00 and drive you to the airport,’” she said.

While Ms. Packard abhors the way the convent managed her departure, she believes they thought they were doing their best to avoid a scene. “I think they thought they were handling it well,” she said. “The church is holy, but it is made up of human beings, and so are religious orders.” This practice of abruptly escorting women out in secret is falling out of favor, but continues in some communities.



Joe Heschmeyer at first was embarrassed to tell his friends and family of his decision to leave the seminary. “I was taking a step in faith that would not look like a step in faith,” he said. He began dating Anna, the woman who would become his wife shortly after leaving, and the couple now has a daughter.

It was once common in seminaries, too, but many vocation directors now try to put more emphasis on freedom and transparency. “In previous times, it might have been the case that a man would disappear in the middle of the night, but today we’re very open about ‘this person has decided to leave; we wish them well, we keep them in prayer,’” Father Mason said.

Ms. Packard said she doesn’t regret her time at the convent, although she still harbors a grudge against the founder. “I kind of think of [my experience in religious life] like a really long retreat. I fell into praying, ‘Thy will be done.’ That’s been my mantra ever since. When I can’t think of words to pray, I still just pray, ‘Thy will be done,’” she said.

Ms. Packard’s transition back into secular life was painful. She made her way back to college and joined a sorority, which summarily kicked her out after three semesters.

“I’m just not meant to be around large groups of women,” she laughed.

Ms. Packard now sees herself as a kind of ambassador to other Catholics who do not fit into a mold of piety and decorum. “I don’t introduce myself, ‘Hi, I’m Jess. I got kicked out of a convent,’” she said. But she is willing to share her experience, especially with young people in discernment. Some of the girls who heard her testimony have joined convents themselves, and she is proud of that.

In Search of Support

A difficult transition to secular life is common for women who leave religious life, especially if they left the convent involuntarily and abruptly. “That experience of intense formation does leave a mark,” said Penny Renner, who manages the blog for Leonie’s Longing, a small but international organization founded to support people who have left religious life.

Ms. Renner, who herself left the convent at age 24, said that many women emerge with a wounded spiritual life. “The vocation of the religious is to be the spouse of Christ. It goes right to the core of the feminine nature. Women come to us wondering if they’ve failed God, or if God has rejected them. They ask, ‘Why did God call me to this and then send me away?’” Ms. Renner said.

The organization promotes the idea that women who leave the convent have not been rejected by God. It also offers more tangible help, including job training and financial guidance. A woman who has been in a convent for many years may not even know how to buy herself a phone when she comes out, Ms. Renner said.

“The problem with giving up everything [to join] is that you have to start with nothing [when you leave]. Our job is to help them expand their network,” Ms. Renner said. Vocations offices are oriented toward people who are entering, but there often is no formal program to accompany them if they leave, she added. “There’s a slowly growing awareness that this is an area of need,” she said.

Leonie’s Longing mainly helps women, although it is open to supporting men. There does not appear to be a comparable organization focusing on ex-seminarians. Father Mason said that as vocations director, he makes an effort to follow up with men who have left and to stay in touch, if that is what they want.

“We’re not gonna just drop them and say ‘good luck,’” he said.

He also sees it as part of his mission to educate a seminarian’s fellow Catholics about what it means to discern a vocation, so there is less judgment and more support when someone leaves.

But it is hard to explain to someone who has never been in a seminary or a novi-





A difficult transition to secular life is common for women who leave religious life.

tiate what it feels like to be out.

Ms. Renner said that men and women may both feel adrift after leaving, but in her experience, men seem more likely to manage their loss as a problem to be solved, whereas women perceive it as a judgment on themselves. They frequently withdraw for a time, especially if they had been cloistered. Many women become depressed, making it harder to build a new life.

Leonie's Longing helps connect women with mental health care, and if necessary, with local charities and a career counsellor. The women it serves sought out the organization because they struggle with re-entry into secular life. But some transitions are more streamlined.

Carrie Chuff, who was cloistered for five years, was, like Ms. Packard, without clothes, possessions or job prospects when she left the convent. They returned the \$500 dowry she gave them when she entered and added another \$500 to help her get on her feet; but she felt hopelessly behind her peers when she emerged. But while Ms. Chuff, like Ms. Packard, was hustled out in secrecy, Ms. Chuff's departure was very much her choice, and leaving felt like liberty, not rejection.

"I felt so free. We were driving...the sun was coming up, and I wanted to get out [of town] before the sunrise. It was like a golden sky, the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. I felt so free and at peace. It was glorious. It was a gift from God," Ms. Chuff said.

She was 18 when she joined her religious order. Although she had some fears, she felt drawn to make her life a gift to God. "I wanted to offer my life as a sacrifice for the conversion of sinners. I wanted to be completely at God's disposal. I truly fell in love with God in seventh grade, and wanted to give my life back to him. The best way to do that, maybe the only way to do that, was to become a religious," Chuff remembers thinking.

But, astonishingly, no one had warned her that the sisters in the community she joined keep silence except on feast days. She was prepared for a life of obedience and rigor, but not for the misery that increasingly swallowed her.

She tried to adapt, thinking it was God's will. "I tried to make myself very malleable. Looking back, things weren't as they should have been. Maybe I was a bit too malleable," Ms. Chuff said.

She realized in the first year that she did not be-

long, but ignored red flags, pushing herself to keep changing, to "become more holy," she said. "I was very afraid of letting people down. Letting my family parish down, afraid of what people would think. That fear made me stay a lot longer than I would have otherwise," Ms. Chuff said.

Her superiors came to depend on the smart and competent novice, and made unusually generous accommodations for her, hoping that her doubts were a temptation.

"They were open to helping me, but it was more like helping me stay, as opposed to helping me discern whether I had an authentic religious vocation to begin with," Ms. Chuff said.

Ms. Chuff's depression finally became unbearable. Emaciated, quaking with fear, she told the mother superior she wanted to go home. She called her mother and was spirited out with no chance to say goodbye.

One of the sisters, sensing what was happening, pulled her into the hallway and demanded to know if she was leaving. Ms. Chuff admitted that she was. "She gave me a big hug and said, 'You have the courage to do what I never did.' That broke my heart. I will always remember that," Ms. Chuff said.

Ms. Chuff is now happily married, with six children, and is friends with some of the other women who left the same convent. Despite the pain of those five years, Ms. Chuff does not think her time in the convent was wasted.

The order hosted regular retreats for the laity, and she quietly absorbed not only spiritual insights, but lessons about married and family life. "I know God worked through that. I don't ever feel like I'm a failure. I'm grateful for my time there. It shaped me into who I am," Ms. Chuff said.

For Mr. Heschmeyer, too, the formation he got in seminary was invaluable,



She realized in the first year that she did not belong, but ignored red flags, pushing herself to keep changing, to "become more holy."

Courtesy photo



even though it took him in an unexpected direction. "It's O.K. if continuing to follow God's voice doesn't mean you end up where you think you're going to end up. He needs saints more than he needs priests," Mr. Heschmeyer said.

Father Mason, too, said that vocations do not simply consist of one decision or one moment in time. "God never stops calling us, even within our vocations," Father Mason said.

A Calling Within a Calling

The direction of that calling can be surprising.

"I had to move back into my parents' house. It wasn't where I expected to be at age 30," Mr. Heschmeyer said. He quickly accepted a job with School of Faith, where his career allows him to evangelize like a priest, without the headaches of administrative duties.

And immediately after he left the seminary, he flew to Phoenix to pay a surprise visit to a female friend with whom he had cut off contact when he was trying to discern the priesthood. When he turned up at her door asking to date, she did not even know he had left the seminary.

"There were a lot of surprises rolled into one, there," Mr. Heschmeyer said. "Fortunately, she said yes, or it could have been an extremely awkward trip." The two dated for three months and then married. They now have a child.

He knows that his relationship raised some eyebrows, and some people might suspect he left the seminary for a woman. That is not so, Mr. Heschmeyer said. "It wasn't like if Anna said no, I was gonna go back in [to the seminary]. It was that I think I'm called to be married, and if that's true, I know whose door to knock on," he said.

Mr. Heschmeyer, like Ms. Chuff, said the things he learned while discerning religious life ended up helping him in his married life. Mr. Heschmeyer said his wife calls seminary "charm school for men," where he learned etiquette and tact, and also gained some psychological maturity.

Magdalene Visaggio initially loved her time in the seminary but grew to feel out of place, socially and spiritually, especially as she grappled with her identity.

"I learned about taking the emotional life seriously. You have to go into those scary, uncomfortable places and be fully human, and not be a head on stilts. Seminary made me confront it and treat it in an adult way," Mr. Heschmeyer said.

That process of self-scrutiny begins before a man even enters the seminary. The application process takes many months, and not everyone is invited to apply. "We don't just accept people out of the blue," said Father Mason. His diocese is usually familiar with a candidate long before he applies, he said; and the application process itself is long and intense.

For religious orders, such as the Jesuits, the application process is even more gruelling.

Philip Florio, S.J., vocations director for the Jesuits' two East Coast provinces, said that men submit to a many-layered, sometimes yearlong assessment before they are even invited to apply. They work with a spiritual director, vocations director and vocations mentor. They pray with a community, go on retreats and clean toilets.



Courtesy photo

"I felt so free and at peace. It was glorious. It was a gift from God," said Carrie Chuff about the day she left her religious community. Ms. Chuff is now happily married, with six children.

Six months in, a would-be seminarian writes a 12- to 15-page spiritual autobiography and undergoes a five-hour interview to review family and personal history, personal, spiritual and psychosexual development, the prospect's relationship with the church and his understanding of the priesthood. Then begins the four-month formal application process, culminating in interviews with three Jesuits and a lay female colleague.

"We insist it be a woman because 50 percent of the church is female. If you can't talk to a woman, we're not interested," Father Florio said.

Even if a candidate is accepted and enters, nothing is conclusive. "Guys still get in and leave," Father Florio said. Their freedom to do so is paramount.

"The Holy Spirit works in freedom, and we honor that freedom," he said.

The order hopes that if men leave it will be on friend-

ly terms, with greater clarity about their own lives.

Magdalene Visaggio experienced such clarity when she left her seminary. Although she eventually came to reject the way the church evaluates moral acts, she said the time she spent in seminary was ultimately psychologically clarifying.

