

# America

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

EDUCATION ISSUE

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in the 21st century?

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## Seeking and Finding God in the Eucharistic Revival

Ask anyone connected with Jesuits to describe what characterizes us, and invariably this is the response you will get: finding God in all things. In his remarks at the closing Mass of the Outreach 2024 conference, Gregory A. Schenden, S.J., director of campus ministry at Georgetown University, sent the congregation off with a slight variation of this phrase, as he encouraged the 350 L.G.B.T.Q. persons and allies who had gathered for the week-end conference “to seek and to find God in all things.”

The addition of “seek” is, in fact, a more faithful translation of what Ignatius actually wrote at the start of the *Spiritual Exercises*: “buscar y hallar la voluntad de Dios,” which directly translates as “to seek and to find God’s will.”

The care that Father Schenden took to include “to seek” reminds me that finding God in all things is an active pursuit, one that requires us to rummage for God in our lives, rather than simply allowing ourselves to happen upon God (and after all, God will happen upon us anyway).

There was another reason why Father Schenden’s use of “to seek” caused a lump to swell in my throat. Two weeks before, I had been at the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis to help cover the event for **America**. When I arrived there, the registration lines were snaking around the Indiana Convention Center, as tens of thousands sought entry to the five-day event. The sheer volume of people overwhelmed me, and I began to shut down. I recalled my misgivings about this gathering, given its expense and the emphasis on Eucharistic adoration (to be sure, a form of prayer I find profoundly meaningful) almost as if it were superior to the celebration of

the Mass itself.

But as the event began, my misgivings were at once confirmed and thrown into confusion. Two weeks earlier in that same space, a massive 8.2-foot-deep, two-million-gallon pool had been installed for the U.S. Olympic swim team trials. Now an altar stood, surrounded by a diverse gathering of the faithful, from cardinals to deacons, and from consecrated religious women and men to devoted laypeople. Atop this altar, a four-foot-tall golden monstrance housing a seven-inch consecrated host was flanked by four equally tall candlesticks, two on either side. Every light in the stadium converged upon the monstrance, all while the congregation was led in praise and worship, singing: “I want more of you God.... No place I’d rather be than here in your love.”

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., who has been spearheading the National Eucharistic Revival, prayed as he stood before the congregation: “Lord, it is good to be here. We are here for you, Lord.” And with these words, I was turned away from my reporter’s notebook toward prayer. “We want to be changed,” he continued. “We want you to transform us into true disciples, missionary disciples, people filled with the joy of the Gospel.”

Later that night, I tried to reconcile my qualms about a rock-concert-like experience with the palpable faith that permeated the room, as people fell to their knees before the Blessed Sacrament. And the next day, I again took inspiration from Bishop Cozzens’s words on that first night as he led us in prayer: “Lord, help my unbelief.”

I moved from one talk to another and through the exhibition hall, until eventually I was drawn to take my

place in the large room where hundreds of priests and penitents were celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. Over the next three hours, as I heard the confessions of my siblings in Christ, I was struck by the depth of their faith and the sincerity of their repentance. As I administered the sacrament, I felt the weight of my own doubts and fears slowly lifting, and I knew that I was not only a minister of God’s mercy but also a recipient of it.

Bishop Cozzens’s words helped me transcend initial criticisms and engage with the congress in a fresh way. We were on a spiritual retreat, not attending a concert or mega-event but a prayer-filled, God-inspired gathering of 60,000 people from across the United States and beyond. We were there united in our desire for spiritual renewal and greater union with God.

But there is another part to this revival that still needs to be tested. Our Christian life is measured by its fruit; our devotion begs action in God’s world that others may be drawn into the mystery of God. Action—not simply adoration—is what’s required of us. The final phase of this third year of the National Eucharistic Revival launches the Walk With One campaign, an initiative to seek out those who have grown disenchanted and disillusioned with the church and bring them back. Now what’s left for us to do is as Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, who was appointed the pope’s delegate to the Congress, proclaimed in the final words of his homily at the closing Mass: “Go! Go! Go!”

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Ricardo da Silva, S.J., is an associate editor of *America Media* and the host of the podcast “Preach.”

Athletes dive into the Seine for the start of the women's individual triathlon competition at the 2024 Summer Olympics, in Paris, France, on July 31, 2024.

Cover: Students commuting to Dominican Academy, an all-girls high school in New York City

Dominican Academy/Siobhan Mullan



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AP photo/Vadim Chirida

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## *Is it OK to attend Mass even if you don't believe in God?*

In the July/August issue of **America**, Emma Camp wrote about attending Mass regularly despite believing in God only “30 percent of the time on a good day.” She went on to describe her attendance as allowing her to escape “age-segregated bubbles” and as helping her “feel accountable to something other than my own conscience.” The article elicited a diverse range of reactions from readers.

What a pleasure to stumble upon your article. You are not alone. I too am an atheist/agnostic who is religious. I have a similar story, but my return to religion came about because of religious history classes, not literature classes, in college. For me, belief in “God” is fairly irrelevant. I believe in the message. Whatever God is, he is useful to me as an idea of love and acceptance of ourselves and each other. I used to find the gnostics a bit silly, but over time I am coming to understand how wise they were. As Jesus said in the TV series “The Chosen,” “God does not reveal himself all at once.” Accepting that, along with the knowledge that I don’t have to believe in a magic man in the sky to still believe, has helped me immensely. I am not a spiritual person, but religious? Yes, it turns out that I am.

Lauren Horner

Well stated, Ms. Camp. To your end, let’s resurrect the term *churchgoer*, but with a positive meaning. “Churchgoer” has fallen from use, but it once signified someone who sat in the pews insincerely to maintain respectability. Well, someone can attend a service sincerely even if they aren’t clear or convinced about what is happening. Churchgoers (myself included) know that *something* is happening in a service that is more valuable than sleeping in.

Joseph S. Harrington

Dear Emma, you are on to something indeed. Now with the family raised and far-flung, my wife and I belong to the cohort of older parishioners who now are harvesting wonderful and meaningful community in parish activities that carry on the parish, not only for ourselves, but for those busy young people and young families who are now attending Mass at least with the same good sense that you have—that we still have. Remember too, how much you are giving and adding by your very presence to the lives of those around you in church, bringing joy through socializing with the elderly and modeling quietly for those young teens—coerced into attending, but wisely so—by their moms and dads.

Dennis Arko

This sentence from Emma Camp amazed me: “Within hours of my first Sunday Mass, I was added to two differ-

ent group chats, had agreed to attend an upcoming happy hour and had swapped numbers with a young woman who would soon become one of my best friends.” Seriously, at a Catholic church you found community that quickly? In the Catholic churches I’ve attended over the years, folks make a beeline for the parking lot as fast as they can. I have yet to attend a Catholic church that holds a coffee hour in the parish hall after Mass—at any one of their Masses. On the other hand, when I attend Eastern Orthodox churches (my parents converted from Catholicism when I was 10), there is almost always a coffee hour or meet-and-greet. So which church you choose to attend definitely *can* make a difference.

Cathy Dempsey

The sentence that most caught my eye was the following: “[T]he idea that I belonged in a Christian community... started with a class on medieval mysticism that exposed me to works by Augustine and Aquinas and—my favorite—Julian of Norwich’s stirring, beautiful *Revelations of Divine Love*.” The Catholic church today simply ignores so much of our rich intellectual and spiritual roots. You just don’t hear about them. And smart, gifted, inquisitive young people like yourself are looking for those powerful synaptic connections such readings can provide to explain themselves, the world and their place in it. Keep reading. Merton, de Chardin, Day, Keating—all accessible in a modern way to bring knowledge of God’s love and blessings to young people. Well done!

James Snyder

I’m a longtime Christian and I understand why atheists would want to be a member of a church. Most, not all, of the Christians I’ve known across all denominations have been wonderful, giving and loving people. More importantly, their graciousness comes from having a direct connection with Jesus the Son of God. I strongly encourage those who enjoy the benefits of faith to focus entirely on encountering Jesus. Without that living connection, churches and people grow cold and die.

Samuel Goldberg



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## A More Perfect Union and the Separation of Powers

On July 29, President Joseph R. Biden Jr. called for a set of reforms to the Supreme Court, including term limits and an enforceable code of ethics for justices. He also called for a constitutional amendment to overturn the court's recent decision establishing a presumption of presidential immunity from criminal prosecution for broadly defined "official" acts. On Aug. 1, the Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, introduced legislation that would attempt to reverse or limit that same decision by removing the Supreme Court's jurisdiction to hear appeals on the matter.

There is no real chance of any of these proposals moving forward. Mike Johnson, the speaker of the U.S. House, declared immediately that any such legislation would be "dead on arrival" in that chamber. The proposals would also almost certainly face a Republican filibuster in the Senate, and a constitutional amendment would have to clear the even higher bar of approval by two-thirds of both legislative houses (or a convention at the request of two-thirds of the states), followed by ratification by three-fourths of the states.

Since the immunity decision involves a former Republican president, now running to regain that office, the proposals likely will be perceived as red meat for partisan electoral politics rather than as sober attempts at reform. That is unfortunate, because as the editors of *America* have noted in recent years, the United States is overdue for a serious conversation not just about possible changes to the Supreme Court, but also about the functioning of our system of separation of powers and of checks and balances among the three branches of government.

While the Supreme Court's deci-

sion about presidential immunity is a significant—and understandable—flashpoint, it is itself the direct product of the failure of the Senate to hold former President Donald J. Trump accountable in an impeachment trial for his actions related to the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol. That failure was arguably made more likely because impeachments, like Mr. Trump's first or even the 1998 impeachment of Bill Clinton, have been viewed not as legitimate correctives of executive power but as partisan exercises.

Claims of Supreme Court overreach are not new. This year's immunity decision and the 2022 Dobbs ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade* are the current topics of such criticism, but presidential and legislative inability to respond to the court's radical decision in *Roe v. Wade* is itself what led to the decades-long struggle to reshape the court by means of nominations. The immunity decision parallels *Roe v. Wade* as well in reading into the Constitution a complicated multi-stage analysis guaranteed to require further clarification by the court. In her dissent in the immunity case, Justice Sonia Sotomayor quoted Justice Samuel Alito's majority opinion from Dobbs, writing that the new "official-acts immunity has 'no firm grounding in constitutional text, history, or precedent.'"

The problem here—beyond the question of whether or not the immunity decision was correct in the first place—is that the lack of constitutional grounding makes it difficult if not impossible for the legislature to work toward any incremental compromise or reform of the matter. The issue of presidential criminal liability, which deeply affects the system of checks and balances, is now locked up by the

court, as abortion was.

The breakdown in checks and balances can also be traced to executive overreach, a concern the editors evaluated in regard to President George W. Bush in 2008 and President Barack Obama in 2016. In fact, during his campaign for the presidency, Mr. Obama warned that Mr. Bush had tried "to bring more and more power into the executive branch and not go through Congress at all." Yet Mr. Obama went on to sign nearly as many executive orders as Mr. Bush.

Even more basically, the problem can be traced to Congress's sclerotic inability to legislate, an incapacity that has brought the nation to the brink of government shutdown and a debt default, and prevented meaningful progress on major issues like comprehensive immigration reform. As the editors argued in 2020, these patterns incentivize using the court as a "relief valve for legislative dysfunction and executive overreach" and amount to "a slow-motion disaster for democracy."

"It is not enough merely to moderate partisan criticism, to increase calls for unity or to turn down the temperature of our politics, as if American political life were basically healthy except for a temporary fever," *America's* editors wrote in an online editorial on July 16 after the assassination attempt against Mr. Trump. "As a body politic, we are chronically ill and in need of treatment that must extend beyond this election cycle." Our political pathology is not just division, polarization and partisanship, but a breakdown in the fundamental give-and-take that is meant to regulate the exercise of governmental power in the United States. That dysfunction has been building for a long time.



There is no quick fix. Whatever the wisdom of Mr. Biden’s or Mr. Schumer’s proposals about the court, the issue will be resolved neither in the three months left before the next election nor by the election itself. The American people need political leaders to rise to the much higher challenge of a sustained national conversation, across the political spectrum, about the design and functioning of our democracy.

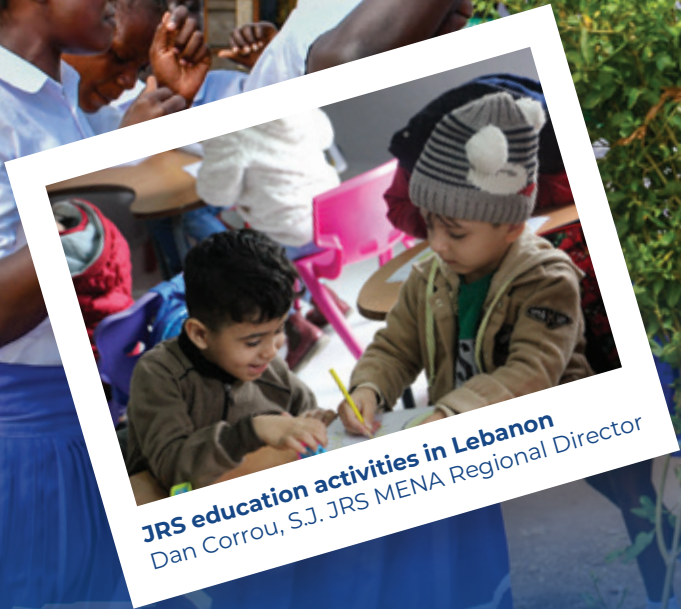
Supreme Court reform should not be the only item on the agenda. If the nation talks about term limits for the court, it should also discuss term limits for Congress. Campaign finance reform should also be on the agenda, along with the party primary system. If polling in this election cycle is any guide, voters would probably want to consider age limits for candidates as well.