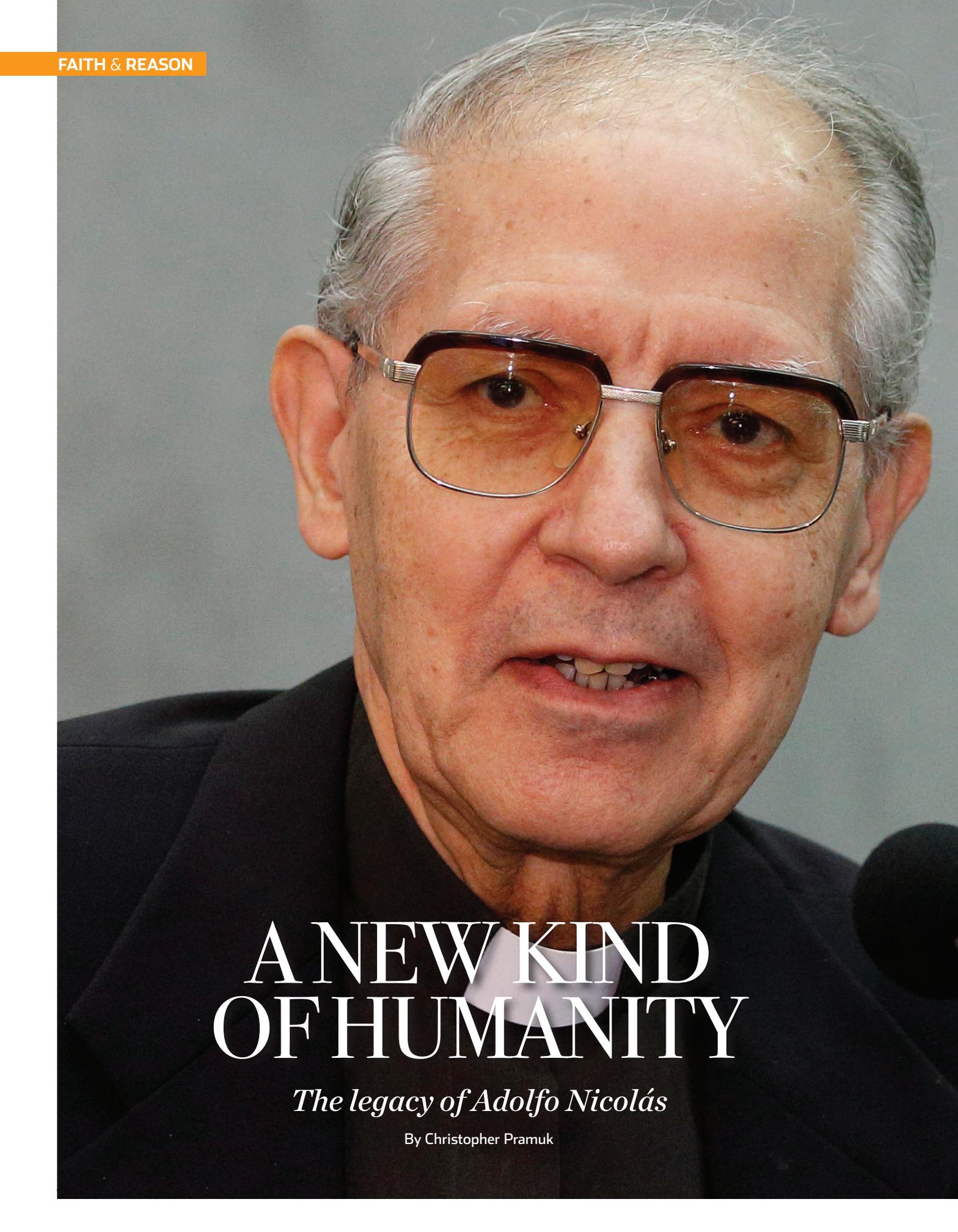
"I think I needed to go through that process to force me to really take seriously, for the first time, the s**t going on in my head. Even though I made some bad decisions after I left, I at least made decisions. I was living with my future ex-wife less than a year after leaving. I would start grad school and get married within two and a half years. These were all huge mistakes, but it is huge that I was able to make them," Ms. Visaggio said.

Ms. Visaggio particularly remembers the care one priest offered her after she came out as trans. "He just let me talk about it, and asked how I was feeling. He didn't start from a position of criticism, but of pastoral care. I'm still in touch with him. A marvelous man," she said.

Leonie's Longing was founded precisely to offer this uncritical listening ear, and many women contact the group simply to express gratitude that such a community exists. "They say, 'This is the first time I've felt understood,'" Ms. Renner said.

"For me, the most healing thing about being part of a community [is that] I can see they are generous, gifted, lovely women," Ms. Renner said. "I can look at them and I can't think, 'These are the women God has rejected.' And if I can't think that about them, then I can't think it about myself either."

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

A close-up portrait of an elderly man with white hair, wearing glasses and a dark suit jacket. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

A NEW KIND OF HUMANITY

The legacy of Adolfo Nicolás

By Christopher Pramuk

On May 20, 2020, Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., the former superior general of the Society of Jesus, died in Tokyo after a long illness. Affectionately known as Adolfo by his friends and Nico by the Jesuits of the Asia Pacific region, Father Nicolás was elected superior general at the 35th General Congregation of the world-wide Jesuit order on Jan. 19, 2008. Eight years later, his resignation was accepted by General Congregation 36; and his successor, Father Arturo Sosa, was elected. After Father Nicolás's death, Father Sosa described his predecessor as "a wise, humble, and free man; totally and generously given to service; moved by those who suffer in the world, but at the same time overflowing with hope drawn from his faith in the Risen Lord; an excellent friend, who loved to laugh and to make others laugh; a man of the Gospel. It is a blessing to have known him."

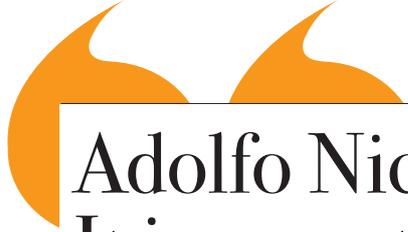
Though I did not know Father Nicolás personally, as a lay Catholic theologian who teaches at a Jesuit university, I feel as though I have lost a dear mentor and friend. Perhaps more than any other Je-

suit figure in recent years, including Pope Francis, Father Nicolás has informed my thinking about the Ignatian imagination, the future of Jesuit education and the challenges to Christian faith formation of young people in our time.

I credit Father Nicolás with recentering the role of imagination in Jesuit education and in the intellectual and spiritual formation of the whole person. His love for Japan and respect for Buddhist culture exemplify a commitment to interfaith friendship and, not incidentally, reinforce his emphasis on the contemplative roots of Ignatian spirituality. His speeches and interviews, many available online, continue to inspire, challenge and stir my heart as an educator and stumbling follower of Christ. In short, for me, too, "It is a blessing to have known him."

What follows is an expression of my gratitude for Father Nicolás's service to the Society and the people of God and my desire to bring wider attention to his life and thought. I speak mainly for myself but perhaps also for my lay colleagues around the world who are blessed to be collabo-

Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., the former superior general of the Society of Jesus, speaks during a news conference at the Vatican on Oct. 25, 2012. Father Nicolás died May 20, 2020, in Tokyo. He was 84.



Adolfo Nicolás: It is essential to understand that imagination is not the same as fantasy.



rators in Jesuit secondary and higher education. Because music emerges repeatedly as a keynote during his years as superior general, I adopt a musical metaphor to suggest three key “movements” in the overarching symphony that is his legacy as leader of the Society of Jesus.

First Movement: Depth of Thought and Imagination

In his landmark 2010 address in Mexico City to Jesuit educators from around the world, “Depth of Thought and Imagination: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education today,” Father Nicolás begins by confronting the “deleterious effects” on the intellectual and spiritual formation of young people created by the “complex new interior world created by globalization.” Before he addresses Jesuit pedagogy or an Ignatian vision of education, he wants to look deeply with his audience at the cultural context that young people take for granted today, so as to understand the challenges they face before they set foot into a Jesuit classroom. His striking description of what he calls “the globalization of superficiality” merits citing at length.

When one can access so much information so quickly and so painlessly; when one can express and publish to the world one’s reactions so immediately and so unthinkingly in one’s blogs or micro-blogs; when the latest opinion column from the New York Times or El País, or the newest viral video can be spread so quickly to people half a world away, shaping their perceptions and feelings, then the laborious, painstaking work of serious, critical thinking often gets short-circuited. One can “cut-and-paste” without the need to think critically or write accurately or come to one’s own careful conclusions.

When beautiful images from the merchants of

consumer dreams flood one’s computer screens, or when the ugly or unpleasant sounds of the world can be shut out by one’s MP3 music player, then one’s vision, one’s perception of reality, one’s desiring can also remain shallow.... When one is overwhelmed with such a dizzying pluralism of choices and values and beliefs and visions of life, then one can so easily slip into the lazy superficiality of relativism or mere tolerance of others...rather than engaging in the hard work of forming communities of dialogue in the search of truth and understanding. It is easier to do as one is told than to study, to pray, to risk, or to discern a choice.

Notice Father Nicolás’s emphasis on the “interior world” created by habits and processes endemic to our globalized technological landscape, how they can shape “one’s vision, one’s perception of reality, one’s desiring.” To the extent that young people spend so much of their time in virtual technological worlds, they (and we right along with them) risk succumbing to “a process of dehumanization that may be gradual and silent, but very real. People are losing their mental home, their culture, their points of reference.” Perhaps above all, Father Nicolás worries that superficial and siloed perceptions of reality “make it almost impossible to feel compassion for the suffering of others.” In place of empathy we see an “unchallenged reign of fundamentalism, fanaticism, ideology, and all those escapes from thinking that cause suffering for so many.”

At this point in the address, Father Nicolás pivots to describe a Jesuit or Ignatian way of knowing, a way of proceeding both in and beyond the classroom, which aims to “promote in creative new ways the depth of thought and imagination that are distinguishing marks of the Ignatian tradition.” To this day, it remains one of the clearest and most moving accounts of an Ignatian approach to education as spiritual formation that I have ever seen in print. It reads:

The Ignatian imagination is a creative process that goes to the depth of reality and begins recreating it. Ignatian contemplation is a very powerful tool, and it is a shifting from the left side of the brain to the right. But it is essential to understand that imagination is not the same as fantasy. Fantasy is a flight from reality, to a world where we create images for the sake of a diversity of images. Imagination grasps reality.

In other words, depth of thought and imagina-

tion in the Ignatian tradition involves a profound engagement with the real, a refusal to let go until one goes beneath the surface. It is a careful analysis (dismembering) for the sake of an integration (remembering) around what is deepest: God, Christ, the Gospel. The starting point, then, will always be what is real: what is materially, concretely thought to be there; the world as we encounter it; the world of the senses so vividly described in the Gospels themselves; a world of suffering and need, a broken world with many broken people in need of healing. We start there. We don't run away from there. And then Ignatius guides us and students of Jesuit education, as he did his retreatants, to enter into the depths of that reality. Beyond what can be perceived most immediately, he leads one to see the hidden presence and action of God in what is seen, touched, smelt, felt. And that encounter with what is deepest changes the person.

Once we engage the real with our students, Father Nicolás suggests, a deep desire to respond is awakened in their hearts, that is, a yearning to take responsibility for reality, in its sorrows and its joys, its brokenness and its beauty. Implicit in Father Nicolás's insistence on engaging with concrete reality is the prophetic aspect of any education that aspires to be Christian, Catholic and Jesuit in its way of proceeding. Much like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. responding from Birmingham City Jail to public criticism of his tactics by fellow Christian ministers, Jesuit education will challenge its students with uncomfortable questions. "Our brothers and sisters are suffering terribly the blows of injustice. I'm here at their side in Birmingham. Where are you?"

For Father Nicolás, to "find God in all things" in the context of Jesuit education is more precisely to be found by God in all things, in and beyond the classroom. In university life, we tend to fashion ourselves as the ones seeking, pursuing truth, new knowledge and ultimately, the mystery of God. Drawing from the life and deepest spiritual insights of St. Ignatius, Father Nicolás here offers a profound reversal: It is God who pursues us with the passion of the Beloved. Thus, the telos of Jesuit education is to accompany students in the direction of this question: How is God calling out to us, inviting us to see, judge and act from within this concrete historical situation?

The oft-maligned "secular" world, in other words, is not in some cultural space "out there." It is the air we all breathe, those of us who belong to churches, synagogues

and mosques and those innumerable young adults who identify as "spiritual but not religious." Implicitly, Father Nicolás is urging all who are responsible for religious education in the church not to lose sight of the fundamental thing: our vocation, precisely in the midst of the secular city, to help young people discern and respond to God's hidden presence in the world, calling us to its renewal.

Second Movement: A New Kind of Humanity

At a 2016 celebration marking the 100th anniversary of the Jesuit-run Sophia University in Japan, Father Nicolás offered some remarkable comments about religious faith that went largely overlooked in Catholic media. Religion, Father Nicolás suggested, is less a code of doctrines and moral teachings than it is a sensitivity to the dimensions of "transcendence, depth, gratuity and beauty" that underlie our human experiences. Lkening religious experience to a person who can appreciate the intricacies and variations of classical music, Father Nicolás said, "Religion is first of all very much more like this musical sense than a rational system of teachings and explanations." Addressing Jesuits and lay educators from around the world, he continued:

We are not in education for proselytism but for transformation. We want to form a new kind of humanity that is musical, that retains this sensitivity to beauty, to goodness, to the suffering of others, to compassion. But of course, this is a sensitivity that is threatened today by a purely economic or materialist mindset, which deadens this sensitivity to deeper dimensions of reality. Just as this musical sense is being eroded and weakened by the noise, the pace, the self-images of the modern and postmodern world, so is religious sensitivity.

Reprising challenges articulated in Mexico City, Father Nicolás suggested that "mission today must first of all work toward helping people discover or rediscover this musical sense, this religious sensibility, this awareness and appreciation of dimensions of reality that are deeper than instrumental reason or materialist conceptions of life allow us." He then sounded a cautionary note that will be familiar to anyone charged with the survival of Jesuit universities today: "It would be a tragedy if our universities simply replicated the rationality and self-understandings of our secular, materialist world. Our reason for being in education is completely different."



Depth of thought and imagination in the Ignatian tradition involves a profound engagement with the real, a refusal to let go until one goes beneath the surface.



I had already liked Father Nicolás before this speech, but after it, I loved him. I continue to be challenged by his words. What can he mean by forming “a new kind of humanity that is musical”? The answer, I believe, is closely related to another theme that echoes across his tenure at the helm of the Jesuits: his insistence that people everywhere today yearn to recover spaces for silence, a “taste for silence” in the midst of our busy and often overstimulated lives. In a stirring 2013 interview with *The Jesuit Post*, Father Nicolás says that the “education of our hearts” and the path toward forming “a new kind of humanity” begin in silence. “The chapel we carry within ourselves, all of the time, no? And we don’t need to have walls and chapels and all kinds of things. We can live in great simplicity in the middle of people and yet be carriers of silence.”

With a characteristically Jesuit wide-angle lens on the global human situation, Father Nicolás is drawing to our attention a deep spiritual malaise at the root of the present human predicament. And he is offering a contemplative way of proceeding grounded in Ignatian spirituality—but by no means limited to it—for the recovery of our deepest humanity. Music serves here as a guiding metaphor for a way of listening deeply and responding to reality that goes beyond explicitly religious ways of knowing to touch on all our relationships, in every realm of our lives, not least in the education and spiritual formation of young people.

In sum, an appreciation for silence is the necessary counterpart to musical and religious sensitivity because music, just like liturgy, is a patterning of stillness and silence. Across some 20 years as a teacher in Jesuit institutions, the most memorable experiences I have had with students involve the careful attunement of silence and speech, contemplation and action, active listening and creative expression—the art of communal learning and discernment. To form “a new kind of humanity that is musical” seems to me shorthand for what Ignatian educators do at their best, akin to Karl Rahner’s famous statement that tomorrow’s devout person “will either be a mystic—someone who has ‘experienced’ something—or else they will no longer be devout at all.”

“In the middle of the noise,” says Father Nicolás, “we can create a space for silence.” In doing so, especially in our classrooms, across all disciplines, we offer a lifelong gift and centering spiritual practice to our students.

Third Movement: A Companionship of Equals

There is a remarkable moment at the conclusion of his Mexico City address in which Father Nicolás asks his audience to imagine themselves “not as presidents or C.E.O.s of large institutions, or administrators or academics, but as co-founders of a new religious group, discerning God’s call to you as an apostolic body in the Church. In this globalized world, with all its lights and shadows, would—or how would—running all these universities still be the best way we can respond to the mission of the Church and the needs of the world?”

The question signaled the Society’s commitment today and, in principle, from its beginnings, to an understanding of Jesuit mission as a “companionship of equals” alongside lay women and men of every background. Father Nicolás was asking both the lay professionals and his Jesuit brothers in the room to imagine the future with him: Catholics and Protestants, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and, we can safely presume, not a few agnostics and atheists. And he linked the invitation directly with the movement of the Holy Spirit in our times.

What kind of universities, with what emphases and what directions, would we run, if we were re-founding the Society of Jesus in today’s world?... [Because] I think every generation has to re-create the faith, they have to re-create the journey, they have to re-create the institutions. This is not only a good desire. If we lose the ability to re-create, we have lost the spirit.

That the Jesuit mission cannot be imagined apart from collaboration is nowhere more powerfully stated than in Father Nicolás's 2009 keynote address at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, "Companions in Mission: Pluralism in Action." Here Father Nicolás notes with approval the emergence in the Society, mirroring developments in the church after the Second Vatican Council, of "a non-Eurocentric vision" of the mission in Asia and Africa, North and South America and Europe, "where Jesuits find themselves as co-workers in someone else's work. Correlatively, they engage with Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Moslems or even agnostic co-workers in their own works." Jesuits err when they assume, often in a paternalistic way, that the mission is "ours," and only by necessity must non-Jesuits be recruited to assist in Jesuit apostolates. To the contrary, a true "reciprocity of personal presence is central to our identity as Jesuits" and has been so from the beginning.

As if to underscore the point more clearly, Father Nicolás then broke from his prepared remarks to share a story from one of the Jesuit schools in Japan involving a Buddhist administrator who stepped in to mediate a conflict with a disgruntled faculty member, who was also a Buddhist but was militantly antireligious in his stance toward the school's Jesuit mission. The administrator was able to engage the faculty member in a way that peacefully resolved the situation. Father Nicolás concluded the story with this comment:

The point I want to make is that sometimes a Buddhist like the vice principal might have a better grasp of what we mean by a good Christian or Jesuit education than some of us do. It's the whole experience that counts. It's not just what we do in the chapel, which is very meaningful and keeps our hearts alive. It's also what we do in the classrooms, the research labs, the residence halls, and so forth. It's the whole operation that is working for depth, for creativity in the lives of people today, for a new humanity in our world and in the future. This man—this Buddhist—got it. We need more companions in mission like him.

Again, notice the emphasis on striving toward the formation of "a new humanity" for the benefit of a suffering world. The language is idealistic and aspirational, to be sure, and Father Nicolás admits that "the conversation on this issue has not yet become deep and penetrating," not yet a true dialogue "among equal co-workers and compan-

ions." In other words, there is much work yet to be done in the realm of collaboration. He takes pains to acknowledge, for example, that while General Congregation 34 formally committed the Society to "solidarity with women as integral to our mission," it remains the case in some Jesuit works that this "has remained more a lip-service ideal than an obvious 'taken-for-granted' reality."

This brings us to what seems to me the "final movement" in Father Nicolás's legacy as the leader of the Society of Jesus. If today we are all "thrown together" by the forces of globalization, as he emphasized in Mexico City, then more than ever we must find ways "to meld our differences into a vital shared purpose." Mere toleration is not enough, Father Nicolás insists, and certainly falls short of a Jesuit vision of education. He concludes by noting that in all things, Ignatius Loyola privileged "the humble, down-to-earth yet exacting task of genuine spiritual conversation." Above all, it was "in authentic conversation about mutual mission," St. Ignatius intuited, that "God was always active, present and profoundly to be found."

This is what I have found, how I have so often been found, in my work in Jesuit education. God comes to us in the dance of conversation, person to person, heart to heart, in a space of mutual welcome and mutual challenge where our diverse gifts are allowed to flourish. If we lose this dimension of our work as Ignatian companions in mission, we lose the heart of our way of proceeding, our creativity, our spirit. Let us give thanks for the life and witness of Father Adolfo Nicolás and for the signposts he has raised on the road of our shared mission.

Christopher Pramuk is an associate professor of theology and the University Chair of Ignatian Thought and Imagination at Regis University in Denver.

'How long, O Lord?'

Psalm 13 is the cry of black Americans

By Mario Powell



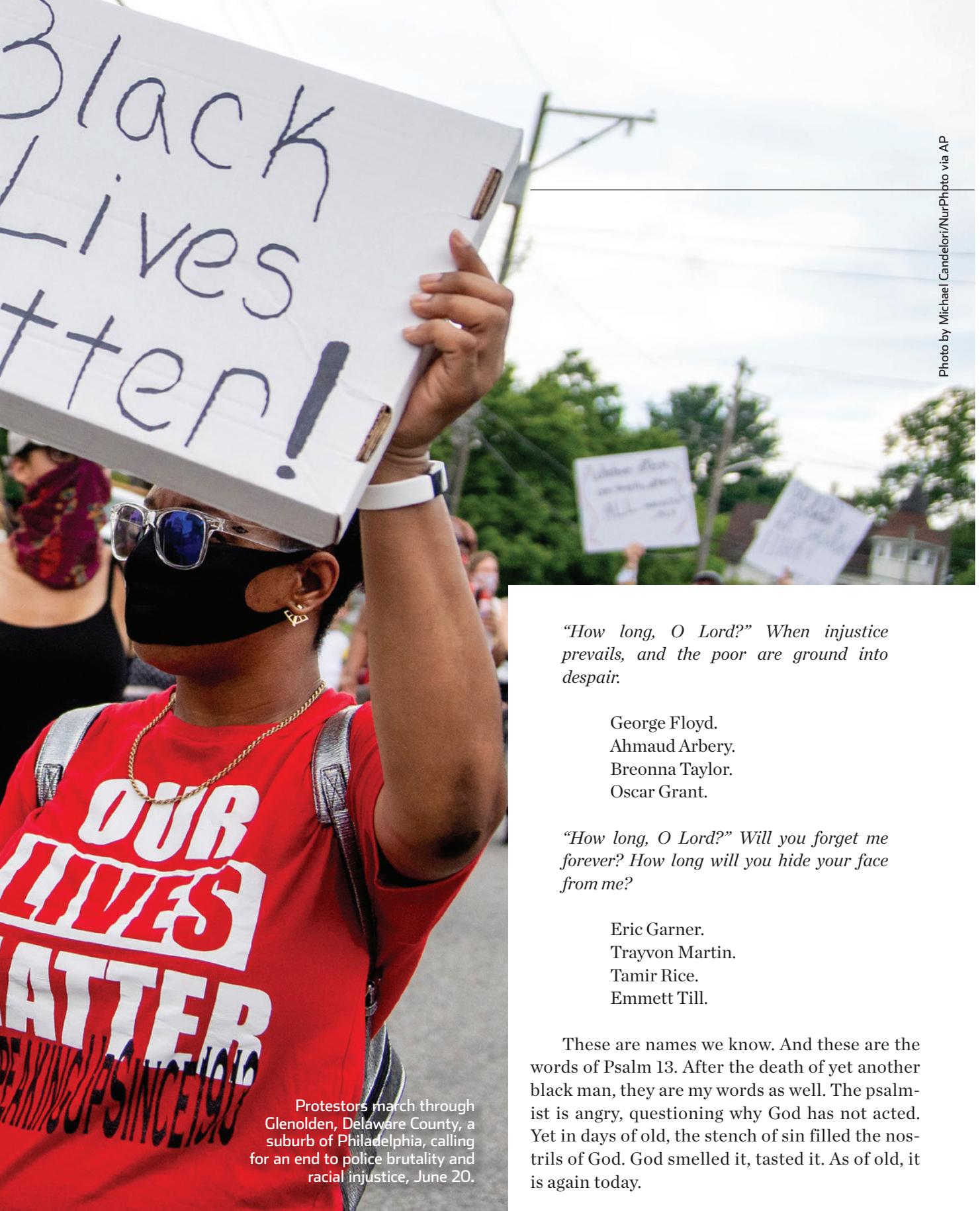


Photo by Michael Candelori/NurPhoto via AP

Protestors march through Glenolden, Delaware County, a suburb of Philadelphia, calling for an end to police brutality and racial injustice, June 20.