More complicated topics, such as reform of the process by which voting districts are redrawn, are likely to come up as well. Recent elections of presidents who won the Electoral College but not the popular vote are also a reason to discuss reforms to that system. And presidential accountability, whether under impeachment or in criminal court, should also be considered.

The point, however, is not to concoct reforms meant simply to transcend partisan conflict. Instead, we should heed the wisdom of the founders, who sought to forge a system that can supply, “by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives,” as James Madison wrote in Federalist No. 51. We should anticipate partisan disagreement and individual ambition and try to channel them to limit misuses of power—rather than allow them to obstruct the basic operation of government, as they too frequently do now.

The United States needs, now as ever, “to form a more perfect Union,” a task that was not finished in 1789 and will continue long past 2024.

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## I'm tired of hearing 'This is not who we are' after political violence

I was waiting for it, and, sadly, President Biden did not disappoint. There it was: "This is not who we are."

It is a sentence, or a variant of it, that he has used before (as have other presidents before him) and one he turned to again in an address to the nation on July 21, the day after the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump in Butler, Pa.

"An assassination attempt is contrary to everything we stand for as a nation," Mr. Biden said. "Everything. It's not who we are as a nation. It's not America, and we cannot allow this to happen."

"This is not who we are" is something many of us say in the sorrowful aftermath of the political or civic outrages that cross the nation's path from time to time. We often hear it right after the latest school or supermarket or church shooting that momentarily shocks before fading into oblivion.

"This is not who we are" is, to my ear, getting to sound too much like the equally trite "our thoughts and prayers are with them," intoned by politicians and other civic leaders in the wake of the many mass shooting events that plague the United States.

My fellow Americans, I have some bad news. This is indeed who we are. We are a society and a political culture that, whatever rhetorical shock we are able to muster from time to time, has normalized violence in a way that few other contemporary societies have.

Violence in America has roots that predate the founding of the republic, demonstrated in the near-liquidation of the Indigenous inhabitants of this hemisphere and the kidnapping, transport, torture and chattel enslavement of the inhabitants of another hemisphere. Those original sins of violence have begotten multiple others—among them, of course, a civil

war that claimed the lives of as many as 800,000 people. In the decades that followed that conflagration, violence has remained a consistent part of American life, whether in suppressing civil rights or union organizing or in our peculiar institution of mob violence and lynching—even in an effort to disrupt constitutional order.

Presidents, presidential candidates and civic leaders who challenge the status quo have long been among the targets of political extremists and the psychologically unsound. In my lifetime, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, two Kennedy brothers, George Wallace, Ronald Reagan, Gabrielle Giffords, Steve Scalise and now Donald Trump have been killed or injured in assassination attempts.

"This is not who we are" has come to sound especially hollow given our consistently cowardly response to the gun violence that has been normalized as an acceptable aspect of American life. Can we really say, after collectively experiencing the special horror of children murdered time and time again in elementary and high schools across the country and across decades, that "this is not who we are"?

Policy decisions in the aftermath of those "mass shooting events," a phrase coined in the U.S.A., have only made it poignantly clear that this is indeed who we are and who we must—somehow—want to be. In fact, as U.S. mass-shooting counters click higher, many states and municipalities across the country have only made it easier for people to buy, carry, and conceal-carry rifles and other guns of all sorts.

When AR-15s are fired at non-combatants in peacetime in the United States, gun absolutists regretfully refer to the Constitution, blame video

games and spiritual dissolution and deplore inadequate mental health services—a crisis that indeed warrants addressing. Sadly, it is one that rarely receives anything more than lip service from politicians who often directly collaborate with the National Rifle Association.

Some of the lowlights from a public health advisory on gun violence issued in June by U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy tell us a little about who we really are as a nation. Since 2020, firearm-related injury has been "the leading cause of death for U.S. children and adolescents, surpassing motor vehicle crashes, cancer, and drug overdose and poisoning." In 2022, nearly 50,000 people died from firearm-related injuries, including suicides, homicides and unintentional deaths.

After each act of political violence or senseless mass-shooting event, we have had the opportunity to ask what kind of country we want to be. In each instance so far, we have remained the kind of country where troubled young men have ready access to military-grade weapons like the AR-15 that was used in Butler, Pa., to shoot the former president, wound two others and murder a father of two.

This is who we are, but it does not have to be. We can begin by assessing the truth of our past and our present with clarity and courage.

Maybe we should deploy "this is not who we are" not as a statement of fact but as a mantra, a prayer for who we *hope* to be. In that case, count me in. "This is not who we are" will be my prayer through gritted teeth and tears.

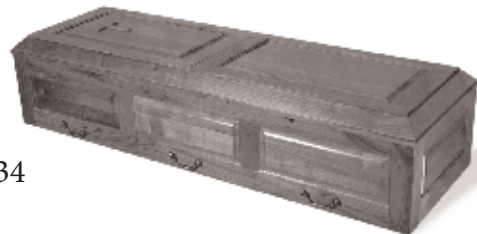
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Kevin Clarke is *America's chief correspondent and the author of Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out (Liturgical Press)*.

# Prayer takes many forms.



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AP Photo/Anton Shtuka

## Ukraine leaps ahead into the troubling future of autonomous warfare

By Kevin Clarke

Considering the Russian Federation’s overwhelming numerical advantage in its war against Ukraine, it is not hard to understand why Ukraine has come to rely so thoroughly on what it has dubbed its Unmanned Systems Forces, a cutting-edge arsenal of aerial, terrestrial and marine drones and unmanned fighting vehicles. In May, the U.S.F. became a fourth branch of the nation’s military—joining Ukraine’s army, navy and air force.

The unmanned-platform entrepreneur Andrii Denysenko, working on a \$35,000 ground recon and assault vehicle called the Odyssey, told The Associated Press: “We are fighting a huge country, and they don’t have any resource limits. We understand that we cannot spend a lot of human lives. War is mathematics.”

The A.P. reports that about 250 defense startups across the embattled nation “are creating the killing machines at secret locations that typically look like rural car repair shops.” Ukraine’s drones and battlefield vehicles are often put together with off-the-shelf commercial components modified to suit the Ukraine military’s particular needs.

The weapons of the unmanned force have scored stunning successes against Russian troops and armor in the contested territories of eastern Ukraine. They have hit manufacturing and logistics sites in Russia proper and detonated fuel and ammo dumps behind battlelines. They have also

essentially neutralized the Russian fleet on the Black Sea. The Ukrainians are offering a real-time case study in adroit, innovative and, not least important, low-cost countermeasures that are no doubt being studied by militaries around the world.

One thing most of the unmanned strike platforms being developed by Ukraine have in common—at least for now—is that human handlers are still remotely guiding them across the battlefield. But reports are already surfacing of drones launched into Russia that are relying on artificial, not human, intelligence to make decisions to evade defensive countermeasures, pick targets and conclude strikes.

Reuters reports that the use of drone swarms to overwhelm Russian defensive countermeasures creates a degree of complexity too profound for remote human pilots to contend with. Ukraine has begun to turn swarm attacks over to A.I. algorithms.

How long before Ukrainian tech and software developers begin deploying battle vehicles liberated completely from human oversight in identifying, pursuing and finally liquidating battlefield targets? The battlefield of the future is fast coming upon us, a combat zone freed from human control.

In practical terms, Ukraine’s U.S.F. is rushing far ahead of other militaries around the world. But Ukraine is

hardly alone in exploring the futuristic military potential of A.I.-managed or otherwise autonomous fighting platforms—called Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, or LAWS for short.

Russia, China, Israel, South Korea and other states are also experimenting with and even deploying A.I.-assisted or -guided weapons systems. Israel has been sharply criticized for its use of Lavender, an A.I.-driven target analysis program that created an overly expansive list of some 37,000 people in Gaza for the Israel Defense Forces to choose from.

The U.S. military sponsors more than 800 A.I.-related projects, directing almost \$2 billion to A.I. initiatives in the 2024 budget alone. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is hard at work developing cutting-edge autonomous tech. Its Robotic Autonomy in Complex Environments with Resiliency program is fast developing autonomous tanks and other battlefield vehicles. Other DARPA initiatives are experimenting with humanless fighter jets and sea drones.

Current Department of Defense policy requires “that all systems, including LAWS, be designed to ‘allow commanders and operators to exercise appropriate levels of human judgment over the use of force.’” That may sound ethically reassuring. But what level of human intervention do specific systems allow, and how do human LAWS managers decide what is “appropriate”?

According to the Congressional Research Service, a 2018 government white paper called *appropriate* a “flexible term,” noting: “What is ‘appropriate’ can differ across weapon systems, domains of warfare, types of warfare, operational contexts, and even across different functions in a weapon system.” The report adds that “‘human judgment over the use of force’ does not require manual human ‘control’ of the weapon system...but rather broader human involvement in decisions about how, when, where, and why the weapon will be employed.”

U.S. weapons that rely on autonomous or A.I. features are already in the field, particularly defensive systems that operate on trigger mechanisms. That is not new or necessarily high-tech, of course—old-fashioned landmines, for example, operate autonomously. The worrisome new tech would rely not on mechanical triggers but on artificial intelligence in literally calling the shots.

One of the remarkable aspects of this autonomous military frontier is how little it is addressed by international humanitarian law. What is at risk? Perhaps everything.

“If indeed AI poses an extinction-level existential threat to the future of humankind akin to the atomic bomb,

as many in the field claim, the absence of a universally accepted global governance framework for military AI is a crucial concern,” Carnegie Europe fellow Raluca Csernati writes for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “While this future Oppenheimer moment is worrying, the present risk of mission creep is more troubling because AI systems initially designed for specific civilian tasks can be repurposed to serve military objectives.”

United Nations Secretary General António Guterres has been among the global leaders troubled by the absence of international law or diplomatic accords governing LAWS. In his “New Agenda for Peace,” a policy brief released in 2023, he said that autonomous weapons “raise humanitarian, legal, security and ethical concerns and pose a direct threat to human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

“Machines with the power and discretion to take lives without human involvement are morally repugnant and politically unacceptable and should be prohibited by international law,” the secretary general concluded.

### **The Human Factor**

The church has likewise long worried about the rise of machines in combat. The human capacity for mercy, the church has persistently taught, must remain a viable component in even the snappiest of snap decisions made on modern battlefields.

Ten years ago, Vatican officials joined a handful of nations then calling for a pre-emptive ban on “fully autonomous weapons”—a proposal resisted by Russia, the United States and other nations that have been moving ahead with LAWS development and deployment. Cardinal Silvano Maria Tomasi, C.S., then the permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva, said that humankind risked becoming “slaves of their own inventions.”

“Meaningful human involvement is absolutely essential in decisions affecting the life and death of human beings,” then-Archbishop Tomasi told the scientists and diplomats gathered for a Vatican-sponsored LAWS conference in May 2014. He said it was essential “to recognize that autonomous weapon systems can never replace the human capacity for moral reasoning, including in the context of war.”

In his introduction to a working paper released by the Caritas in Veritate Foundation in 2016, “The Humanization of Robots and the Robotization of the Human Person,” the Rev. Antoine Abi Ghanem, then representing the Vatican’s mission to the United Nations, wrote: “The idea of a ‘moral’ and ‘human’ war waged by non-conscious, non-re-

sponsible and non-human agents is a lure that conceals desperation and a dangerous lack of confidence in the human person.... Robots and artificial intelligence systems are based on rules, including protocols for the invention of new rules. But legal and ethical decisions often require going beyond the rule in order to save the spirit of the rule itself.”

And most recently in his historic address to G7 leaders in Rome in July, Pope Francis broadly warned about the threat posed by artificial intelligence and specifically called for a ban on autonomous weapons systems. “We would condemn humanity to a future without hope if we took away people’s ability to make decisions about themselves and their lives, by dooming them to depend on the choices of machines,” he said. “We need to ensure and safeguard a space for proper human control over the choices made by artificial intelligence programs: Human dignity itself depends on it.”

He repeated that message soon after in a statement released to corporate developers and proponents of artificial intelligence, as well as world faith and political leaders, gathered in Hiroshima, Japan. Recalling that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima itself was a sorrowful example of a technology overwhelming human moral judgment, he described as “urgent” the necessity to “reconsider the development and use of devices like the so-called ‘lethal autonomous weapons’ and ultimately ban their use.”

“No machine should ever choose to take the life of a human being,” the pope said.

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent.*



## A brave new world in defense spending

There are many signs that lethal autonomous weapons production is not a normal sector, even within a vast weapons manufacturing industry already regularly deplored by religious leaders, particularly Pope Francis, because of its scandalous cost and the nature of the output of its production lines. The LAWS sub-market raises alarms among diplomats, defense analysts, religious leaders, scientists and ethicists alike.

A market research firm noted in 2021 that the autonomous market promises explosive annual growth of 10.4 percent, expanding from \$16.2 billion in 2024 to likely more than \$24 billion by 2033. But the same researchers note a key “hindrance” to growth: 274 companies and organizations and 3,806 individuals who work on the development of artificial intelligence have pledged not to work on autonomous weapons systems, agreeing that “the decision to take a human life should never be delegated to a machine.”

**152:** The number of U.N. member states that voted in December 2023 to request that the U.N. secretary general prepare a report on **autonomous weapons systems**, seeking guidance on humanitarian, legal, security, technological and ethical concerns posed by the emerging weapons systems. The report is expected to be delivered at the U.N. General Assembly this month.