“How long, O Lord?” When injustice prevails, and the poor are ground into despair.

- George Floyd.
- Ahmaud Arbery.
- Breonna Taylor.
- Oscar Grant.

“How long, O Lord?” Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

- Eric Garner.
- Trayvon Martin.
- Tamir Rice.
- Emmett Till.

These are names we know. And these are the words of Psalm 13. After the death of yet another black man, they are my words as well. The psalmist is angry, questioning why God has not acted. Yet in days of old, the stench of sin filled the nostrils of God. God smelled it, tasted it. As of old, it is again today.



Until you can see in those nine minutes a black man as a brother and not withdraw from his suffering, nothing will change. 🍓

As a 38-year-old black Jesuit priest, this is a familiar smell for me. It stinks. Its smell and the reactions it provokes in black Americans is impossible to avoid. It is a strange and bitter fruit.

The video that allowed the world to witness the murder of George Floyd stinks as well. I have undergone periods of paralysis, disbelief, anger, numbness, fear and despair since watching those agonizing nine minutes.

I feel paralyzed because I am away from the community that I normally rely upon to process this filth. I am in disbelief that George Floyd's death is yet another black male body that has been brutalized and murdered right in front of my eyes. I am angry at the banal and vanilla statements put out by many, including too many Catholic leaders. I have become numb by the sheer number of these events.

But there is something new to me in this experience. It is the fear I feel not just for myself or for black Americans in general but for the 80 young black children who are students at the middle school I have been asked to lead: Brooklyn Jesuit Prep. I fear what this summer has in store for them and other black children of central Brooklyn. I fear that without summer jobs or camps, and faced with over-policing, more black youths will have encounters with police—encounters that often do not end well for people who look like them.

I must admit that there have been times that I have found it difficult to hold despair at bay. In the face

of those nine minutes, words telling these black and brown children how much I love them, how much they are valued seem to fall flat. But it is not only that they fall flat; it is that these children are already loved; they already know they are loved as children of God. Yes, we all need reminding of this, but in the face of these nine minutes they do not need only to be told that they are loved. They are not void of love. They are not victims. It is not they who need a message but our world, our country and our collaborators. Perhaps you do as well.

As a black Jesuit and a priest, I mainly live in a white world. Which means it is my burden, responsibility and task to talk about events like this with my white brothers and sisters. These conversations happen after every sensationalized black death. Sometimes my friends and collaborators just want to talk. Sometimes they call to listen. Usually, these conversations include a desire to better understand or to participate in some way.

But I must admit that I often avoid these conversations—and not because these people are unimportant to me or because these issues do not need to be discussed. I avoid them because they are exhausting. They are exhausting because, I have found, that while white people can engage these issues at their leisure, discuss them in person or on social media and then withdraw again to their daily concerns, I cannot do that. The students whom I love and for whom I am responsible cannot do that. Black America cannot do that. I am exhausted because we cannot withdraw from this painful cycle.

And I am tired of it. Change requires change.

Of course, this means making changes to our unjust system: We have to change the structures that prevent black people from voting. Substandard education must be improved. We need to change unjust laws that produce economic inequality. The criminal justice system must be reformed. All this remains true.

But how does such change happen? Simply put, these structures will not change until white America—which means individual white Americans—gets close to black and brown people. Until you can smell the stench of sin that we smell, until the smell of that strange fruit fills your nostrils and will not let you inhale the sweet fragrances of the world; until you can see in those nine minutes a black man as a brother and not withdraw from his suffering; until you can feel the pain of that knee on

SHAPESHIFTING

By Onyekwelu Chiwenite Kingsley

All my friends are learning to shapeshift
into God. One opens

his body into a collection of beads. The other
burns out himself with

incense and fish oil. Every attempt is a new
way to worship something

different. Say, a redwood nailed to the East.
Say, waterbirds

swallowing half the fishes in the sea. Most of
the people I know are cone-shaped.

Always protruding. Always piercing into
everything that

doesn't smell like God. In one story, there is
a man collecting

milk teeth from another's lungs. In the same
story, he poisons

an oxygen that isn't his. They say there is no
difference between murder

and suicide. I tell them it all depends on what
was killed.

My friends are finding it hard to stay alive.
Firmament is the root word for sunrise.

But even at that, there is no need to let too
much darkness into our night.

Onyekwelu Chiwenite Kingsley's works have been published on Brittle Paper, Kreative Diadem, Okadabooks, Micah 2019 and elsewhere. He is a 200-level pharmacy student at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka, Nigeria. This poem was a runner up in the 2020 Foley Poetry Contest.

your own neck and suddenly find it hard to breathe in front of your computer screen; until then nothing will change. These structures will not change until that body has a name and relationship to you.

And let me be clear: This is Christianity. This sharing in the experience of others is what it is to be one body in Christ. I am not inventing this. Here are Pope Francis' words: "Christian doctrine...is alive," he insists. "[It] knows being unsettled, enlivened." This means Christianity has flesh, breath, a face. In the pope's words, Christianity "has a body that moves and grows, it has a soft flesh: It is called Jesus Christ."

It is also called George Floyd and Sandra Bland and Trayvon Martin.

It is the soft flesh of these black bodies that America must grow close to. It is Jesus in the soft flesh of the black and brown children at my school and schools all across this land that this country must come to know.

How long, O Lord?

*How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and
day after day have sorrow in my heart?*

How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Psalm 13 is the cry of black Americans. We have been crying out this question for centuries. But we cannot cry it alone anymore. Until you grow close to our suffering, until it fills your eyes and ears, your minds and hearts, until you jump up on the cross with black Americans, there can be no Easter for America.

Mario Powell, S.J., is the president of Brooklyn Jesuit Prep.

HUNGRY FOR THE BREAD OF LIFE

Celiac disease limited my access to the Eucharist. But I still find communion in the church.

By Emma Eder



Josh Applegate/Unsplash

Pizza I could live without. Donuts? That would be tough, but I could manage. Naan bread at Indian restaurants? That is pushing it. But the Eucharist? What happens when a devout Catholic cannot eat the bread of life?

Let's rewind: I was a happy kid with a loud mouth, a big heart and an even bigger personality. I was proud of who I was, and my satisfaction with my own identity brought an internal peace, flourishing friendships and a strong relationship with God. Loving myself, others and God was easy.

Fast forward to June after my freshman year of high school: Early in the morning, I launched myself out of bed and stumbled blindly and half asleep to the bathroom, retching along the way. This new ritual had started in mid-June and showed no sign of stopping as the summer progressed. It was normal to feel like I would vomit or pass out after meals. Random bouts of chills racked my body despite the summer heat. My mom and dad knew something was wrong with me, but they could not pinpoint what. Did someone assault me? Was I keeping something from them? No and no. I just felt sick pretty much all the time, and I didn't know why.

After three months of doctor visits, blood tests, an endoscopy and a colonoscopy, a gastroenterologist diagnosed me with celiac disease, an autoimmune disease that causes my immune system to attack my small intestine when I eat

gluten, a protein in wheat, barley and rye. The solution? Eat a strictly gluten-free diet. Easy, I thought. I could do that.

Yet as time went on, my sickness persisted. Though they became less frequent, periods of nausea sporadically plagued me throughout high school and into college, exhausting me emotionally as I wondered when it would end. What could I possibly have eaten that made me sick? Was I failing to follow the gluten-free diet? Were my stomach and small intestine still healing? Would I ever completely heal?

I remember crying myself to sleep, without my sister knowing, when we shared a room at a weeklong service camp. I did the same without my best friend knowing when we shared a room in Italy on a trip with our high school choir and orchestra. Surrounded by other people, I still felt isolated. My anxiety around food reached an all-time high because I had to face the agony of potentially eating the wrong thing at least three times a day and then waking up the next morning to do it all over again. Slowly but surely, my sickness and anxiety wore me out—a pebble in the shoe that brings mere discomfort for a while but after enough time becomes unbearable. I found myself wishing for a terminal illness, which would at least give me clarity and end the pain. Loving myself got infinitely more difficult and so, it turned out, did loving God.

At some point during my sophomore year, my mom discovered a new parish nearby that had an earlier Sunday Mass than our home parish. One morning I decided to join her instead of going to my usual 5 p.m. Mass, but I feared it might not provide a way for people with celiac disease to receive Communion.

According to the Catholic Church's liturgical laws, the bread used in the sacrament of holy Communion must contain wheat for it to truly become Christ's body. (While low-gluten hosts are considered valid, the Vatican reiterated in 2017 in a letter to bishops that "hosts that are completely gluten-free are invalid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist.") There is no such thing as a completely gluten-free host available for the Catholic Mass. All hosts contain wheat to some degree.

Because of the severity of the disease, celiacs have to avoid not only food or drink that *contains* gluten but also food or drink that has been *contaminated* with gluten. For that reason, the safest option for me when receiving Communion is to drink from a chalice before others who have received the host have done so. My home parish designates a "celiac cup" from which those with celiac disease can drink before others do. My high school followed this same approach, as does the Catholic center at my college. If we have enough eucharistic ministers, only those with celiac disease receive from this designated cup. Otherwise, I sit close to a specific station and drink from the cup first.

Much to my delight, sitting in the pews at this new church, I noticed that the eucharistic ministers drank from the priest's chalice instead of the ones they would bring down to the congregation. I just had to reach one of those chalices first. But the minister on our side of the church ended up standing too far from where I sat; another communicant reached the cup before me, potentially mixing the blood of Christ with the bread that is his body—and the gluten that destroys mine.

Dismayed and overwhelmed with the frustration that had built up for months, I cried all the way home from Mass, a common occurrence by this point.

During the summer after my junior year of high school, I joined our choir and orchestra on a trip to Italy, one of the most vibrant Catholic centers of the world. While there, I played my French horn at various churches. I participated eagerly at Mass. I listened intently to the prayers in hopes I could chime in for the Italian Our Father and Hail Mary.

But I could not receive Communion. The Italian churches that we attended rarely offered the chalice. Some churches in the United States will extend a blessing to those who cannot receive Communion, so I processed up with my friends and knelt down on the wooden kneelers in front of the sanctuary with my arms crossed in front of my chest. This, I learned, was not a universal gesture, and the priest kept extending the body of Christ out to me, waiting for me to take it. With a limited Italian vocabulary, I could not explain my predicament to him. Remembering my Spanish teacher saying that Italian

and Spanish are similar, I murmured, "No puedo" ("I can't"), and walked away humiliated.

I felt rejected by the church. Over and over again. It was a slap in the face, and I couldn't bring myself to turn the other cheek. Why did the church exclude someone trying to live out her faith? Why didn't every church offer a form of Communion that was safe for me to eat? The church was supposed to be my safe haven away from suffering, but instead it dug the pebble further into my flesh. I was not only upset with the church; I was angry.

After much bitterness, building anxiety and occasional sickness from accidentally eating gluten, I sat in the confessional. It began normally—"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned"—but once I described the hurt and frustration I felt from the church's rejection, I started to cry and could not stop, tears pouring from my eyes and a different liquid streaming out my nose. My sickness had broken me down to the point of hopelessness.

Broken. Bitter. Angry. Hurt. Humiliated. Hopeless. Rejected.

The priest listened to me with compassion and then spoke words I had not anticipated: "I would like to offer you Anointing of the Sick." Here it was, a gift from God: a path to healing. I remember my hands trembling as he anointed them. I thought, "Lord, let my hands be your hands on Earth." Although the sacrament did not cure me of my illness, it was a salve for my wounds that helped me eventually find grace amid suffering.

It is hard for me to sincerely call my celiac disease a blessing, but I do believe through the grace of God I can identify where I have grown as a result of my struggles. More than before my diagnosis, I empathize with those who have severe food allergies, with those who suffer from crippling anxiety and with those who feel alienated from the church. I have reflected on how an imperfect church does not negate a perfect God. I have shared moments with people in my life who have, at times, also felt like outsiders in their own church. My godmother cannot receive Communion because she married a divorced man. At a family reunion recently, we prayed quietly together as we sat in our pew alone while everyone else processed forward.

Even when I cannot receive physical Communion, I can pray the "Act of Spiritual Communion," which requests, in part, "Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart." Thus I still join in "communion," togetherness, with the rest of God's children. I cannot eat the bread of life, but I know I will never hunger for God.

Emma Eder was diagnosed with celiac disease in August 2014. She studies mathematics and philosophy at Northwestern University, where she also serves as a Catholic scholar at Northwestern's Sheil Catholic Center. This essay is the first-place winner in America's Generation Faith essay contest.



James Baldwin Can Help Heal the Wounds of Racial Division

By Stephen G. Aduvato



James Baldwin knew that to be truly free meant to be healed. Pictured: a protester in Charlotte, N.C., May 30.

In his essay “Notes of a Native Son,” James Baldwin compares his experience as an unloved stepson with his experience as a black American, noting that U.S. culture treats blacks like ugly stepchildren. The most alarming experience of racism he had was in a diner in New Jersey in 1948. He recounted a surge of rage taking over him as the waitress told him, “We don’t serve Negroes here.” He started to lose awareness of what was going on and ended up flinging a glass at her. She ducked, and it shattered a mirror on the wall across from him. As he regained consciousness and bolted out of the diner, he writes that he “saw nothing very clearly but I did see this: that my life, my real life, was in danger, and not from anything other people might do but from the hatred I carried in my own heart.”

As our country once again confronts violent racism, Baldwin’s words explore what hatred can do not only to society at large but to the individual who bears it.

Baldwin felt this kind of hatred not just for white racists, but for his own stepfather, David Baldwin, who suffered from mental illness and was a religious fanatic. In addition to imposing his Pentecostal religion on young James, he made him feel like he was ugly. Baldwin described his

loathing when looking upon him dead in his casket and how unsettled this hatred made him.

Baldwin eventually went on to become one of the most powerful voices in 20th-century American literature. His work touched on issues like sexuality, race and class in ways that were far ahead of his time. As a young man, increasingly able to recognize the correlation between the wounds inflicted by his stepfather and by racist America, Baldwin grew in his determination to fight against injustice and hatred in all of its forms.

“This fight begins, however, in the heart,” he wrote, “and it now had been laid to my charge to keep my own heart free of hatred and despair.”

The idea of covering over his wounds by hating his actual stepfather or racist U.S. culture would not satisfy him. He knew that to be truly free meant to be healed. And part of that healing would require reconciliation and striving toward unity with those who had oppressed him. Baldwin’s path toward crossing the divide required that his “enemy” be part of the healing process.

Baldwin’s wounded relationship with his stepfather made him desperate to find

Unsplash/Clay Banks



Baldwin attributes the divisions in society to the widespread ‘blindness’ to our own humanity.

role models and mentors as he was growing up. The most impressive one, perhaps, was Beauford Delaney, whom he met in Greenwich Village in 1940. Baldwin was immediately captivated by his warmth, charisma and artistic vision. One of the most striking memories Baldwin had of Delaney was of when they were walking down the street after a rainstorm and Delaney pointed out a puddle, asking him to “look.” Baldwin claimed to see nothing but water. Then Delaney asked him to look again. This time, Baldwin noticed some pools of oil swirling within the water, causing the reflection of the buildings to radiate brightly.

He saw Delaney as his “long-lost father” who “never gave [him] any lectures” but instead provoked him to recognize beauty within the ugliness, both internally and in the world around him. Baldwin learned to look at reality through his mentor’s gaze, going on to say that “the reality of his seeing caused me to begin to see.”

In his 1964 essay *Nothing Personal*, a monograph that included photographs by Richard Avedon, Baldwin spoke of the “miracle of love” that begins to “take flesh” when we encounter someone who embraces our wounds and is unafraid of making themselves vulnerable to us. Delaney was not the miracle but instead helped Baldwin to be more receptive to that miracle, wherever it might come from.

Many of Baldwin’s realizations and much of the language he used are rooted in his Pentecostal upbringing. He distanced himself from the church of his childhood (and from organized religion in general) because of its moralistic and pietistic nature. Needless to say, the Christianity of his youth repelled him. It covered over the broken and needful humanity of people Christ came to save.

Ironically, it was by leaving the church that he was able to come to understand his need for salvation, for a “revealed” answer to his questions. It was Baldwin’s faithfulness to going

to the depth of his wounded humanity that enabled him to recognize his need for a greater love, for a truer happiness. It was precisely this need that the slave traders who bought and sold his ancestors denied. They convinced themselves that the people they enslaved were not really humans, which enabled Jim Crow to draw an artificial line dividing brothers and sisters into “whites” and “colored,” or human and not entirely human.

When I look at the United States in 2020, rent apart and reeling, I see just how prophetic Baldwin’s words were in the beginning of *Nothing Personal*. Baldwin attributes divisions in society to the widespread “blindness” to our own humanity. We are still deluding ourselves that wounds are something we should hide rather than basic realities we ought to delve into.

The range of responses stirred up by the slaying of black lives testifies to Baldwin’s warnings. We argue back and forth about who is on the right side and who is on the wrong side of these killings. We debate the best way to correct systemic injustices and whether or not the burning of cities and retaliation against police is a justifiable way to bring attention to them. Yet as I take in all of these reactions from the news and from social media, I hear Baldwin’s voice in the back of my head, asking me those fundamental, human questions.

When we skip over those questions, it becomes easier for us to convince ourselves that the “answers” are in our hands. And we become more inclined to fortify the walls that divide us from those we deem to be on the “wrong side.” Our inability to look closely at our wounds makes it unbearable to be challenged by the “oth-

er” and to accept that justice is not something that we can bring about by our own efforts.

It seemed to Baldwin that the divides between black and white, rich and poor, saved and damned, beautiful and ugly were the result of Americans’ inability to look at themselves in the mirror, at who they really are. This internal blindness has, in effect, blinded us to the humanity of the other and to our experience of reality more broadly.

My first encounter with Baldwin’s unique take on racism and American culture was through the 2018 documentary “I Am Not Your Negro.” This was when I began to realize that for Baldwin, racism was the symptom of an existential or “human” disease.

Baldwin did not deny the political implications of racism; he became enthusiastically involved in politics as time went on. He became an outspoken supporter of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and attempted several times to convince Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to take the plight of urban blacks more seriously. But what made his approach unique was that he started from the personal level.

Baldwin’s position is an echo of Jesus’ indication that social justice begins from personal conversion. Pope Francis recently commented that “the justice proposed by Jesus is not a simple set of rules applied technically but a disposition of the heart that guides those who have responsibility.” Francis emphasized that the conversion of the individual “is the only justice that generates justice!” In Baldwin’s eyes, the political injustices brought on by racism began and can only be changed from the level of one’s inner self-awareness.

Baldwin’s dedication to seeking an experience of healing for these racial wounds turned into a journey. He dedicated his life to discovering the answers to the questions that plagued him since his youth. But this journey was not an individualistic endeavor. He believed he was called to be “a witness to whence I came, where I am. Witness to what I’ve seen and the possibilities that I think I see.”

His journey of making sense of his wounds was an experience he felt compelled to share with others, to provoke them to begin to look at their own woundedness and to reject the idea that we ought to mask our own vulnerability. The more we deny our own humanity, the more we become blinded to the humanity of others.

Baldwin continues in *Nothing Personal* to lament that we “appear to have become too timid to question what we are told. Our failure to trust one another deeply enough to be able to talk to one another has become so great that people with these questions in their hearts do not speak them.”

Baldwin attempts to help us face those rare and precious moments when existential questions inevitably rise up to the surface of our consciousness. He points to that “devastating” moment when we wake up in the middle of the night and start thinking about all the things we have to do the next day: Get up. Get dressed. Go to work. Then back home, fall asleep and do it all over again. Just going through the same cycle again and again. What is the point? Why does anything matter? Who am I and why do I even exist in the first place?

“It is a fearful speculation—or, rather, a fearful knowledge—that, one day one’s eyes will no longer look out

on the world,” he wrote. “One will no longer be present at the universal morning roll call.... Sometimes, at 4 A.M., this knowledge is almost enough to force a reconciliation between oneself and all one’s pain and error.”

Baldwin indicates that we have two choices at this moment. Either we can fall back asleep and keep blindly going through the routine, never really looking at our need for meaning or for answers to those existential questions. Or we can wake up and look at ourselves in the mirror, facing our need to be infinitely, unconditionally loved.

The answer, Baldwin proposes, does not emerge in the realm of politics or law. As much as the correcting of social evils does require radically restructuring our political system, any change that does not begin on the level of the individual will be inert, at best. Nor will the answer be something one can purchase or manufacture by oneself. Instead, the only adequate answer is something from beyond ourselves, what he calls, “a miracle.”

“For, perhaps—perhaps—between now and that last day, something wonderful will happen,” Baldwin writes in *Nothing Personal*, “a miracle, a miracle of coherence and release.... It is the miracle of love.... [I]t is only this passionate achievement which can outlast death, which can cause life to spring from death.”

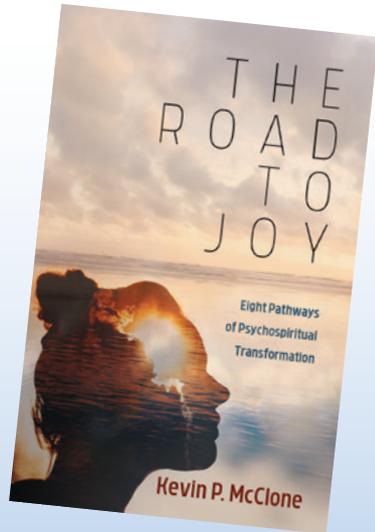
Stephen G. Adubato studied moral theology at Seton Hall University and currently teaches religion and philosophy at St. Benedict’s Prep in Newark, N.J. He also blogs at *Cracks in Postmodernity* at the Patheos Catholic Channel.