**30:** The number of countries, including the Holy See, that have called for a pre-emptive ban on LAWS.

**\$1.8 billion:** The Department of Defense allocation for its A.I. development programs in 2024.

**\$500 million:** The amount the Pentagon will spend in 2024 to finance its **Replicator Initiative**, an A.I.-enabled systems program that includes research and development of kamikaze drones, unmanned surface vessels and counter-drone systems.

**1,000:** The number of **unmanned warplanes** under development for the U.S. Air Force—with an anticipated cost of \$6 billion over five years.

Sources: Allied Market Research, Business Research Company, United Nations, Congressional Research Service, Stop Killer Robots, Human Rights Watch, The Associated Press, Future of Life Institute, Defensescoop, Air Force Times, The Guardian.



## Cardinal Hollerich: 'If women do not feel comfortable in the church, we have failed.'

The working document, or *instrumentum laboris*, for October's meeting of the Synod of Bishops is taking up the teaching of the Second Vatican Council by focusing on the missionary responsibility of all the baptized in the synodal church. In a conversation with **America**, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, S.J., the synod's relator general, emphasized the importance of the working document's attention to affirming and promoting the role of women in the church in the 21st century.

***The document says that "in the synodal church, the responsibility of the bishop, the college of bishops and the Roman pontiff, to make decisions is inalienable." It adds, "however, it is not unconditional."***

When we say now that the church is not a democracy, I completely agree, but the church is not an absolute monarchy either. Sometimes we have taken in forms of government from the political world, from the organization of our states, without reflecting, and then this slightly changes the sacramental meaning of being a bishop, being a priest. So I think it's always necessary to adjust, to come back to its original meaning. And there we have to go back to Scripture.

I think that now we are going back to the original church, the primitive church, because in between we had Christendom.... The culture was mainly formed by the Catholic Church in Europe. But that time is over, and now we come back to a church of the first centuries, where the church has to confront other mentalities, other ways of thinking. Sometimes it is apologetic, but it always has to enter into dialogue with this world because God is present in this world.

***The working document says one of the first fruits of the synodal process is listening.***

God is present in this world. God is acting in this world. And I can discover God when I listen. Now, listening is not just an exercise of reason; listening is an exercise of the heart. Listening means you first have to accept the other person as your equal; otherwise, you cannot listen to him, to her. Listening means you must feel empathy for the other person so that you understand not only his or her different position but what led him or her to have a different position. Listening means to get the feeling of the suffering of that person, of the hopes of that person.

God listens to people, and this means God loves people. Listening means entering a little bit into the love of God for



Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, S.J., speaks at a Vatican news conference on March 14. At left is Simona Brambilla, M.C., secretary of the Dicastery for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life.

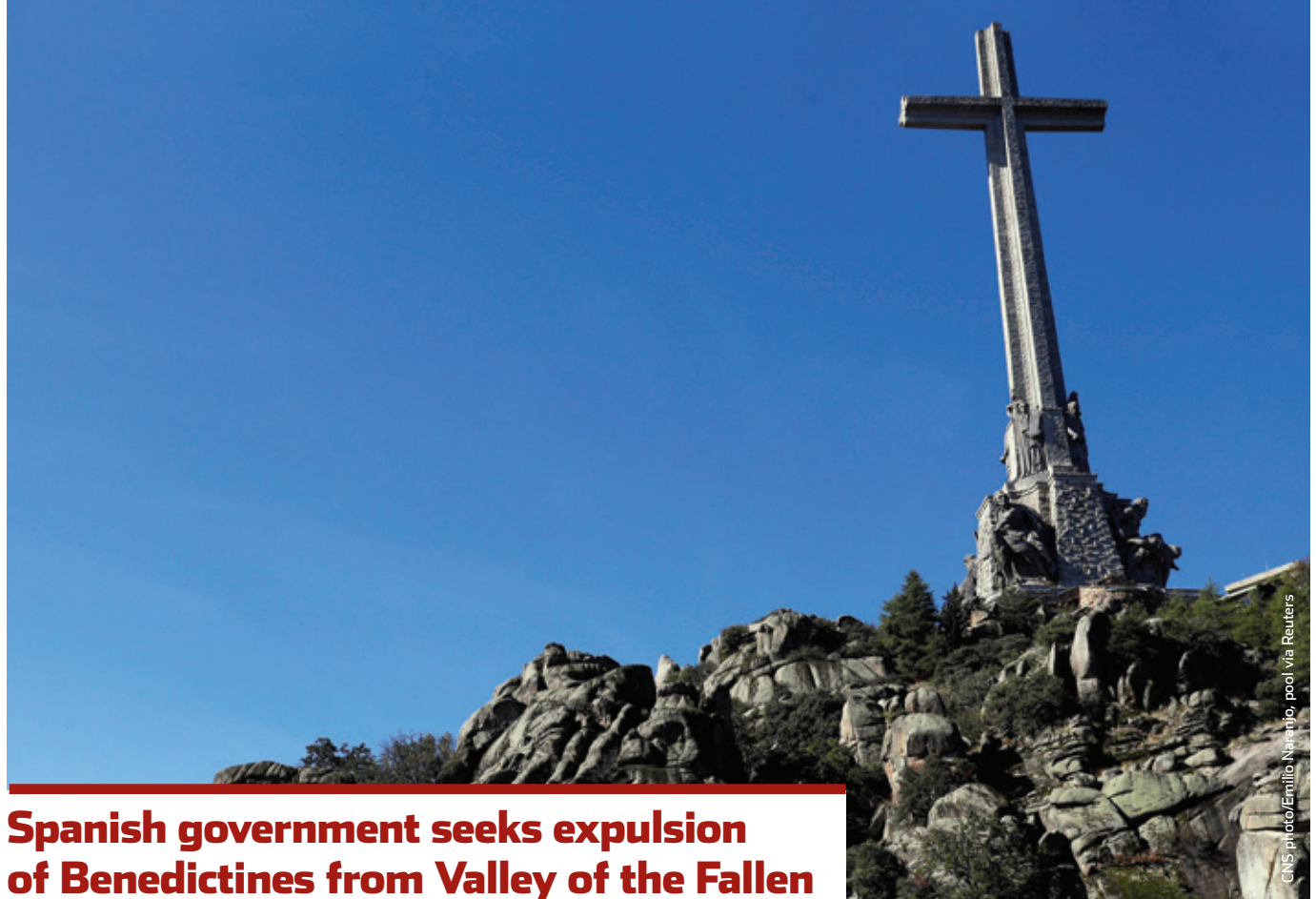
people, and therefore it always needs a conversion from those deep attitudes in our human heart that are sinful, attitudes that make us not want to listen, that make us feel superior so that we think we know everything.

***What comes through most strongly in the working document is both the request and the need to affirm women, to promote women, to bring them into decision-making, to recognize that they are fully part of the church.***

That is the most important point for the church today. If women do not feel comfortable in the church, we have failed our living as Christians. Genesis tells us that God created man in his own image and likeness; woman and man he created them. Which means that if I do not respect women, if I think that they, for whatever reason, are less competent because they are women, it is a scandal today, and it cannot be accepted.

Now the question is, if this full equality of women and men means that they must also be ordained ministers, I do not know. But what is important for me is that ordained ministry should not be lived as the point where power is. In general, you should not speak about power in the church but about service. So if women feel that their voice is listened to as much as the voice of men, but they still feel, let's say, discriminated [against] by not being admitted to the ordained ministry, we have to think about it.

Gerard O'Connell, *Vatican correspondent.*



CNS photo/Emilio Naranjo, pool via Reuters

## Spanish government seeks expulsion of Benedictines from Valley of the Fallen

The Spanish government wants a community of Benedictine monks to leave the “Valley of the Fallen,” a Spanish Civil War memorial site not far from Madrid. “We want them to go,” Spain’s minister of territorial policy and democratic memory, Ángel Victor Torres, told the Spanish newspaper *El País* in May. The monument, he said, “must be a secular center that serves to explain the war and what came next. They cannot stay.”

The late Spanish dictator Francisco Franco had commissioned the construction of the site as a memorial to Spain’s civil war—three years of conflict (1936-39) that included atrocities committed by both sides. The Basilica of the Holy Cross of the Valley of the Fallen also serves as the burial site of 34,000 people killed during the civil war, including dozens who have been declared martyrs and soldiers from both sides of the conflict, transferred there from mass graves all over Spain. It was opened in 1959 as a memorial of reconciliation.

According to the historian Stanley Payne, the Valley of the Fallen is the only memorial site in Spain dedicated to reconciliation. The monument has always been strongly linked to Franco’s legacy. That link was confirmed in 1975, when the former dictator was buried behind the basilica’s main altar. But for those willing to look beyond political optics, Mr. Payne believes that the church can indeed be a place of peace and reconciliation.

The Benedictine community in the Valley of the Fallen was established as part of an agreement between the Holy See and the Spanish government in 1958. The monks have the right to remain on the grounds as long as they fulfill their designated mission—to pray for those who had died in the civil war and for Spain’s peace and prosperity.

“The monks have done nothing to deserve being removed,” said Pablo Linares, spokesperson for the Association in Defense of the Valley of the Fallen. “They have fulfilled their obligations with a lot of self-sacrifice since 1958.”

Emilio Silva, a sociologist and journalist, is president of the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory, founded in 2000 principally to locate mass graves and identify the dead from the civil war. For him, the site serves primarily as a memorial to Franco and the Fascist-Nationalist victory over the Republican forces.

Mr. Silva argues that the valley should be re-established as a secular site that welcomes people of all beliefs. The current government under Spanish Socialist leader Pedro Sánchez seems ready to take those steps. Mr. Payne counters that the Sánchez government’s intention to change the Valley of the Fallen does not promote historical discussion but suppresses it. The proposed changes to the site are being undertaken through stipulations of the Law of Democratic Memory.

## A memorial cross in the Valley of the Fallen

The Sánchez government removed Franco's body from the basilica in 2019 and has redirected revenue from its entry fees to the conversion of one of the basilica's chapels into a forensics lab for identifying the bodies of those buried at the site. In 2022, the Valley of the Fallen was renamed the Valley of Cuelgamuros—the original name of the site—in accordance with the Democratic Memory law.

Mr. Payne considers the government's plan to secularize the site as both undemocratic and a violation of religious liberty. Despite its past controversies, "what it is now is a basilica of the Catholic Church and no one has the right to mess with it," he says.

His criticisms extend to the Law of Democratic Memory. "It is a complete fraud of democracy," he says. "It's more of a Soviet-style law that assumes the government has the all-seeing capacity to decide who is good and who is bad. It is not even rewriting history. It's decreeing history instead of allowing for historical discovery."

The Sánchez government has lurched from crisis to crisis, but the Spanish prime minister has proven himself a political survivor. "He is an audacious politician," Mr. Payne admits. He expects that Mr. Sánchez will forge ahead with the plan to expel the monks despite public outcry.

It remains to be seen who will outlast whom—the monks or the politician.

*Bridget Ryder contributes from Spain.*



## GOODNEWS: A church-run halfway house in Florida builds a community of brothers among former inmates

For all the good that halfway houses for former inmates do, they often fall short in one key challenge: keeping residents from ending up back in prison. Roughly two-thirds of former prisoners are arrested again within three years of their release.

Joseph House, in Tallahassee, Fla., hopes to make a difference by creating a supportive and spiritually integrated community for its house brothers. The Rev. Dustin Feddon, the community's founder, began his prison ministry as a seminarian and vividly recalls the "horrific conditions" that he witnessed in Florida's prisons.

"There are so many extraordinary human beings that are condemned and forgotten," Father Feddon said, "and hearing their stories of where they've come from was powerful, on top of the fact that many of these men really didn't have any place in particular [to go] when they were going to be released; they had no support."

What really put Father Feddon's vision for Joseph House into motion were encounters he had with Taparree "Pre" Shelton, then a prisoner at Santa Rosa Correctional Facility. "Pre, myself and other men that I was talking with at the time just started daydreaming about what something like what became Joseph House could be," Father Feddon said.

But Mr. Shelton found himself doubting he would ever walk through its doors. "If you do 22 years in prison, you don't trust anybody, and you think everybody's lying."

He took a risk by putting his faith in Father Feddon and immediately after the conclusion of his sentence, "Father Dustin was at Santa Rosa Correctional to pick me up," he recalled.

Bishop William Wack, C.S.C., of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee said it is the Catholic mission of Joseph House that sets it apart from secular halfway houses. "What's fundamental to our faith is the dignity of every person," he said. "You can have this in a secular house, and they can say, 'We're all special,' and I love that. But [respect for human dignity is] in our Catholic DNA."

*Michael O'Brien is a Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., fellow at America.*



# THE FUTURE OF SINGLE-SEX CATHOLIC EDUCATION

How these schools help students navigate the pressures on young people today

By Molly Cahill



Students from Regis Jesuit High School, in Aurora, Colo., attend a Special Olympics pep rally.

In the fall of 2009, I attended an open house for an all-girls Catholic school. I was 11 years old, and my family and I were considering whether I would join the school's seventh-grade class the next academic year. That day, we toured the campus and heard student and faculty speakers. We learned about the school's history and academic offerings. Underlying many of the presentations was one theme: the single-sex advantage.

Spoiler alert: My family and I were convinced. I attended that school for six years and absorbed all the academic, personal and spiritual advantages I had heard about.

Today's single-sex schools remain committed to the idea that young men and women are more likely to thrive both academically and personally in the environment these schools provide, and they point to research to support their claim. An often-cited book published in 1990, Cornelius Riordan's *Girls and Boys in School: Together or Separate?*, concluded that single-sex education offers an academic advantage, particularly for female students. Research from the International Coalition of Girls' Schools suggests that girls are more likely to consider pursuing studies or careers in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), to experience increased confidence and motivation, and to perform better in the classroom when they are educated in single-sex environments.

But not all the literature on the topic falls so neatly in line. A review of the literature published so far in this century, published in *Teaching and Teacher Education* in 2021, rounded up 70 relevant articles on the topic. One highlight: "Claims that suggest providing girls and/or boys with single-sex education, alone, will have positive impacts upon students' academic performance ought to be questioned at best and outright dismissed at worst."

In the United States, the Catholic Church runs the largest network of private schools, and according to the National Catholic Educational Association, 6.7 percent of those schools—a total of 395—educate students using the single-gender model. Of these, 328 are secondary schools and 67 are elementary or middle schools. Dale McDonald, P.B.V.M., the vice president of public policy at the N.C.E.A., told me that for coed and single-sex Catholic schools alike "survival is a big issue going forward." According to a report from the N.C.A.E., 20 new Catholic schools opened in the United States in the 2023-24 year, but 55 schools closed or consolidated.

Single-sex Catholic schools continue to lean into

their strengths and to stress in their promotion what makes them unique. For example, Sister McDonald told me that prospective families are likely to hear that girls feel more comfortable and confident raising their hands in class if boys are not present, or that boys can focus on school more easily when not distracted by trying to impress their female classmates. She said that while these statements might play into some broad stereotypes of young people, they also match many students' experiences and continue to resonate with them.

I was curious about how the single-sex secondary school experience had changed (or had not) since I had attended one, so I spoke with administrators and faculty from three different high schools. On one point they all agreed: From the allure of social media to the pressures of preparing for college, being a young person in 2024 is really hard. Although critics might argue single-sex schools are a relic of the past, the people I spoke with argued that single-sex Catholic schools are uniquely poised to help their students navigate ideas of service, gender, equality and faith in our world today.

### **Educating Boys at Boston College High School**

When it comes to single-sex education, Adam Lewis is about as strong an advocate as you can find. He has been working in Jesuit Catholic education for 23 years, and 21 of those have been spent in all-boys schools. When he became the principal of Boston College High School in 2019, he fulfilled a "personal and professional ambition," to be a leader at the school, which he says exemplifies why he is so passionate about working with young men.

At his first assembly as principal, he shocked the school's 1,400 boys with a phrase his family in Australia often used: He challenged them "to be beautiful, to be beautiful boys."

"At first it freaked them out," he says. "I lost them in the first conversation. But over the last five years, I think I've got them back."

Mr. Lewis's objective is to help BC High's students reconceptualize what a good man looks like. Qualities like sensitivity, gentleness and humility are not always associated with young boys, and Mr. Lewis believes that is a serious disservice. In his view, a conversation about how to be a good man is most effectively had in an all-boys school.

"This is harder to do in a coed school, and anyone who tells you otherwise is lying," he says. "There are huge

Boston College High School students at morning registration



benefits of coed. This is not one of them.”

But as it tries to educate good men, BC High also has encountered challenges. Each year, the faculty selects a topic they want to focus on in their summer professional development, one that they believe needs to be urgently addressed at their school. In 2023, the faculty unanimously voted that they needed to work on dismantling sexism.

Alison MacDonald began her professional career as an English teacher at BC High in 2001, and she has been a vice principal for the last five years. As a young female teacher, she said, she experienced sexism—in the classroom and from colleagues. At a student-led assembly that was initiated by the faculty’s summer workshop, she was asked to share her experiences in a talk to the entire school community.

“My hope,” she says, “was that they would see my experiences as unacceptable to the kind of community that has the mission and values that we say that we have, and how much it would have helped me if, in those moments, any of my students or co-workers would have acted, would have said something.”

“The one group of people that our students don’t have as peers here are girls. Our students are never, as long as you remain single-sex, going to have the experience of having pushback or dialogue in their classes from girls,” Ms. MacDonald says.

But the answer, she believes, is not to abandon the all-boys model: “I don’t think that that would do anything to stop sexism at BC High. I just want to be clear about that.... I went to a coed school. I have many colleagues that have worked in coed schools. Sexism is as rampant there as it is here.”

But others have argued that making the school coed would help in another way. In 2017, Boston news outlets reported that BC High’s board of trustees was discussing the possibility of admitting female students in an effort to address declining enrollment. The issue never came to an official vote, but it did unsettle some members of the community.

Grace Cotter Regan became the school’s president in the summer of 2017, making history as the first woman to serve in the role. (*Editors’ note: Ms. Regan also serves on America Media’s board of directors.*) When Ms. Regan inherited the coed question, she knew she needed to change the narrative. She said that just the perception that the school might go coed “divided the school and hurt the school.” Alumni, donors, faculty, students and staff voiced opinions, and even Cardinal Sean O’Malley, O.F.M.Cap., the archbishop of Boston, weighed in against the possible change.

While Ms. Regan believes BC High is in a stronger position than it was when she arrived in 2017, she says it is still part of her job to prioritize financial viability. As the team at BC High watches schools close in their own Archdiocese of Boston, Ms. Regan knows they need to prepare for a changing landscape. “My point to the board [of trustees] and to my team is that we need to be prepared if a school was about to close. If an all-girls school was about to close, and they came to us, what would our response be?” she says.

While she is making sure they are prepared in the event of a crisis, she doesn’t anticipate that BC High will have one. That’s due in part, she says, to the leadership’s strategic approach and their relationships with the Jesuit province and the archdiocese, but even more because of the faculty and staff’s clarity on the school’s identity and mission.

“We speak the same language,” she says. “We’re very clear on who we are and what we want to do.”

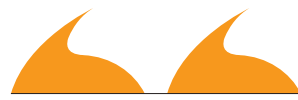
When you speak to Ms. Regan, Mr. Lewis and Ms. MacDonald, that is evident.

Ms. MacDonald believes that BC High will continue its mission of educating boys, and she hopes it does. But she tells me that she wishes there were more opportunities for girls to benefit from single-sex education, too—and in particular, she is disappointed that Boston’s girls don’t have the opportunity to experience the Jesuit school model.

“I know how much girls would respond to and just be completely transformed by Jesuit education,” she says. “I believe that girls would have as much benefit as boys do. I think it’s a justice issue that girls don’t have that opportunity.”

Mr. Lewis agrees.

“I have a daughter and we live in Boston. She will never get a Jesuit education. And so I feel that really acutely in my heart because I would really hope and desire that for her,” he says.



# A CONVERSATION ABOUT HOW TO BE A GOOD MAN IS MOST EFFECTIVELY HAD IN AN ALL-BOYS SCHOOL.

But if his daughter is going to receive a Jesuit education, he's sure the place for that won't be BC High. "In the same breath, I will also say, 'You don't belong here.' I'm being as candid as I can. That is hard. But I am so clear on the value of an all-boys' Jesuit education that I can't make it feel right in my heart. I know that other colleagues in our place feel similarly."

When it comes to the future of single-sex Catholic education, Mr. Lewis has faith. "I feel very passionately that it not only has a future; I think in time we'll see it become even more important."

## Educating Girls at Dominican Academy

I cannot help but gape as I walk into the historic mansion that is now Dominican Academy on the Upper East Side of New York City. Before the Dominican Sisters of Peace began educating girls here, it was the home of Col. Michael Friedsam, the president of the luxury department store B. Altman & Company, until he died in 1931. To say its interior is impressive would be an understatement; to this day, the school has kept its original architectural elements, featuring marble fireplaces in classrooms, stained glass windows and wrought ironwork at the entrance. Girls at DA study in Colonel Friedsam's library and take their physical education classes in the ballroom where he used to entertain. While much of his extensive art collection now belongs to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum of Art, some pieces remain in the school.

Even though the school's space is unique (to say the least), alumnae of girls' schools will recognize the hallmark of the model: traditions. As I hear about junior ring Mass and a freshman retreat and Christmas decorating, this Manhattan mansion somehow still reminds me of my days wearing a plaid uniform kilt alongside a few hundred of my "sisters." I see students making themselves comfortable in this stunning space; they are doing homework by a grand staircase and organizing the seating chart for prom on a board in the cafeteria.

Three women accompany me on my campus tour: Lauren Checo, the school's director of admissions; Dr. Alexandria M. Egler, the president; and Dr. Leslie Poole Petit, the principal.

As we walk and talk, they fill me in on the school's history and also remark on how it has changed. The building's sixth floor still holds the convent for the Dominican sisters, but these days there is only one sister left—Joan Franks, O.P., who teaches French and ancient Greek.

When it comes to the timely challenges the school is facing alongside their young girls, Dr. Petit says that student mental health is a top priority. The students are supportive of each other's goals and accomplishments, but Dr. Egler says they put a tremendous amount of pressure

on themselves. Dr. Petit describes the levels of anxiety she sees as "out of control" and attributes much of that to the high-pressure nature of the college admissions process. In the school's all-honors curriculum, their ambitious and impressive students shoulder pressure from parents when it comes to grades. "Every little point counts," Dr. Petit tells me.

In dealing with this problem, Dr. Egler and Dr. Petit are determined to be proactive instead of reactive. Seventeen faculty and staff members have been certified through a youth mental-health first aid program to respond to the students' needs, and the school is working to get the entire faculty certified. They have also brought in speakers to focus on the girls' overall wellness, including one who encouraged students to use the summer to decompress. "We literally had to instruct the girls on how to relax," Dr. Petit says.

Students are not permitted to use phones during the school day, and DA is even encouraging a reduction in classroom computer use. To alleviate academic stress, the school has stopped posting their honor roll.

"Education isn't just academics. It's spirituality, it's emotions, it's mental health," Dr. Egler explains.

As they work to help the girls reduce anxiety, DA considers its Catholic identity to be an asset. "Faith helps us help them," Dr. Egler says. "The message is: You don't have to carry this alone. You have to do the work and be proactive, but you're not alone. Your family, your school community and especially God and the Holy Spirit are with you in that."

Dr. Egler and Dr. Petit are also comforted by the fact that the girls feel safe to speak up in their school. In their eyes, it is a direct benefit of the single-sex environment. Dr. Egler believes that the girls would feel more pressure to hide the anxiety they are experiencing if DA were a coed school.

It may help that the leadership does not lean into an image of exclusivity, like other private schools in the area might. "We don't want to be perceived as an elite school,"



Dominican Academy/Slobhan Mullian

The all-girls Dominican Academy, on Manhattan's Upper East Side, offers a 9-to-1 student-teacher ratio.

Dr. Egler tells me, explaining that they want the school to be both academically strong and also for everyone. “We want DA to reflect New York City.”

Having New York City as a backyard also makes DA what it is. From field trips to service and advocacy opportunities, the urban environment opens doors. Students enjoy Broadway shows, museums and city scavenger hunts, and they also look out into their community to see how they can help. Juniors, guided by faculty and staff, focus on an advocacy issue in groups; Dr. Egler and Dr. Petit are advising groups focusing on teenage homelessness and the city's migrant crisis.

The hallmark of a DA grad? “These are women who change the world,” Dr. Egler says. “It might sound like a pat phrase, but it's true.”

### **Educating Boys and Girls at Regis Jesuit High School**

Twenty years ago, the all-boys Regis Jesuit High School in Aurora, Colo., began admitting girls. But it did not go coed.

One could be forgiven for being confused. Regis Jesuit is the only co-divisional Jesuit school in North America. (There is one other in the world, in the Philippines.) The school educates boys and girls on the same campus, but it does so in separate classrooms.

David Card, the school's president, is an alumnus, and his father taught at Regis Jesuit, so he has been around the school for much of his life—long enough to have known it first as an all-boys school.

Mr. Card is open about the fact that when they made the shift, the reaction was mixed. “Did you have a daughter that you desired to have a Catholic education? Then you're probably excited about it,” he recalled. “And if you didn't, you might think Regis was undermining its tradition.”

At the time, he said, some parents were worried that the school would not give sufficient attention to their sons' education as it focused on starting the girls division. On

the other hand, according to Mr. Card, there was strong support from the faculty.

“I think it took a lot of fortitude on the part of the board of trustees. I think they knew their cause was just and they were doing this in service to the archdiocese,” Mr. Card says.

When Jimmy Tricco arrived at Regis Jesuit six years ago, he was hired to serve as principal of both divisions and to aid in the school's reorganization plan, combining academic departments and working to make the two divisions feel more like one unified school, while maintaining separate spaces

for boys and girls. Before 2018, most teachers taught in either the boys division or the girls division. Now the vast majority of teachers work in both divisions.

Still the principal, Mr. Tricco calls Regis Jesuit's model “the best of both worlds.” He is speaking as a parent of daughters and a son, but also as a veteran Catholic educator who has worked in both single-sex and coed environments. He says that as Regis Jesuit continues to thrive, other schools are reaching out to ask about it and to consider replicating aspects of the model.

As the school went through this transition, Mr. Card said, teachers who were used to working with one gender had to unpack and let go of some of the “mythology” they might have developed about what it would be like to work with another gender.

Heidi Kabadi was recently recognized for 20 years of service to Regis Jesuit. She started the same year the girls division opened, but Ms. Kabadi was hired to teach social studies in the boys division.

In 2015, she volunteered to take on girls' social studies as well. “I felt like it would make me a better teacher to have taught both,” she says.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Ms. Kabadi became the department chair, leading 14 social studies teachers and assigning each of them their class schedule. Each teacher is responsible for five classes, and Ms. Kabadi told me that she works with each department member to understand their preferences and then assigns them two classes of boys and three classes of girls, or vice versa.