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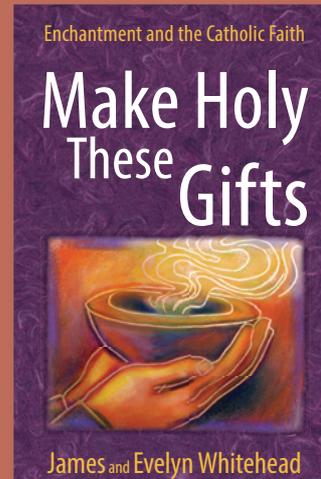
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By James and Evelyn Whitehead



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My Arms Are Empty: A Song of Lamentation for Ahmaud Arbery

By Luke

Oh
When I saw him die
I no longer
cared about the trembling the tears
no one walks these streets except
the very few
and the solitary runners
choke me I cannot breathe against
the rhythm sorrow beats into my
throat

I moved into the morning and I will
sit against this tree
seven days they say
seven days of tattered shirts I no longer
care let the holes be seen seven
times seven I have found this place and I
will
stay

No I cry and no I whisper
and no one
cares that I am
become the Pietà without a child
even that

even that
And I hum “Oh,
Mary,
Don’t You Weep” and she is now
here with
me
saying No you will you must drain your
heart
until the others come
and the others will

This tree is not shelter not from
the devouring fire it burns

forever and our scars
pulse
with the rage that cannot sound

when the others come
I will
know that we will
then unclench
our swollen fingers

Our hands will drum our sorrow
into this ground

Yes I see
you glance at me yes I am
the one who whispers each
child’s name if I cannot hold
them to my breast I will
hold them with my song

Yes
live child you live
and this
tree and I will be the place where
no lie can live

Joseph A. Brown, S.J., writing as Luke, is a native of East St. Louis, and a professor in the department of Africana studies at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. His writings include A Retreat With Thea Bowman and Bede Abram: Leaning on the Lord; To Stand on the Rock: Meditations on Black Catholic Identity; and The Sun Whispers, Wait: New and Collected Poems (2009).

Sinful thinking

By Candida Moss



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Sin in the New Testament

By Jeffrey Siker
Oxford University Press
240p \$24.95

When human beings have tried to describe evil, it almost always takes a kind of self-reflective, anthropomorphic shape. Though he has horns, a tail and cloven hooves, the devil is recognizably human; the Antichrist, as constructed by tradition, will appear at the end of time as an ordinary person; and the monsters and ghouls that inhabit our artistic imagination—from succubae to vampires and even aliens—mostly share some features with ourselves.

It is almost as if we cannot think of evil without remembering our own propensity toward sin. But what, precisely, is sin? How does sin relate to evil personified? And how has our perception of sin changed over the

past two millennia? The stakes are not small here. If, as the Gospel of Matthew says, Jesus is named because “he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21), and, as the Creed professes, sin creates the need for the incarnation and salvation, its nature surely warrants some considered attention.

Two recently published books from Oxford University Press address the variegated and multifaceted character of sin in the New Testament. Jeffrey Siker presents a concise and structurally important survey of this topic in *Sin in the New Testament*. Siker’s earlier book, *Jesus, Sin and Perfection*, drew out the culturally constructed transgressions attached to Jesus’ biography (his birth to an unwed mother and ignominious death by crucifixion, for example), Siker begins this latest work with a taxonomy of sin that traces the origins of ideas about sin from among Jesus’ followers to contemporary and scriptural ideas about “lawlessness” in ancient Jewish tradition to Greco-Roman philosophy. He then takes each book (or collection

of books) in turn, in order to draw out the various ways in which sin is a cosmic power with which to be wrestled, a power associated with particular sets of religious crimes and in a particularly intimate relationship with ancient theories of sacrifice.

This relationship between transgression and sacrifice, of course, gives, as it has since Hebrews, explanatory power to the death of Jesus—a death that has been variously described as ransom (Mk 11:45), sacrificial offering to wash away sin with blood, victory over the cosmic forces of sin (Revelation, Irenaeus) and repayment of sin-induced debt (Anselm). Though Siker’s interests lie in the concrete descriptions of the New Testament, he elegantly and accessibly sketches the interpretations of early church figures, including titans like Clement of Alexandria. Nor is Siker ignorant of the cost of the interpretative traditions that surround sin. For example, he is sensitive to the ways in which traditional portraits of gluttony might moralize and condemn those suffering from eat-

The Emergence of Sin
The Cosmic Tyrant in Romans
By Matthew Croasmun
Oxford University Press
296p \$34.95

Two recently published books address the variegated and multi-faced character of sin in the New Testament.

ing disorders, but is equally interested in the enduring place of sin in modern Christian communities and theologies.

By contrast, Matthew Croasmun's *The Emergence of Sin: The Cosmic Tyrant in Romans* takes an in-depth look at the various applications of sin language in Paul's most significant missive, his Letter to the Romans (in particular, Chapters 5 to 8). Here Croasmun seeks to explain the relationship between sin as a cosmic power (as popularized in the early church by Irenaeus and in the language of "Christus Victor," coined by the 20th-century Swedish theologian Gustaf Aulén), sin as a systemic problem or force and sin as practiced by or inhabitant in the individual. In addressing this question, Croasmun turns to "emergentism," a modern psychological theory, and leans heavily on the work of Philip Clayton and Andy Clark.

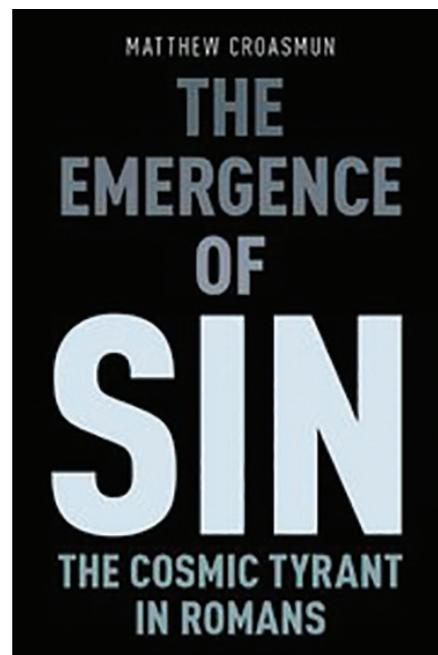
Croasmun is not the first biblical theologian to note the individuated and mythological dimensions of sin; but, as he notes, the ways in which these different elements are bound together has thus far been somewhat neglected. It is here that he turns to the grounding principles of emergentism (a kind of layered view of nature) to draw together the individual with the cosmic or mythic. In particular, he harnesses the philosophical idea of supervenience—the notion that certain kinds of relationships are affected and sometimes controlled by different kinds of properties. To put this in terms of human beings, he writes: "the social supervenes on the individual" but also that "the social is *irreducible* to the individual." Sin supervenes on our individual agency as sinners, but it does not exist without us.

What this means, exegetically speaking, for our understanding of s/Sin (as Croasmun puts it) as both cosmic actor and individual act(s) of transgression is that Sin can act as collective figure (like a character or agent) even if, by its very nature, it does not exist without the acts of individual sinners. Emergent theory holds s/Sin in a kind of productive tension: It is the personified force that enslaves people while simultaneously and coherently being the individual transgressions that we each commit on a regular basis. In the current moment, we might crassly but usefully say that systemic racism supervenes on individual members of society but would not exist without the tacit and explicit racism of individuals.

The theological upshot is that we are all responsible for sin as members of a social collective as well as blameworthy for our individual transgressions. This observation sheds new light on the Lord's Prayer as well as broader attitudes toward culpability and confession.

Croasmun's theory certainly works as an emergent reading of Romans 5–8, but perhaps his larger success is in brokering a healthy working relationship between the vocabulary of exegesis and theology, on one hand, and nontheological theoretical approaches, on the other. Certainly he is not the first to attempt to draw together different methodological realms, but his "emergent hamartiology" has potential.

Historically speaking, it is a simple fact that our priorities about which is the greatest sin have changed. For some authors of the New Testament and many members of the early



church, it was apostasy (scripturally defined as denying the Holy Spirit) that constituted the unforgivable sin. For most of Christian history from late antiquity to the Reformation it was, as Brad Gregory showed in his *Unintended Reformation*, avarice or greed that threatened to place souls in jeopardy.

Only in the last hundred years and in the wake of the cultural and technological sexual revolutions have abortion, contraception and sexual orientation risen to the top of the heap. The shifting sands of our own historical contexts only contribute to the problem. One wonders what the author of Hebrews, who (arguably) declared that any postbaptismal sin might be unforgivable, would think of the comparatively liberal sacrament of reconciliation and teachings about purgatory. The truth to which both of these authors speak is that any theology of sin is inevitably complex.

Candida Moss is the Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, and an award-winning author of five books. She is also a frequent news commentator for CBS and CNN.



Five centuries of Catholic lives

By Patrick Gilger

Philosophically speaking, we Americans are incurable presentists. Everything best is new. Everything new is sparkingly so—and has been pulled from the ether rather than grown from the ground. It can be well-nigh impossible to get us to take even our own history seriously, much less that of other, more distant parts of our blessed world.

What goes for Americans goes equally for American Jesuits. Which is why, during the height of the summer every other year, all the American novices in the Society of Jesus are sent to Regis University in Denver for a monthlong course on Jesuit history.

The teachers of this course, each of whom is given a week to cover the essentials of their specialty, are typically drawn from the Who's Who of Jesuit historians. When I was there one scalding Colorado summer years ago, John W. O'Malley captivated us with chronicles of the first Jesuits and the great church councils. Thomas

Lucas fascinated us with accounts of his restoration of the rooms of Ignatius to their original simplicity. And John W. Padberg charmed us with fascinating stories of the impact of the Jesuit university on 19th-century Europe. Father Padberg opened his week of lectures with the following quip. "A good historian is nothing other than a high-class gossip."

Far be it from me to label Leslie Woodcock Tentler a high-class gossip, but it is no reach at all to say that her book *American Catholics: A History* is both a rigorous and laudable effort to cure us American Catholics of the illusion that our desires have no history.

Like all good historians, Professor Tentler peppers her book with fascinating historical tidbits. I had no idea, for example, that in 1787 and 1788 irked parishioners of St. Peter's Parish in New York twice prevented the Rev. John Carroll—at the time the papally appointed "superior of the mission" of the entire United States—from say-

ing Mass in their church by forcibly pulling him off the high altar. Nor did I realize quite how commonplace, in the early 19th century, was the Rev. Stephen Badin's practice of relying on Angeliq ue Campeau, a French-Potawatomi woman who spoke multiple languages, for help not only in preaching but in hearing confessions during his work as a frontier missionary in Indiana. Nor did I know that, in the booming post-World War II years, there were so many priestly vocations that it was common for a young priest to wait some 20 years before being named pastor of a parish.

Tentler's larger story is told both chronologically and "from below." She ranges from the horrors wrought upon the natives of Florida by Ponce de Leon's 1513 expedition to our current sexual abuse crisis, and from consideration of the tensions between the French and Spanish (or Jesuit and Franciscan) models of inculturation to Pope Francis' address to the joint

A statue of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini at the Columbus Day Parade in New York, Oct. 14, 2019.

chambers of Congress. In so doing, Tentler not only covers five centuries but does so while offering a series of snapshots of what it has meant to be a “good Catholic” in America. She demonstrates once again that by no means, and despite many protests to the contrary, has it always meant the same thing.