According to Ms. Kabadi, the Regis Jesuit faculty has had training sessions on the relevant research about differences between teenage boys' and girls' brains, and how to best motivate each. She knows teachers whose teaching methods are strongly influenced by this research, but she doesn't always base her own teaching on it. While studies suggest that boys are motivated by competition and girls





# EDUCATION ISN'T JUST ACADEMICS. IT'S SPIRITUALITY, IT'S EMOTIONS, IT'S MENTAL HEALTH.

work well in groups, she has girls in class who thrive with competition, as well as boys who do well with collaborative activities. “I tend to just do as many types of activities as possible with both groups, and give each of them as individuals a chance to shine,” she says.

She said that she can see the ways young boys and girls are socialized come through in the classroom—and ultimately in their academic performance. She teaches AP U.S. History in both divisions, and while her female students tend to be more prepared for class and on top of their assignments, they consistently struggle with the multiple choice section of the AP exam. Male students, in contrast, tend to put in less preparatory work, but they perform well when asked to identify the “best answer” to a multiple choice question.

In Ms. Kabadi’s view, the difference maker is confidence. To set the girls up for success, she gave them a pep talk before the AP exam one year: “I honestly said to them, ‘What I want you to do is pretend you are a 16-year-old boy who studied for half an hour and just go with your gut, every time. Just trust yourself.’ Those girls did at least a letter grade higher when I said just trust your gut.”

While the 2018 restructuring is complete, the project of making the school feel more unified is ongoing. Academically, progress is clear. Ms. Kabadi says a major goal of the reorganization was “making sure that our departments were on the same page, that we were holding both groups to the same academic standards. I was worried that we weren’t. And now I feel like we very much are.”

Since boys and girls share a campus, if not a classroom, certain clubs and sports teams are coed, and students have the opportunity to interact with students of the opposite gender outside of class.

Ms. Kabadi has watched the slow and steady changes in the way the boys and girls interact over the course of two decades. As she describes it, “I think they see each other as classmates now in a way that they didn’t before. I think before, it felt like a competition, and each division wanted to win.”

Mr. Tricco adds: “When I first heard about Regis Jesuit, it was labeled as two different schools. I don’t think there was this sense of ownership for everyone, that the girls division teachers thought boys were their students or boys’ division teachers thought girls were their students. It was part of my task, being the first co-divisional principal, to unify the school and make sure teachers saw every student on campus, whether they taught them or not, as their student, and as someone that we were impacting directly or indirectly.”

When I asked Mr. Card about his perspective on the advantages of single-sex education and what sets Regis

Jesuit apart, he stepped back and told me about an experience he had at a previous school he worked at, a dual-language school in Denver: “The principal at the school is just fantastic. I once asked her: ‘Why do you think our mode of dual-language education is better than some other ones?’ and she said, ‘I don’t know that any of them are better. What really matters is the people in the building believe in it.’ And I think there’s something similar here. Not that we believe single-sex education is inherently better, but we believe in what’s happening here.”

Molly Cahill is an associate editor at *America*. She was a 2020-21 Joseph A. O’Hare fellow.

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# MODELS OF BELONGING

## Ensuring access to the sacraments for people with disabilities

By Delaney Coyne



When I visit St. Thérèse of Lisieux Church in Cresskill, N.J., in April, people arrive early and families talk to each other. They notice that I am new and ask my name. That is new to me. After moving to New York, I attended Mass at many new churches, and I sometimes felt like a tourist, clumsily entering what felt like a parish-slash-museum where regulars would prefer to worship undisturbed by interlopers like me, thank you very much.

It is nothing like that here, at St. Thérèse's special needs Mass. In this oblong sanctuary that screams of the 1970s, the parish feels fully alive.

About 15 to 20 families regularly attend the Mass, which is held on Sunday monthly at 1:30 p.m. As they trickle in, Patrick Glass, a 28-year-old man with Fragile X syndrome (a genetic condition that causes intellectual disability), dances to a ditty the choir accompanist plays for him. Near the start of the Mass, Patrick exclaims "New York City!" after singing "This Little Light of Mine" with members of the parish's teen choir. Members of the congregation smile.

I watch as people with disabilities fulfill the roles of lectors and soloists and altar servers. At the end, all are invited to the altar at the end of Mass to sing "Rise and Shine (Arky Arky)," a nursery rhyme about Noah's Ark with accompanying choreography. I join in the dance gestures from the pews with other smiling parishioners.

The Mass is followed by fellowship in the school next door. As I enter the packed hall, I see a spread of juice boxes, homemade cannolis and cookies provided by the special

needs Mass's hospitality committee, staffed by many parishioners who have no connection to the disability community except for their desire to support it.

Many families travel to St. Thérèse for the special needs Mass, including Patrick and his parents, Gerry and Lori Glass, who drive half an hour each way from Fort Lee, N.J. There is nothing like this at their home parish, Lori tells me. They said that they found a community at this Mass where their son could express himself through music.

Catholic worship is often focused on "talking, talking, talking," Lori explains, which can be inaccessible for Patrick, whose verbal abilities are limited. "But here," she says, "the music is so uplifting, and everyone can sing."

I ask Patrick if he enjoys coming here. "Yes, ma'am," he tells me, with a big thumbs-up.

"I don't know who started it," Gerry says of the special needs Mass. "Whoever they are, they're a saint."

That would be Samuel Citero, O.Carm., the pastor at St. Thérèse, who was inspired to organize the Mass after a pilgrimage to Lourdes in 2015. "It didn't take a lot to convince our parish," he said, thanks to its longstanding commitment to social concerns; since then, parishioners have consistently volunteered to support the Mass.

Unlike many U.S. parishes, Father Citero's has seen growth in recent years, including a handful who joined St. Thérèse because of their welcoming stance toward people with disabilities. "We're not trying to steal people's parishioners, but we do what we do," he says.



iStock/A-Digit

“They come from far away because they say they don’t feel comfortable in their churches,” says Sheri Minetti, the music minister at St. Thérèse.

“Some of them are refused sacraments, so we take on that responsibility,” Father Citero explains. Some people with disabilities are denied the Eucharist if the pastor believes they cannot “distinguish the body of Christ from ordinary food,” as instructed by the Pastoral Statement of U.S. Bishops on Persons With Disabilities, published in 1978. But many parishes lack catechesis for people with disabilities to begin to grasp the mystery of the Eucharist. (And few neurotypical adults face similar scrutiny about their understanding of transubstantiation.)

Maureen Millett tells me about her son, Bryant, whom she described as a multiply disabled man. She says their family faced refusals from local pastors many years ago when they asked if Bryant could make his first Communion when he was about 16, and they searched for a place where he would be accepted. Their search led the family to join St. Thérèse, where Bryant received his first Communion from Father Citero.

Bryant died in his sleep in November 2022 at age 36, but the family remain parishioners at St. Thérèse. They attend the special needs Mass each month with their entire family, including Bryant’s sister, Breanne, and her 11-year-old son, D.J., who was an altar server alongside a boy with Down syndrome at the Mass I visited. “Our hearts are still with these kids,” Ms. Millett says, pointing to the dog tags

she and her husband, Geoffrey, wear with Bryant’s face and “forever in our hearts” etched into the silver metal.

Masses like the one at St. Thérèse offer safe spaces for people with disabilities to worship, where no one blinks an eye if they have an outburst or need to step out for a moment. They might also offer sensory adaptations. The Masses include people with disabilities among the liturgical ministers, which reminds the rest of the congregation that people with disabilities have abundant gifts to share with the church.

Beyond offering Masses for people with disabilities, the parish has the potential to be a place where people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, who often struggle to make friends in adulthood, can find a community that welcomes them, affirms their dignity, and makes space for them to offer their gifts and talents. Disability ministry thrives at the parish level because of the relational, individualized nature of such work. However, the local nature of the ministry sometimes restricts its growth, because a few organizations with limited resources shoulder the massive responsibility of providing centralized information about Catholics with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the United States.

Most dioceses do not have offices specifically designated for disability ministry. Instead, the responsibility often is shared among different offices, which can make it difficult for families and pastoral staff to find resources.

I spoke with ministers who offer programs that help facilitate catechesis, sacramental life and fellowship for



Courtesy of Delaney Coyne

Charlotte Coyne, the author's sister, with the Coyne family dog, Jerry. Charlotte often attends the special friends Mass at Old St. Patrick's Church in Chicago.

people with disabilities to find out both where disability ministry is thriving today and what it might need to grow in the future. My investment in the topic is both professional and personal.

### Why Is Disability Ministry Necessary?

My younger sister, Charlotte, is a 21-year-old with intellectual disabilities, and she enjoys going to church with our family. She will tell you that Jesus loves her, and she especially enjoys attending a Mass at our parish in Chicago for people with disabilities like the Mass at St. Thérèse, but she does not wish to receive the Eucharist regularly. She received her first Communion, but walking to the front of the church is extremely anxiety-inducing for Charlotte, so when my family attends Mass, she stays in the pew while the rest of our family go up to receive.

In 2020, Pope Francis made headlines by affirming “the right of all persons with disabilities to receive the sacraments, like all other members of the church.” Perhaps I was naïve, never having faced pushback from a pastor because my sister never tries to receive Communion, but I was shocked that even needed to be said.

But then I thought back to Charlotte's experience growing up in the church. When she was confirmed alongside a few other eighth graders with disabilities, the experience was overwhelming to her, and she ran out of the

sanctuary crying, my mother and I trailing closely behind. The bishop followed us, cornered her in the parish lobby and anointed her with the chrism as she bawled. Charlotte was hardly “properly and reasonably seek[ing]” confirmation that day, as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' guidelines instruct, but I don't entirely blame the bishop either—I don't think he knew what to do in that moment. After all, the church is not the only institution that has struggled to understand people with disabilities.

Catholic teaching has long affirmed the inalienable dignity of all people, regardless of ability, but the church's ministry to people with disabilities is still developing. Lori Weider, the chair of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability's Committee on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and the mother of two adults with disabilities, said, “Nationally, I feel like there's been a lot of improvement in accepting and welcoming and including people with disabilities, but there's still a lot of work to be done.”

The N.C.P.D. was founded in 1982 to carry out the mandate of the U.S. bishops' pastoral statement from 1978. It focuses on educating and providing resources on disability ministry to parishes, dioceses, ministers and laypeople. The N.C.P.D. maintains a list of affiliate dioceses around the United States, including diocesan directors, providing a vital point of contact for many families. It has also advocated for expanded programming for the Catholic disability community, including Masses for people with disabilities like the one at St. Thérèse. N.C.P.D.'s main goal is to “move from inclusion to belonging,” ultimately aiming at “communion...where everyone is the same,” Ms. Weider said.

The N.C.P.D. has commissioned national surveys by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate to assess the needs of Catholics with disabilities; the latest one, “Disabilities in Parishes Across the United States,” was commissioned by the N.C.P.D. and Potomac Community Resources and was published in 2016. CARA and the N.C.P.D. are currently in the process of conducting a new one.

The 2016 report relied on responses from parish staff, so it reflects the staff's ability to take the pulse of the disability community, and that can vary depending on the parish and the type of disability. The 2016 report found that pastors serving larger parishes are 33 percent more likely to be aware of a parishioner with an intellectual disability and 47 percent more likely to know of a parishioner with autism than pastors serving smaller parishes.



## Disability ministry thrives at the parish level because of the relational, individualized nature of such work.

### Pastoral Outreach to Parishioners

Mary Catherine Widger, S.L., has been involved in expanding access to catechesis for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities since 1976. She currently serves as the assistant director of special religious education for the developmentally disabled in the Archdiocese of Denver. She said that implementing a religious education program for a child with disabilities begins by “talk[ing] to the pastor, to be sure he is open to that.”

She explained that if the pastor is not the one making the request, it often comes from parents or even family friends, who might ask on behalf of the parents of a child with disabilities. “So many times, [parents] are a little hesitant to reach out, because they’ve been told ‘no’ so many times, and that just shouldn’t be happening in that area.” Sister Widger’s office uses the U.S. bishops’ “Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments With Persons With Disabilities” to remind pastors and leaders of their responsibilities toward their parishioners with disabilities.

Once Sister Widger’s team makes sure the pastor is on board, the team and pastor connect with parish leaders who can help with outreach, “and that’s usually some of the good women who are holding the parish together anyway,” Sister Widger said. They then begin reaching out to families, which can take “quite a bit of time,” since some families do not know that their child has a right to catechesis and the sacraments.

“We just keep trying to find those people that need to be reached out to—the parents that are agonizing, not because they have this child, but because they can’t share what means the most to them, which is their faith,” she said.

Sister Widger explains to parents that an inability to thrive in a traditional classroom religious education setting does not mean a person is unable to receive the sacraments: “There’s a big difference between ‘I can go and sit in somebody’s class and just not get it because I don’t understand the language,’ and ‘I can receive the living God, my parents have loved me, I know what love is, and this is what’s happening in that sacrament and all the sacraments, actually.’”

Still, these surveys have the potential to drive change in the church: One such survey, according to Charlene Katra, the executive director of the N.C.P.D, was the impetus for the publication of “Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments With Persons with Disabilities.” The guidelines were first published by the U.S. bishops in 1995 and were updated in 2017.

Ms. Weider said that much of the responsibility to minister to people with disabilities falls to individual parishes, but parishes located in dioceses with offices for disabilities benefit greatly from the additional support. In the 2016 report, fewer than half of responding pastors (48 percent) said that they were aware of opportunities in their diocese for parish staff to access training to accommodate people with disabilities, and only 28 percent said staff had attended such trainings, whether they were offered by the archdiocese or another organization. But of those who attended, 83 percent said that the training was at least partly sponsored by the diocese or archdiocese.

Most efforts start locally, according to Anne Masters, the director of the Office for Pastoral Ministry With Persons With Disabilities of the Archdiocese of Newark. “If the pastor in particular isn’t on board, it isn’t going to get anywhere,” she said.

Dr. Masters’s work lately focuses on facilitating a “conversion of mindsets” in parish communities. She explained that including people with disabilities in the parish community demands greater “interpersonal identification” from parishioners, specifically from parish leaders.

Disability ministry relies on getting to know people by name, Dr. Masters said, and making changes based on what would be helpful *to that individual* and their spiritual development. She said she’s heard people say things like, “I’ve got this Down’s kid that needs to prepare for the Eucharist,” which identifies people by their diagnosis, and that can be dehumanizing. Even among people with the same diagnosis, the needs of people with disabilities vary widely. A broad look at “disability access”—without careful attention to each person with disabilities—may fail to meet these parishioners’ individual needs.

The 2016 N.C.P.D. report found, for instance, that 85 percent of pastors said their parish at least “somewhat” offers a way to include students with disabilities in its religious education program, with 58 percent responding “very much.” Only 16 percent said they use the same catechetical resources for all without accommodations. But because the data does not distinguish among types of disability, it is unclear how many of the accommodations that are provided are tailored to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Maureen Barney, third from left, stands with participants and volunteers for the special friends Mass at Old St. Patrick's Church in Chicago. Ms. Barney helps to coordinate the Mass, at which people with disabilities serve as lectors, gift bearers and music ministers.

The full scope of disability ministry includes ministry to—and in collaboration with—people with disabilities at all stages of their lives. “Participation in the full life of the church is not just about sacrament participation,” said Dr. Masters, but she said the calls her office receives reflect the fact that “child sacrament preparation is still our predominant focus as a church.” Therefore, creating models of religious education that empower people with disabilities to receive the living God and recognize God’s love has been a point of focus for leaders in disability ministry.

### **An Alternative Model of Religious Education**

A special religious development program (the acronym is Spred) is one used to catechize people with disabilities. Spred programs operate in 19 dioceses in the United States, as well as 17 dioceses across Africa, Europe, Australia, North America and South America. Rather than emphasizing instruction in a classroom, Spred aims to cultivate authentic relationships in “communities made up of eight catechists and six ‘friends’ with intellectual and developmental disabilities,” said Joseph Quane, the executive director of the Spred program of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

The relational charism behind Spred comes from the Rev. Eucharist Paulhus, who brought the Spred method to Chicago from France with the Rev. Jean Mesny. The basic line of thought goes: “Our friends are educable in the faith because they can form relationships with people,” explained Mr. Quane. “If they can form relationships with

people, they can form relationships with God.”

During a two-hour session, participants with disabilities begin by unwinding and settling into prayer through a creative activity. Then they move to the “sacred space” where catechists help participants to find God using a symbol for a particular theme. For example, a glass of water on a hot summer day might be used as a metaphor for spiritual renewal. Participants and catechists discuss the theme and read Scripture; then a message is delivered to each participant, one by one. Afterward, the group leaves the room and they share a light snack or meal, mirroring the Eucharistic feast we share at the Mass. Spred Masses and other programs engage participants in the broader life of the parish.

The Spred model has empowered many people with disabilities to receive the sacraments, including Molly Gallagher, a 15-year-old girl with Down syndrome from Palos Park, Ill., who is nonverbal. Her father, Michael Gallagher, the director of vicariate operations for the Archdiocese of Chicago (he also serves on the board of directors of Mamre Inc., which raises money for Spred), said that Molly was not able to join the religious education program at their parish. She received her first Communion “one-on-one” with the pastor, but after that, there was a “void” in her religious education that Spred filled. Molly celebrated her confirmation this April at St. Cyril and Methodius in Lemont, Ill., with other teenage Spred participants.

With a four-to-three volunteer-to-participant ratio, the Spred program in Chicago is volunteer-intensive, and



## There's been a lot of improvement in including people with disabilities, but there's still a lot of work to be done.

different age cohorts are distributed across a network of parishes with Spred ministries. Despite varying abilities, participants find community with others who are going through similar life experiences.

At Spred, Mr. Gallagher said, Molly enjoys interacting with three other teenagers with disabilities. "It's not just prayer, it's also social," he said, which helps Molly develop her relationship with church.

Because Molly is nonverbal, "communication is a little limited," Mr. Gallagher explained, "but she's always very happy to go to Spred. She's happy when she comes out of Spred." He expressed confidence that Molly now has a strong faith life, rooted in the community at Spred.

Mary Ann Galeher also spoke highly of Spred. She was once told that her daughter Mary Kate, who has autism, would "never achieve confirmation" because she struggled to learn in a traditional youth catechesis setting. Mary Ann said that some people made her feel she was making a mistake with her daughter's religious life by pulling her out of catechesis. Now, Mary Ann calls those concerns "silly." She connected with Mr. Quane, and Mary Kate was confirmed at age 21 with her Spred group at St. Barnabas in the Beverly neighborhood of Chicago.

Now Mary Kate is 30 and works as a transporter at a hospital in Evergreen Park, Ill. She speaks fondly of her time in Spred, and her faith remains a sustaining force in her life, even if her work schedule sometimes prevents her from attending Sunday Mass. When she has panic attacks at work, she said, "I kind of just say a bunch of Hail Marys and Our Fathers and then...[I] realize everything is going to be OK."

Mary Ann said that her daughter's experience partially inspired her to begin volunteering for St. Cajetan Parish's Spred group one year ago as "something to get me involved in the parish besides registering there," but it has also connected Mary Ann to other families in the parish with disabilities and deepened her faith. "When those kids came up to join us in a prayer circle, it just blew me away. I've never felt such happiness [in] walking with Christ than I did at that moment."

Spred continues to grow because it retains its volunteers. Mr. Quane said that he began volunteering for Spred 15 years ago, and "for the most part, every volunteer has stayed" in his parish group. He said that the community fostered through the program is life-giving for both the disabled participants and the volunteers alike.

### Richer Models

Bridget Brown, a 38-year-old woman with Down syndrome, is an advocate for inclusion for people with disabilities. She

serves on the N.C.P.D. Committee on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, where she helps advise congregations on how they can better include their members with disabilities. She acknowledged the strides that have been made toward inclusion but argued that, as a church, "we have a long way to go."

Inclusion can make a measurable difference—the 2016 N.C.P.D. report found that parishes where people with disabilities serve in ministerial roles or on parish committees are more likely to offer significant accommodations for parishioners with disabilities. Thomas Gaunt, S.J., a co-author of the report and the executive director of CARA, said that most parishes do not have "any deliberate intent to exclude," but parishes that succeed at ministering to their parishioners with disabilities have a "positive intent to include."

Ms. Brown expressed frustration that in her work as an advocate, she rarely sees people with disabilities included in discussions that directly pertain to their experience.

"I wish that at conferences...people with disabilities were there—people with lived experience," Ms. Brown explained. "Most of the time it is just intellectuals talking about people with disabilities, but not inviting them to the table and listening to their stories."

"Charity is different than justice," Ms. Brown said. "Charity is giving someone money or food, but justice is sitting at the table with each other and sharing a meal."

"People with disabilities are often lonely, isolated, marginalized and pushed aside," Ms. Brown continued, and it takes intention to show them that they are welcome and have gifts to share with the community. She suggested that sensory-friendly Masses should be offered for the entire congregation in the main church, with people with disabilities serving as liturgical ministers, so the entire congregation can get to know its members with disabilities and grow in fellowship. She also said that activities outside of Mass—like Bible studies or dinner groups—can facilitate stronger relationships among parishioners of all abilities

and build a tighter-knit community.

My sister has experienced the power of this connection, too. After my family joined Old St. Patrick's Church (where Ms. Brown also attends Mass), we learned the parish hosts a monthly "special friends Mass," where people with disabilities serve as lectors, gift bearers and music ministers.

I asked Charlotte about it when I returned for Christmas this year. She described it in characteristically curt terms: "I like it. Maureen is nice," she said, referring to Maureen Barney, an Ignatian Volunteer Corps member who helps coordinate the special friends Mass.

While I was home, Charlotte received a card in the mail from Ms. Barney wishing her a Merry Christmas; inside was a Starbucks gift card. "I can get a pink drink!" she rejoiced. Throughout the day, Charlotte asked our family, "Don't you love Maureen?" And though I had never met her, I had to say that yes, I do.

Ms. Barney began by sending cards for Christmas and participants' birthdays, but during the pandemic, she started sending them more frequently, hoping to connect with the community outside of Mass. She's kept at it.

"I send them something every week," Ms. Barney said of the 15 or so special friends Mass participants, "a post-

card, a letter, a gift." My sister checks the mail every day; she cannot read, but she can scan for names, and when a letter comes in for her, it makes her feel cared for, special.

"Each of the participants makes the community, and without them, we would not have that sacramental life that we have," Ms. Barney explained. She strives to remind each of them of their vital place in that community.

Each month's special friends Mass also includes a service activity, like assembling hygiene bags for Chicago's homeless population, so "the participants know they are being served, but they also have something to bring to others." Thus, people with disabilities are reminded that they are not objects of charity; they have a part to play in the church's work of bringing about justice in the city and the world.

In speaking to people at various dioceses and in programs like Spread, it is easier to see a way forward, to see a church in which there is a seat at the table for each of our friends, regardless of their abilities, surrounded by people ready to listen. I pray others share this vision.

*Delaney Coyne is a graduate student in theology at the University of Notre Dame. She is a former Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., fellow at America.*



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# INVESTING THE CATHOLIC WAY

**Is there a better way to align money and values?**

By Bernard G. Prusak

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that in giving to the needy, your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing (Mt 6:3). This striking image is part of his injunction not to draw attention to your good works but to go about your giving quietly and humbly.

In 2007, The Los Angeles Times published a story suggesting that the left hand of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation didn't know what the right hand was doing—but in a different sense from what Jesus intended. On the one hand, the foundation was heavily investing in global health initiatives like vaccination against polio and measles and the fight

against malaria. On the other hand, it had invested hundreds of millions of its multibillion-dollar endowment in companies that are major polluters and whose business practices exacerbated the very health problems that the foundation was working to combat.

The issue stemmed from a “fire-wall” that the foundation had erected between its grant-making side and its investment side. The left hand gave from the endowment, but the right hand effectively took many of the benefits back in its work to secure the endowment's growth. The authors of the Times article quoted an industry expert describing this dynamic as

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“the dirty secret” of many large philanthropies. “Foundations donate to groups trying to heal the future,” he went on, “but...they steal from the future” in how they invest.

Of course, it is not only philanthropies that have to worry about aligning their money and their values. (And the investment advisor and activist Morgan Simon reports, in her book *Real Impact: The New Economics of Social Change*, that the Gates Foundation has since significantly changed its ways.) Colleges and universities, for example, proclaim a social mission and profess all sorts of commitments to civic values. Do they invest their endowments accordingly? What about unions with pension funds? Or, for that matter, morally scrupulous individuals putting money away in retirement accounts managed by behemoth firms like Vanguard, Fidelity and T.I.A.A.?

Jesus also says in the Sermon on the Mount that where your treasure is, there your heart is, too (Mt 6:21). That may be a hard saying to hear. It is even harder to heed his injunction not to worry about tomorrow (6:34), which might seem fine and well if you think that the world is soon coming to an end, but which is surely much less persuasive if you have, even indirectly, responsibility for an institution that by its nature has to be “in” the world, even if it strives not to be entirely “of” it.

Enter socially responsible investment (SRI).

It’s hardly a new phenomenon, but it has attracted wide attention only in recent decades. Histories of SRI sometimes trace its roots to the international “free produce,” anti-slavery sugar boycotts in the late 18th and 19th centuries, demonstrating the power of economic action. A more direct precedent is the establishment of the Pioneer Fund in the United States in 1928 (not to be confused with a later nonprofit that advocated eugenics). Marketed to evangelical Protestants, it avoided investment in the alcohol and tobacco industries and yielded robust returns.

Both the Vietnam War in the 1960s and ’70s and the divestment movement against the South African apartheid regime in the 1980s accelerated the growth of SRI as institutional and individual investors sought to ensure that they were putting their money where their mouths were, so to speak; or, more precisely, that they *weren’t* putting their money into industries, products or causes to which they or key stakeholders of theirs strongly objected. Some of the protests in 2024 on college and university campuses about Israel’s war in Gaza have similarly objected to those institutions’ investments in the defense industry and to investments linked in any way to Israel as a whole.



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### Investment and Gospel Values

There are several methods of SRI. The predominant method is so-called negative screening: constructing portfolios *not* invested in firms or industries to which the investor would object on ethical or religious grounds. Other methods include corporate activism or engagement, which might take the form of introducing shareholder resolutions or casting proxy votes on company policies; and community or impact investing, which allocates capital in support of social or environmental goals like affordable housing or sustainable agriculture.