To bring some order to this effort, Tentler has split her study into five parts, showing us first the shape of Catholic lives in colonial America, then an expanding nation through the heart of the 19th century, the institutional expansion that provided a place for waves of Catholic immigrants in the early 20th century, the booming church that produced John F. Kennedy and Fulton Sheen, and finally the post-Vatican II unraveling in which we currently find ourselves. She opens each part with a brief profile. Mother Cabrini stands in for our immigrant experience and Patricia Caron Crowley—a lay female member of the Pontifical Commission on Population, Family, and Birth that preceded the issuance of “*Humanae Vitae*”—for our current unmoored state.

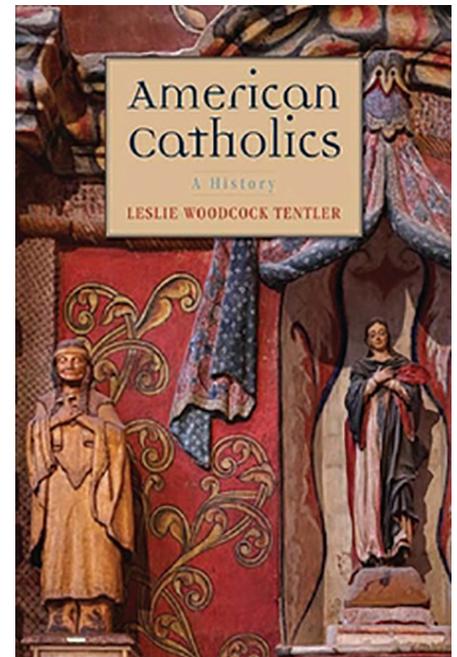
But the profile that opens the book and can serve here as an example of Tentler’s style and insight is of the recently canonized Eusebio Kino. In a few pages, Tentler not only tells the story of Kino’s life but does so in a way that allows him to serve as a lens through which we can begin to locate some of the most important fault lines of the colonialist age in America. In Kino’s case, this means not only placing him in the relatively positive context of the global expanse of Catholic missions but in the

more-than-relatively problematic context of the colonial missionary priest as agent of empire.

It is to Tentler’s credit that she gives attention to such troublesome realities. Nor is such clarity of vision limited to the remote past, as she writes about the support of slavery by almost all Southern American Catholics (including certain bishops), the now-infamous 1838 sale of 272 men, women and children by the Jesuits of the Maryland Province and the recent trauma of the clerical sex abuse crisis.

But neither is Tentler an accuser in search of a scapegoat, and I found it edifying and encouraging to be reminded of the Catholic literati of the mid-20th century (Dulles, McLuhan, Murray, Merton, O’Connor, Percy, Powers) and of the impact of women religious throughout the entire history of the American church. It was in service of describing the symbolic role that women religious have played that Tentler tells a bittersweet story, one that captures so much of what is beautiful and strange about Catholicism.

It was 1910, and Father Cullane, the pastor of a rural Michigan parish, had invited two Holy Cross sisters to come from Indiana for a three-week visit. Their arrival was highly anticipated, and “business was at a stand still” when they finally arrived and made their way through town. But Tentler, drawing upon Cullane’s memoirs, also relates a visit they made to a German Catholic family. At the conclusion of the visit, as they were leaving the house, the *hausfrau* knelt down and asked not for the pastor’s blessing but that of the sisters. “The startled sisters,” Tentler tells us, “recovered

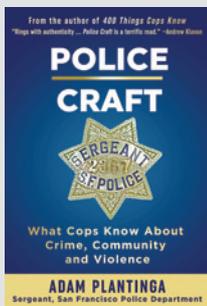


their wits sufficiently to ask ‘Father’ to do the honors.”

In Tentler’s capable hands our own history, like our wills, turns out to be a recalcitrant thing. It is neither innocent nor guilty. It simply does not conform to our present categories. It is not, in fact, what we thought it was. Nor were we ever quite what we are supposed to have been. It is a stubborn thing.

It is precisely in this stubbornness, this recalcitrance, this strangeness and otherness that the gift of good history lies for us Americans. Because this recalcitrance, like a rock thrown at the windows of our relentless presentism and endless nostalgia, has the capacity to break us open, to show us from where we have come. And where it still may be possible to go.

Patrick Gilger, S.J., is pursuing a doctorate in sociology at the New School for Social Research. He is *America’s* contributing editor for culture.



Police Craft
What Cops Know
About Crime,
Community and
Violence
By Adam Plantinga
Quill Driver Books
280p \$12.95

Cop culture

Until I read Adam Plantinga's *Police Craft*, I was not aware that a police officer in an interrogation room with a kidnapping suspect can forgo reading the suspect his or her Miranda rights because of a "public safety" exception. If the victim has not yet been found, Mirandizing a suspect is not necessary because time is of the essence to ensure the victim's safety.

Plantinga, now a sergeant in the San Francisco Police Department, has been a police officer for over 18 years in Milwaukee and San Francisco. His firsthand experiences on the job are recounted extensively in the book. There are vivid chapters that describe adrenaline-fueled foot chases and shootouts with felons, and heartbreaking moments with opioid-addicted mothers in danger of having their babies taken away by Child Protective Services.

Plantinga embellishes on the idiosyncrasies of his craft: the firefighter-versus-cop rivalry, the endless low-brow humor that cops inflict on each other and how each cop must endure the mountains of paperwork that accompany each end-of-day report.

That does not mean that he does not romanticize his profession as a crime fighter. In one chapter, Plant-

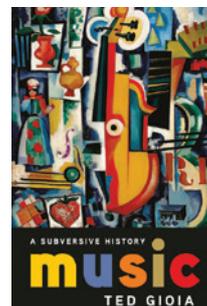
inga sarcastically comments on the dead body of a gang member with the words "Live a solja, die a solja" tattooed on his body: "Exactly what cause was he fighting for? A more equitable distribution of heroin? Maybe we can go ahead and cancel the 21-gun salute for this fallen warrior."

One of the darkest chapters in the book, "Predators," provides a horrific peek into the worst of the worst of the criminal world: child rapists, sadists and murderers. Anyone looking to write a detective novel will find juicy details in the book that could spark ideas and prompt further research.

For me, the book brought up many mixed feelings. I grew up a poor immigrant in the United States, sometimes living in the kinds of neighborhoods Plantinga writes about. My parents and I have suffered at the hands of hypocritical police culture too many times for me not to find the tone of the book sometimes entitled, often smug and, at its worst, insolent.

Plantinga does now and again turn a reflexive gaze on the police department and how it might benefit from various improvements, be they community relations or anger management. But it will take many more books and many years of dialogue and healing to reverse the damage already done to impoverished and misunderstood communities who do not consider the police purveyors of "Safety and Respect."

Deniz Demirel is a Polish-born writer, actor and filmmaker.



Music
A Subversive History
By Ted Gioia
Basic Books
528p \$19.99

From outliers to icons

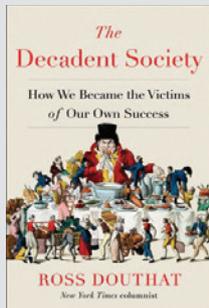
This nearly 500-page treatise on the agitational power of popular music in society, history and culture finds its author, the award-winning writer and musician Ted Gioia, at the height of his critical power. Gioia establishes the connection between music and violence—from the universe-defining explosion (and "downbeat") of the Big Bang to the music-driven hunting rituals of the Paleolithic era to the inner-city violence depicted by late-1980s gangsta rap. He also argues that the most significant musicians and composers throughout history have suffered rejection by the "cultural elites" of their day, only to be sanitized and elevated by those same elites after death.

Gioia opens *Music: A Subversive History* by stating that the term "music history" makes him cringe, with the "images of long-dead composers, smug men in wigs and waistcoats" that it conjures up. It is clear that Gioia wrote this book for readers who might feel the same—who would be more at home at Coachella than at Carnegie Hall. Or perhaps more accurately, readers who might find themselves drawn to both settings. But, he argues, so would have rabble-rousers like Mozart or Bach.

Bach, Gioia writes, “is commemorated as the sober, bewigged Lutheran, who labored for church authorities and nobility,” but he was far more colorful. Bach’s exploits were well known while he lived, including “pulling a knife on a fellow musician during a street fight” and “consorting with a married woman in the organ loft.” It wasn’t until a decade after his death in 1750, a period that coincided with the rise of German nationalism, that “the myths of Bach’s genius finally emerged.”

Though Gioia’s examples of this mainstreaming process—from outlier to icon—are many, what I found most emblematic of his argument was his consideration of N.W.A.’s “Straight Outta Compton”—an album that went from pariah to paragon in 25 years. When it was released in 1988, the gangsta rap album was maligned by pundits, repressed by on-air D.J.s and even reviled by the F.B.I.—who sent a threatening letter to the group’s record label. But in 2017 it was chosen by the Library of Congress for preservation in the National Recording Registry, “a distinction limited to works of cultural, historical, or artistic significance.” As a postscript to this anecdote, Gioia writes that the F.B.I. letter is now on display at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame—as “a monument to the futility of authorities’ attempts to control the evolution of the song.”

Cameron Dezen Hammon is a writer and musician. Her memoir, *This Is My Body*, was published in 2019.



The Decadent Society
How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success
By Ross Douthat
Simon & Schuster
272p \$27

A state of stagnation

July 20, 2019, marked the 50th anniversary of the moon landing, an epic pinnacle of human achievement. It is also the point at which Ross Douthat, in his new book, *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success*, chooses to begin his study of the cultural, economic and political torpor that has emerged since that time.

The term *decadence*, Douthat writes, “deployed usefully, refers to economic stagnation, institutional decay, and cultural and intellectual exhaustion at a high level of material prosperity and technological development.” Consider our nonfunctional politics, theological deadlocks, even the increasing unbearable sameness of our cities. Something, clearly, is not working on a very large scale. Douthat attributes much of this to decadence.

Crucially, decadence, as Douthat defines it, has nothing to do with high-brow culture, haute cuisine or high fashion. Decadence is a state of being, and as Douthat contends, it is where we find ourselves in the 21st century West. The West generally—and the United States in particular—is no longer the productive force it was 50 years ago, he says. Instead, it is treading water, and becoming exhausted doing so.

Douthat first calls our attention to innovative stagnation, or a disappointing lack of life-altering inventions in the recent past. He concedes that the internet is the biggest innovation since the 1960s, but generally speaking, “everyday life was...more radically transformed by earlier technological breakthroughs.”

The book then covers the fertility crisis, or the fact that the birth rate in developed countries across the world has fallen below replacement level. Finally, Douthat devotes a significant amount of space to institutional and political sclerosis, intellectual repetition and the ways the government actively enforces our decadent lifestyles.

The book concludes with a rough sketch of how decadence ends—with a bang, perhaps, but more likely through the convergence of large-scale trends that are just now manifesting themselves: African immigration to Europe, climate change, bioethical advancements and conflicts, and (perhaps) Chinese Christianization.

In the end, I considered Douthat largely correct in his diagnosis. The West is drifting; it lacks an animating purpose. But reading Douthat’s criticisms of the 21st century at the onset of the Covid-19 crisis provided a stark contrast to the very real issues that motivated him to write the book. The coronavirus-related economic shutdowns and social disruptions have had the result of removing many of us from the subject of the book: society itself and its tired repetition of business as usual.

Dominic Lynch is a writer from Chicago who publishes the website *The New Chicagoan*.

Birth Pangs

**FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME (A)**
JULY 12, 2020

READINGS: IS 55:10-11; PS 65; ROM
8:18-23; MT 13:1-23

This year has been extremely difficult for so many people. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic turned the world upside down, halting everyday life in an unimaginable way and causing many people to suffer and die from the virus. Likewise, the murders of Breonna Taylor in March and George Floyd in May by police officers added two more names to the list of the many black people who have died at the hands of cavalier law enforcers. We have seen the sadness, frustration and rage that Floyd's murder in particular sparked. The visual confirmation of a murder in broad daylight showed the world yet another example of inhumane treatment and outright disregard for black life. As a black woman, I feel despair. Can Scripture help? I hope so.

The second reading, from Paul's Letter to the Romans, is apropos. Paul speaks of creation "groaning through labor pains," using the image of a woman giving birth to capture collective suffering. This vivid imagery is used throughout the Bible to express a difficult period that will eventually end, but only after much pain. For instance, Jeremiah speaks of the suffering of the people of Judah as a woman crying out in labor while giving birth to her first child. She gasps for breath, stretches out her hands and faints,

overcome by the difficulties she endures (Jer 4:31). Similarly, when Isaiah describes the suffering that would befall the city of Babylon, the city is personified as a woman experiencing the anguish of labor (Is 13:5).

The Gospels of Mark and John also use language of birth pangs. Mark wrote during the first Jewish-Roman War, the Great Revolt, in which Jews rebelled against the Roman Empire, resulting in many deaths and enormous destruction, most notably the destruction of the temple. Mark characterizes this period as "the beginning of the labor pains" (Mk 13:8). John also uses this language, although he highlights the joy that comes after the struggle: "When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world" (Jn 16:21). I am certain, however, that many women remember both the pain of childbirth and the joy of a new life. If we are currently laboring through injustice, we cannot focus only on a future joy. We must struggle together to deliver the society we want to see.

Like John's use of the labor pains metaphor, the Letter to the Romans highlights hope when experiencing collective pain. Paul sees suffering as a part of the human condition, which he frequently connects back to the first human sin in the garden of Eden. Yet Paul also asserts that future glory will

'We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now.' (Rom 8:22)

Praying With Scripture

What will you do to promote justice in society?

How can you remain hopeful even when feeling despair?

How can the command to love one another inform your actions?

be revealed through the Holy Spirit. As the passage continues beyond today's reading, Paul remains optimistic, calling for people to wait with patience for future redemption.

I wish I could share Paul's optimism, but I have no more patience. We can no longer merely wait for things to get better. God also calls us to work passionately to recognize the "glory to be revealed for us," when all humans are finally treated with dignity and respect.

Not to belabor the birth imagery, but right now not enough of us are groaning in labor pains. We are long overdue to deliver a just society for all: It is time to induce.

Weeding the Field

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME (A)
JULY 19, 2020

READINGS: WIS 12:13-19; PS 86;
ROM 8:26-27; MT 13:24-43

In my commentary for the Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, I called for us to move society out of the painful birth pangs of racism to deliver justice for all people. The readings from last week and this week highlight the many obstacles that we face as we try to create this just society.

In this year of the Lectionary's cycle, the Gospel readings come from Matthew, who depicts Jesus speaking in parables. Parables are short stories that often teach by criticizing bad behavior and calling for hearers to reform their lives. These are not simply reflections on the kingdom of heaven; these are directions for how to create the kingdom on earth.

Throughout the parables, Jesus highlights the need to open one's ears and eyes to receive his message. When listening to parables, hearers should compare themselves to people or elements in the story. In the parable of the sower, read last week, Jesus used agrarian imagery to help his community change their actions to receive the good news and distribute its message of love throughout the world. Jesus likens the Gospel to seeds, and he compares the crowd to various surfaces that freely receive the Gospel. Pathways, rocky ground and thorny soil are all ineffective

places to sow seeds. They leave the seeds vulnerable to evil ones (birds), or shallow, without roots and easily tempted by wealth (weeds). These are all barriers that inhibit the Gospel from thriving. Only the good soil brings forth a successful harvest.

Hopefully, ancient and modern audiences desire to be the good soil that receives the word and faithfully promotes justice. Our current state of affairs, however, reveals many birds and weeds that actively oppose the Gospel and rocky ground in which it cannot grow deep roots. We should remember that this parable is not preached in order to celebrate good soil, but to help its hearers cultivate good soil in themselves to receive word of the kingdom. Jesus calls for them to recognize the metaphorical birds and weeds in their midst who sow division and discord, promote hatred and fail to take accountability for their actions.

The parable of the weeds has a similar goal but a more eschatological tone. The seeds are followers of Christ who will inherit the kingdom of heaven, while the enemy and his weeds are evildoers who will be thrown into "the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." Are you the good seeds or the weeds? Do you promote justice and righteousness, or do your actions or inaction damage your community?

While the parable of the weeds looks forward to a final judgment day, it has implications for how we build up the kingdom in our present

'Whoever has ears ought to hear.' (Mt 13:43)

Praying With Scripture

Do you attentively listen to the cries of injustice in society?

What can you do to promote the dignity of all people?

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

circumstances. As we work toward a society in which all people are treated with dignity and respect, we will have to contend with the weeds that choke justice, literally and figuratively.

This parable can be misused to justify complacency as the weeds and wheat grow together until final harvest. But telling people who are presently suffering victimization to wait for a future reckoning only does further harm and fails to promote God's kingdom. God's eschatological justice cannot be an excuse for inaction, comfortable ignorance or outright denial of the need for change.

The reason God waits to burn the weeds is to protect the wheat as it grows. When we recognize the weeds as harmful, destructive entities, we too have an obligation to prevent them from choking off the potential of the good seed God has planted.

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Governance

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A) JULY 26, 2020

READINGS: 1 KGS 3:5-12; PS 119;
ROM 8:28-30; MT 13:44-52

In August, the Democratic and Republican parties will officially confirm their nominees for the presidential election. We need thoughtful leaders who will govern with the interests of all people in mind, not only a select base. Today's readings provide insights into governance that can inform how we think about elected officials and whom we elect in November.

In the first reading, God visits King Solomon in a dream early in his reign. God asks the new king what he desires. Solomon first recounts the faithfulness and righteousness of his predecessor, his father, David. Then Solomon acknowledges the gravity of assuming the throne, recognizing that leadership means he must serve the needs of all people. With this in mind, he requests that God give him an understanding mind and the ability to determine good from evil, right from wrong. God praises Solomon's sincere and selfless request: "Because you have asked for this—not for a long life for yourself, nor for riches, nor for the life of your enemies, but for understanding so that you may know what is right—I do as you requested."

Scripture reminds us that the call to leadership is exactly that, a calling. Leaders must focus on the needs and success of others, rather than their

own wealth, fame and success. Recognizing, as Solomon did, their responsibility to govern a "vast people," leaders must promote justice and equality for all people, rejecting hateful ideologies and policies. We can pray that our leaders seek wisdom and understanding, but we must also exercise our right to vote for those who have demonstrated these qualities. Now more than ever we need competence and heart to get us through this difficult time.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we continue to hear parables about the kingdom of heaven. This week we hear three short parables, using the images of a hidden treasure, a fine pearl and a fishing net.

The fishing net parable is especially relevant today, and it connects well to last week's Gospel. In this parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a net thrown into the sea that catches fish of every kind. When the net is full, it is brought to shore. The good fish are put into baskets, and the bad fish are thrown away. This passage has an eschatological tone, as it imagines a future judgment in which the righteous (good fish) are separated from the evil (bad fish), who are thrown into hell.

There are echoes of the parable of the weeds in today's Gospel. Like the wheat and the weeds, the good and bad fish live side-by-side with one another. Just as the wheat grows amid the weeds, the good fish swim in the same sea as the bad fish and are caught in the same net. Solomon needed wisdom

***'Give your servant an understanding heart to distinguish right from wrong.'* (1 Kgs 3:9)**

Praying With Scripture

Do you seek to increase your own wisdom and understanding?

How can you help to build the kingdom of heaven on earth?

Are you voting for people who want to promote a just society for all people, or only a select group?

to govern God's people; we need it in order to distinguish between the righteousness God seeks and the hatred and injustice that clouds and poisons the sea where we all swim together.

As we prepare for election season, Scripture reminds us of the wisdom required for leaders to consistently promote the good and care for diverse communities. We similarly need wisdom to choose such leaders.

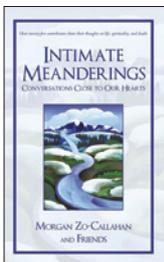
Jaime L. Waters teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies.

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America

The Enduring American Dream

Imperfections remain, but there is reason for hope

By Nelson J. Pérez



I never dreamed I would be celebrating Independence Day in the cradle of liberty as archbishop of Philadelphia—or under the circumstances of a pandemic as well as societal tensions rooted in race relations. This year, our national holiday and the current national atmosphere offer an opportunity for reflection and for hope.

When the founding fathers gathered in 1776 to sign the Declaration of Independence, it was also a tense and anxiety-ridden time. As in the present day, major challenges affected everyone in society.

In the midst of that tension, our founding fathers declared, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” That declarative statement was a watershed moment in world history. It marked a new age in political thought, one that sought to shape the laws of man to ensure that the God-given rights and dignity of every individual would be upheld without discrimination. This political revolution sought to achieve not only the emancipation of the human person, but also the emancipation of the human soul.

It was a lofty goal and one not to be achieved overnight. Imperfections existed from the beginning. But the Declaration of Independence created

a starting point. It forged a land of opportunity where, ideally, all would be given equal opportunity to achieve the best life possible based on their own merits. That beacon of opportunity and hope is the reason our nation has experienced continued waves of migration since its founding.

Ours is a country built by immigrants, and each of our families has a migration story. Some are recent and others in the distant past. We are truly *e pluribus unum*—“out of many, one.” Our only true national identity rests in the common beliefs outlined so eloquently in the Declaration itself.

Each generation of Americans has faced its own set of grave challenges to the basic principles of our political system of thought. Over nearly two and half centuries, “We the People” have survived revolution, civil war, pandemics, the Great Depression, world wars, the Cold War, social turbulence regarding race relations, terrorist attacks and much more.

In each instance, we have overcome darkness and emerged brighter, fueled by optimism, faith and a common bond of civic responsibility to one another. Our nation has never triumphed over a moment of crisis in a perfect state. There always has been, and likely always will be, room to do better as individuals and as a country. The tragic death of George Floyd and the events that followed throughout

the land are evidence enough that we have a long way to go and that there is much work yet to be done.

Catholic teaching on social justice reinforces our obligatory bond to one another. It demands that we work each day to ensure that all those who suffer and who are oppressed be set free and that they be allowed to pursue life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we must embrace unity and diversity in thought and action.

Although America may appear broken, the American dream has not been shattered. It is up to each of us to live out that dream and to help our brothers and sisters to do the same.

I urge everyone to open their hearts to the needs of people today—to see the opportunities in front of us, to accompany those in difficult situations and to stand in solidarity with those fighting for social justice. And remember the words of the Old Testament: “You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Lv 19:34).

May God bless you and may God bless America.

The Most Rev. Nelson J. Pérez is the archbishop of Philadelphia. He was appointed in January 2020.



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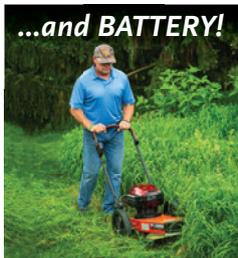
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