Impact investors likewise seek a return (impact investment is distinct from philanthropic giving), but it may or may not be “market rate”—that is, the return that would be expected from investing without ethical qualms, against a standard benchmark of general investing. It should be noted, too, that SRI is itself distinct from ESG investing, which takes into account a firm’s environmental and social record (with respect to climate change, or supply chain oversight), as well as its governance practices (for example, the composition of the board of directors and its role in oversight of executives). A common criticism of publicly traded ESG funds is that they are opaque—it is hard to know all that much about the investments included in the funds—and as such are vulnerable to “greenwashing”—that is, a company making itself seem much more environmentally friendly than it is in practice.

In the world of Catholic institutional investors, such as universities, health care systems, foundations and religious congregations, the SRI method of choice is “negative screening” (a Global X research paper from 2022 calls investment restrictions the “bedrock of Catholic investing”), and there are a number of investment firms and mutual funds serving this market. There is even a S&P 500 Catholic Values Index, with a corresponding ex-



# IN THE WORLD OF CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONAL INVESTORS, THE INVESTING METHOD OF CHOICE IS ‘NEGATIVE SCREENING.’

change-traded-fund (E.T.F.) under the ticker CATH.

Yet the time may be ripe for Catholic investors to examine themselves, as the Gates Foundation had to in the aftermath of the Los Angeles Times exposé. While admirable in some ways, negative screening is no guarantee of moral purity. The “no” of negative screening is more equivocal and permissive than it might seem. Moreover, framing investment decisions in terms of what *should not* be done, instead of what *should* be done, unduly limits the scope of possibilities. Finally, negative screening risks promoting a false sense of security that, so long as specific products or industries are avoided, everything else is fair game.

Those criticisms are only a start. This is not to say that negative screening is useless or that it shouldn’t be done at all. But it is to suggest that more attention should be given both to what negative screening is good for and to the other methods of SRI. As it happens, the Vatican’s recent reflection on “faith-consistent investment” (the document “Mensuram Bonam,” published by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in 2022) calls for investors first to be active owners of assets and to work “to influence...the enterprises in which they invest”; second, for investors to adopt “a proactive stance regarding the contributions or potential of funds or enterprises to...environmental, social, [and] human goods”; and only third for investors “to avoid ethical contradictions between an investment and the teachings of the Church” (No. 42).

Accordingly, some Catholic investors, acting through organizations like Investor Advocates for Social Justice and the Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investment, have committed themselves to corporate engagement. Others, such as 16 U.S. congregations of Dominican sisters, have made significant allocations toward impact investing. Still others, like the Raskob Foundation, have taken the “Catholic Impact Investing Pledge”

and are *en camino*, but many more should follow suit.


Pope John Paul II observed in his 1991 encyclical “Centesimus Annus” that “the decision to invest in one place rather than another...is always a *moral and cultural choice*” (No. 36). The challenge for investors who profess Gospel values is to invest in ways and places that not only shun an economy that kills, to speak in Pope Francis’ prophetic language, but also help cultivate an economy that does right by the poor, marginalized and vulnerable and responds appropriately to the increasingly urgent cry of the earth.

## The Problem(s) With Negative Screening

The business ethics literature presents a handful of criticisms of negative screening as a method of SRI. First, it is open to dispute whether some products or industries that are frequent targets of exclusion really ought to be. For example, as the business professor Mark S. Schwartz asks, “Is the production of nuclear power necessarily unethical [and thus properly excluded], especially when compared to the alternatives?” Most Catholic screening guidelines do not exclude investment in nuclear energy, but the Vatican’s own investment policy discourages it. For a more controversial example, as a rule Catholic guidelines do exclude manufacturers of contraceptives, though a large majority of Catholics do not see eye to eye with the Vatican or the bishops on this matter.

Second, excluding whole industries or categories of products, such as alcohol, can have the effect of eliminating the wheat together with the weeds (Mt 13:24-30). Yes, it withholds funding from companies that engage in unethical business practices, but, as one journal article notes, it also misses “investment opportunities to support companies” that do business right and could even change industry norms for the better.

The third criticism cuts deeper. No company is self-sufficient—sourcing, supplying, financing, insuring, manufacturing, distributing, marketing and so forth, all its goods and services, all on its own. As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops remarked in its 2021 investment guidelines, today’s economy consists of an “entangled web of corporate relationships.” The upshot, as the Dominican theologian and economist Albino Barrera observed in his study of market complicity, is that it can be a challenge to judge whether a given company is “‘significantly’ or ‘primarily’ engaged in...excluded products or services.” Some companies may infringe a negative screen indirectly, as Mr. Schwartz notes, “by acting as a supplier, a customer, a joint venture partner, a creditor, or a shareholder” of other, excluded companies.



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# THE ‘NO’ OF NEGATIVE SCREENING IS MORE EQUIVOCAL AND PERMISSIVE THAN IT MIGHT SEEM.

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One problem here is that such information might not be readily available to investors (a reason to demand greater transparency). Another is that excluding all “significantly” engaged cooperating firms, should they be identifiable, might begin to make it difficult to construct traditional, risk-diversified portfolios.

An example: Say that you want to screen against firearms, as Catholic investing guidelines normally do. It makes sense to target manufacturers, but why not also big retailers like Walmart and Dick’s, or the industry’s principal banking partners, like Wells Fargo? Or say that you want to screen against pornography, as Catholic guidelines also do. Why not its major distributors as well, like Comcast?

A way around this problem is to exclude companies based on the percentage of their revenues derived from the product or service to which investors object. For example, the U.S.C.C.B. guidelines state that it “will not invest in companies that...derive more than 10 percent of their revenue from the sale of contraceptives, even if they do not manufacture them.” But this strategy is itself open to two objections. First, why 10 percent? Why not 5, or 15, or 20 or 25? The percentage seems arbitrary.

Second, if a product or service is morally objectionable to the extent that investors should shun its manufacturers, why is it acceptable to invest in a company that derives *any* of its revenues from it? Why give such companies a 5, 10 or 15 percent pass on bad behavior? That decision seems likewise arbitrary, and it prompts the disquieting question of whether negative screening is really making that much difference for the better in the world.

Finally, the charge of arbitrariness can be leveled at the whole enterprise of negative screening. The U.S.C.C.B. guidelines can again serve as an example. They are thoughtful and thorough (and, like “Mensuram Bonam,” propose more than negative screening), but it is obscure at times why they recommend one investment strategy rather than another (and appeals to the need for “prudence” do not dispel that obscurity). *[Editor’s note: America’s invest-*

*ments follow U.S.C.C.B. guidelines.]*

The guidelines state emphatically that the U.S.C.C.B. “will not invest” in companies having to do in various ways with abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, in vitro fertilization, research on human embryos and fetuses, cloning, pornography, gender reassignment, contraceptives, weapons of mass destruction, firearms (other than for hunting, law enforcement and the military), gambling, tobacco and recreational cannabis. Why not also capital punishment, animal experimentation for cosmetics and the like, wasteful fast fashion, and unfair business practices such as predatory pricing, price fixing and price discrimination? The list could go on.

But more to the point, why will the U.S.C.C.B. only “consider” divesting from companies that persistently violate workers’ human rights, and why will it only “consider” divesting from companies that consistently fail to take steps to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions? (Here’s looking at you, Big Oil—from which the Church of England Pensions Board recently divested after five years of largely futile efforts at corporate engagement.)

Remarkably, the U.S.C.C.B. guidelines recommend only “corporate dialogues, proxy voting, and support of shareholder resolutions” for companies mixed up with forced labor and child labor. Why not cut out companies that cannot or will not cut through the opacity of global supply chains to be sure they are not selling products made by young children and modern slaves? Granted, that is much easier said than done, but it’s surely just as important as—if not much more important than—saying no to legalized weed.

## Investing for Positive Results

It is not hard to imagine the response: Those academic criticisms of negative screening are all fine and well, but let us hear from the finance professionals, engaged in the trenches of investment. What do they have to say about all this? Further, what are realistic, practical alternatives for, say, the investment committee of a board of trustees with fiduciary responsibilities for a Catholic university or health care system? Do such alternatives exist? It is wonderful for Dominican sisters to invest in a climate solutions fund or for foundations to align their investments with their philanthropy, but what if you need to try to ensure a high rate of returns to maintain the very existence of an institution whose purpose is not to give away its money?

Here is what some finance professionals had to say in interviews with **America**. Tim Macready, head of global multi-asset investing at Brightlight, an investment advisory firm, suggests that the goal of negative screening should

not be understood as seeking moral purity. That is a goal it cannot achieve. “For those seeking moral purity in their portfolios,” he said, “the complex nature of our modern economy makes this, in my view, impossible.” According to Mr. Macready, what negative screening can do is express values, but that makes it a starting point, not an end in itself.

In biblical terms, saying no to putting your treasure in some places is not yet expressing yourself in full. For Mr. Macready, reversing the customary reading of Matthew 6:21, treasure ought to follow the heart. In this reading, investment is about character development as well as more measurable outcomes, and the key question for investors to consider is what they care about and want to support. “Thankfully,” he said further, “within some circles much of the argument has now moved away from purity portfolios and toward conscience portfolios. But that still frustrates me. It’s better theologically, but still not comprehensive. And it neglects so much positive opportunity.”

Mr. Macready also makes a case for more nuanced, less blunt approaches to negative screening that do not exclude entire industries and that do not treat all “cooperating” firms as equally guilty or, for that matter, equally innocent. “We hear the argument a lot,” he said, “that because there’s no universal standard [for what should or should not be excluded], then I shouldn’t try to improve my portfolio. But the Christian life is one of constantly seeking growth and repentance. Screening would be no different.”

Another frequent argument is that “it’s too hard, so I don’t have to think about how my values are expressed in my portfolio.” Here his rejoinder is to “do the hard work.” From his perspective, “If we thought about the character of the companies in our portfolios, we would embrace far more shades of gray.” It is true that a measure of arbitrariness would remain concerning some investment decisions (for example, decisions based on the percentage of a company’s revenues from this or that product), but those decisions would be driven by positive reasons, not a quixotic quest for purity.

Duane Roberts, director of equities for Dana Investment Advisors, likewise sees negative screening as only a first step: Its flip side is so-called positive screening, which is concerned with marks in an investment’s favor. An entry-level form of positive screening is to identify “best in class” investments: for example, “a fossil fuel company that captures methane emissions might be considered ‘best in class’ for reducing its climate impact,” said Mr. Roberts. But, as he noted, “That’s a compromise that still supports harmful activities,” which leads some investors to want investments that align more directly with their values (or, in Mr. Macready’s terms, “conscience portfolios”).

Mr. Roberts’s example here is a Catholic investor who, as a first step, avoids “investments in drug companies that use embryonic stem cells derived from elective abortions in research or production.” To express his or her pro-life values more fully, Mr. Roberts commented, “That investor might seek out companies that are proactively pursuing alternative methods of drug discovery and manufacturing.” This progression brings the investor to the threshold of impact investing, which in Mr. Roberts’ definition “goes beyond values-aligned management to seek out businesses whose purpose addresses a social need.”

Dennis Hammond, senior vice president of responsible investing at First Trust Portfolios, also advocated for “[e]xtending negative screening to corporate engagement, positive screening and impact investing.” According to him, “From a Catholic investor’s perspective, negative screening is good as far as it goes. It’s certainly better than simply ignoring problematic corporate practices and products. But it’s not the whole solution to the moral issues facing investors on Wall Street today.”

Ascension Investment Management (AIM), a registered investment advisor and a wholly owned subsidiary of Ascension, one of the nation’s leading nonprofit Catholic health systems, has managed an impact investment program since 2014, when it was an innovator in the space. (Ascension, AIM’s principal client, is another signatory of the “Catholic Impact Investing Pledge.”) Initially, AIM allocated around \$50 million of its then nearly \$30 billion in assets under management to impact investments for six participating institutional investors. At the end of 2023, those numbers had grown to 21 participating institutional investors, with \$287 million aggregated for impact investments, against around \$41 billion in assets under management.

AIM’s program has two impact objectives: first, improving access for the poor and vulnerable to goods and services such as clean water, adequate and affordable housing, education, health care and financial services; and second, caring for the earth, through both environmental conservation and the development of innovative “green” products and processes, such as clean technologies.

David Erickson, AIM’s chief investment officer, explained that the percentage of assets in impact investing is relatively small for two main reasons. First, there are a limited number of opportunities that fit AIM’s investment criteria: investments that are expected to be able to make an impact for the better *and* to generate a market-based return. Second, he noted that AIM limited its capital capacity in order to stay nimble, making it easier to participate in smaller funds and co-investment opportunities that larger

allocators might overlook or deem insignificant.

Amplifying these points, Jessica Cook, AIM's managing director of business development, remarked that "impact measurement is an ongoing project for our team and for the market generally. It can be difficult to aggregate the data in a way that demonstrates that the outcome a fund is seeking to achieve has been realized." But the market is still young and growing. Accordingly, AIM's Impact Investment Advisory Committee, comprised of institutional investors that participate in AIM's impact program, meets quarterly to provide feedback about impact objectives, investment qualifications and measurement reporting.

### Human Flourishing

Change, then, is afoot. Even institutions in the highly change-averse industry of higher education have committed through the Intentional Endowments Network to "advance an equitable, low carbon, and regenerative economy." In the Catholic world, signatories include Loyola University Chicago, the University of Dayton, the University of St. Thomas and Villanova University. And there are a number of portfolio managers developing "Gospel-centric" funds that, in the spirit of Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25, seek to bring food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty while also generating healthy returns to investors, which of course attracts greater investment. Creation Investments Capital Management, which is focused on emerging markets in the developing world, is one noteworthy example, with currently more than \$2 billion in assets under management, up from \$100 million in 2013.

But a reality check is in order: Elon Musk's fortune is around \$200 billion; Jeff Bezos's is about the same. Mark Zuckerberg is worth around \$155 billion, Bill Gates \$130 billion. The Wall Street Journal recently lectured the students demanding that their colleges and universities divest from the defense industry that divestment wouldn't make any difference: Among other reasons, "there's just too much capital around," such that, even if Columbia University were to move its full \$14 billion endowment, it would be but "a drop in the ocean of capital swilling around big companies."

Microsoft, The Wall Street Journal's article notes, is valued at \$3 trillion. Like it or not, "The impact of even a lot of universities selling [stock in such a company] would be negligible." The students' particular politics aside, the lesson is that the whole SRI movement is swimming against the tide, as academic research also suggests. Mammon rules.

But isn't that just defeatism talking? It is a view that gives greed the last word, and that seems to put more faith in the power of human works—here, the power of the dark-

ness overcoming the light—than in the efficacy of grace patiently inviting into being a new creation. Negative screening won't save the world, and there is only so much that could be done with even the University of Notre Dame's \$20 billion endowment, duly reallocated. Investment can contribute, though, to the biblical mandate to be fruitful and multiply (Gn 1:28); it just needs to be cast in terms of giving and not only getting.

According to Brightlight's Tim Macready, investment, framed in biblical terms, is "taking capital that would otherwise be unproductive and using it productively to support the creation of goods and provision of services that enable human flourishing." Catholic investors need to look beyond negative screening to see this possibility.

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# HEARING THE SPIRIT SPEAK

## The Jesuit roots of the synod's method of conversation

By Colleen Dulle

How do you conduct a “conversation in the Spirit?” At last year’s Synod on Synodality, Catholics heard this term frequently, and they surely will again when the second and final session begins in October.

The method, it turns out, has deep roots in a Jesuit form of communal discernment that was developed in Canada after the Second Vatican Council.

Conversation in the Spirit is a method of communal discernment that aims to help a group of people listen to the Holy Spirit through conversations with one another. Participants, having reflected privately on questions distributed earlier, gather in a circle with a facilitator. They begin with personal introductions, if necessary, and a prayer. Then each person shares for a limited amount of time (at the synod this was three minutes maximum) those things that stood out to them during their prayer and reflection with the questions.

The group takes a few minutes of silence to reflect on what they have heard, and then, in the second round of sharing, each person takes a turn saying what stood out to them from what the others shared. During this phase, some throughlines or tensions may emerge, but they are

not yet discussed. The group again takes a few minutes of silence, and then, in the third round, they discuss what emerged in the previous rounds. At the synod, each group was invited to document at this point “convergences” and “divergences” of opinions from their conversations, along with any proposals or open questions they wanted to raise.

While the method has certainly gained popularity in the last two years because of its use in the synod, it is not new. The method is rooted in what Jesuits call the “Canadian method” of spiritual conversation, which was developed in Canada and the northeastern United States beginning in the 1970s, and the method grew richer in Canada and Belgium in subsequent decades.

After Vatican II, interest in individually directed retreats swelled, and some Jesuits, including the Canadians John English, John Veltri and John Wickham, began to explore how to create something similar for groups. The three were seen as seminal members of the Montreal Directed Retreats movement rooted at the Guelph Centre of Spirituality (now called Loyola House/Ignatian Jesuit Centre) in the city of Guelph, Ontario.

Because the Spiritual Exercises are meant to guide individual retreatants through discernment of a decision, the exercises done by a group could be a type of communal discernment—for example, about the identity and future of the group.

With Father English, the American Jesuit George Schemel, himself the founder of multiple spirituality centers in the United States, co-founded a group called Ignatian Spiritual Exercises for the Corporate Person, which included James Borbely, S.J., Maria Carew, R.S.H.M., John Haley, and Sister Judith Roemer. The group developed a method for discernment in common, which it published in



Participants in the assembly of the Synod of Bishops gather on Oct. 25, 2023, for an afternoon session in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican.

three volumes, one of which was released in 1989. The method guided groups through three questions: Who are you, as a group, before God? What do you do (or what are you called to do)? How do you do it?

Peter Bisson, S.J., recalls Father Schemel visiting Guelph, often to work with Father English and the I.S.E.C.P. group in the early 1980s, when Father Bisson was a novice there. He later returned for his tertianship—the final phase of Jesuit formation—to Guelph, where he and the other tertians “breathed, ate

and dreamed spiritual conversation and discernment in common” under Father English’s direction, Father Bisson wrote in an email interview.

“Because of the influence of I.S.E.C.P. on Loyola House [novitiate in Guelph] and the centrality of Loyola House in the life of the English Canada province, many of the Jesuits of my generation had some exposure to it,” Father Bisson continued.

Meanwhile, in the mid-1980s, Father Wickham wrote and gave the first version of his communal exercises to small groups; he would expand this into a guide whose second edition was published in two parts in 1991. The same year, Father Schemel and Sister Roemer published a 16-part video series called “Ignatian Spirituality and the Directed Retreat,” geared toward groups, to meet the growing desire from groups for directed Ignatian retreats.

By the mid-1990s, the communal retreat and discernment model had caught on internationally. In 1995, a Belgian group called E.S.D.A.C. (Exercices Spirituelles pour Discernement Apostolique en Commun) was formed by some Jesuits, translating I.S.E.C.P.’s work into French. To this day, E.S.D.A.C. leads groups in discernment and has a presence across Europe and in Canada and Lebanon. As the method grew in Belgium, though, it waned in popularity in Canada.

In 2002, Father Bisson, today one of the most significant promoters of the “Canadian method” in Canada, returned from his doctoral studies in Rome and was tasked with “strengthening [the English Jesuits’] social justice sector with spiritual conversation and discernment in common.” He said the effort was “fruitful, and was the beginning of discernment in common taking root in the English Canada province.”

In 2008, he was asked to put together a toolkit on spiritual conversation and discernment in common, which he

did with Earl Smith, S.J., and Elaine Regan-Nightingale, who had both been involved in the Jesuits’ Christian Life Communities in Canada. The communities had been working with Father English and had become “a strong repository of these skills,” Father Bisson said, “and their skills and knowledge in turn helped renew and spread these skills in the Jesuit province.”

By that point, he said, all of the Jesuit novices in Canada were learning the “Canadian method,” and it was used at province gatherings, including those attended by now-Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J., the prefect of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, who was influenced by the method.

The “discernment in common” or “spiritual conversation” method gained a global spotlight when it was used at the Jesuits’ 36th General Congregation in 2017 to get the order past an impasse in their conversations. The following year, the French- and English-speaking provinces of the Canadian Jesuits merged and, in 2019, the new province founded a committee called Service for Discernment in Common, which incorporated some of the French province’s work with E.S.D.A.C. and the English province’s developments from the Guelph school of thought. The group was headed by Laurence Loubières, X.M.C.J., who is now superior general of the small (about 100 members) Ignatian-inspired order of Xavières—of which Sister Nathalie Becquart, one of two undersecretaries for the Synod on Synodality, is a member.

The method has now spread through the Jesuits and other Ignatian-inspired orders well beyond Canada—so much so that, according to Father Bisson, it is no longer widely referred to as the “Canadian method” but simply “spiritual conversation” or “discernment in common.”

So, how exactly did what was once known as the “Canadian method” make the jump from the Jesuits of Canada to the global Synod on Synodality?

The method was proposed by the synod’s commission on methodology, which was headed by Sister Becquart, she confirmed in an email to **America**. She had learned the method from the Xavières of Canada, and others on the commission had had personal experience with it as well. Because the commission had been tasked with finding best practices for use at the synod, and because its members had heard from members of the Australian Plenary Council that the method had had positive results there, they proposed it for use at the synod assemblies.

Colleen Dulle is an associate editor of **America** and co-hosts the podcast “*Inside the Vatican*.”

# ON BEING A COUNSELOR OF LAW

**It is my duty  
to assist those  
in need.**

By Jeffrey Wald



istock/BCFC

One might be justified in questioning the veracity of my vocation (from the Latin word *vocare*, “to call”) to be a lawyer upon learning of the circumstances attending the call. I remember them vividly.

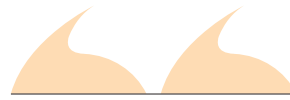
It was the middle of the night. I was lying awake, whether tossing or turning I can’t recall. But feeling terrified? Anxious? Uncertain? Yes, yes, yes.

I knew I was getting married. Not imminently, as I had only just begun to date my future wife—who happens to be my current wife, who also happens to be my only wife, just to be clear—but there was no doubt in my mind that we would eventually be married. And that fact changed my approach to everything.

At the time, I was a junior in college studying English, philosophy and Catholic studies. I prided myself on choos-

ing a financially nonviable course of study. I believed my path was the pure path of the mind. I would be an intellectual, a scholar, a writer. One who sat upon mountain tops and pondered. I understood that the market for the skill set I sought was slim to nonexistent. But in my mind, that was a fact in its favor.

I derided and stuck up my nose at my friends who were pre-law, pre-medicine or pre-business. It was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one of my fellow students who had a legitimate career path to receive my approval. In my youth, I failed to recognize my own deadly pride and gnostic tendencies. I earnestly believed that the pure realm of ideas—whatever that is—is an infinitely higher realm than the world of flesh and blood and bones and mud. I was terrified of the mundane, the



banal, the everyday ordinariness of most of reality. I hoped to escape that through the persistent pursuit of immaterial ideas, whether through novels or philosophy or abstract theology. Money, the selling of goods and services, people's physical or legal ailments, putting food on one's table, gas in one's car and heat in one's house—all that was beneath me.

But when I considered this path in the context of a marriage, my worldview was upended. It was one thing if I was content for the entirety of my worldly possessions to consist of books by Aquinas, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. But could I really invite my beloved into such a life? What would my choices mean for our future—and our future family?

Thus my cold sweats in the middle of that January night. What should I do, O Lord? Then—in a fit of inspiration, or panic-induced revelation—it came to me. I would become a lawyer!

As simple as that, the decision was made. I fell asleep and woke up the next day a new man.

I awoke the next morning with the realization that I didn't know any lawyers and did not really know what they did. I grew up in small-town North Dakota. We didn't have a courthouse or a cop or a lawyer, and we liked it that way. The only thing I knew about lawyers I had gleaned from watching "Matlock" and "The Practice." But during high school, I had also been an avid public speaker, an active member of Future Farmers of America, and participated in 4-H, drama, music and speech.

I reasoned that if I combined my knowledge of law from TV shows with my love of public speaking, I could develop a plan: I'd be a trial lawyer, spending my days in front of juries. In my mind, a trial was just another speaking competition. And if there was—and is—something I like even more than scholarship and the world of ideas, it's competition. And winning.

If I had taken two steps down the ladder of intellectual snobbery, I had probably taken three or four steps up the ladder of pride and self-conceit. The *world of ideas* had simply been replaced by *the idea* I had of myself. And the idea I had of myself was one of success. Of great competency. Confidence in my ability to convince another or a group of others that my position was right. I hated to lose. I had always been an accomplished student, an award winner in whatever extracurricular activity I did (save basketball). And I reasoned that I'd simply continue that in law. I'd get the highest grades and a coveted clerkship and an important job doing important things. And I'd keep winning.

But what I failed to see back then, and during most of my law school days, is that lawyers have clients who are human beings with real-life problems. Lawsuits aren't competitions. Lawyers don't get trophies for winning a case.

## Lawyers have clients who are human beings with real-life problems.

You don't stand before a jury trying to convince them that God exists, or that utilitarian philosophy is bunk or that language does reveal something about essence. Instead, lawyers are advocates who must stand in the shoes of their clients, clients with concrete, incarnate legal problems. More than just advocates, lawyers are counselors.

It has taken me nearly 10 years of practicing law to even begin to understand that term: *counselor of law*. But of late, the Lord appears to want to hammer this idea into my skull.


### From Pages to People

Today I am an appellate attorney. I love this niche area of practice. In some ways my work as a lawyer is closer to my original vision for my life than I could have thought possible. Give me 1,000 transcript pages and unlimited access to an online legal research database and lock me in a windowless office for a week or two, and I'm happy. I love research and writing. I enjoy pondering legal issues and thoroughly considering them from every angle. I am proud of my ability to craft succinct, clear, persuasive legal arguments. Writing a brief is about as much fun as one can have as a lawyer.

But my work also constantly reminds me that there is no such thing as an abstract legal issue, that the practice of law is about real people. And the Lord keeps sending real people with real problems to knock on my office door, pulling my mind out of the appellate heights. To help me see that, God has given me the privilege of seeking to understand these problems from others' perspectives. I am learning that being a lawyer is not primarily about coming up with the best legal arguments. It is about being a counselor. A listener. An empathizer. And an advocate.

These folks do not usually become my clients. They come to me because I am the only person they know who is a lawyer. And they know me because of my family's mission to build Christian community with the poor and marginalized, including through foster care, weekly communal dinners and creating a house of hospitality.

At times I am simply able to point them in the direction of pro bono or low bono resources. Other times I can help them understand their legal challenges and their options going forward. But most importantly, I can listen



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## The Lord keeps sending real people with real problems to knock on my office door.

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and empathize with those who come my way. Women in abusive relationships trying to navigate divorce and child protection proceedings. Employees terminated from jobs. Teen fathers being investigated by law enforcement. Individuals charged with crimes.

Many times, there is not much practical assistance I can offer. I wish I could do more. I wish I could change their often dire circumstances. Those in need of legal counsel are usually going through one of the hardest times in their lives. Stress, anxiety, fear, the overwhelming sense of helplessness and lack of control—these feelings are all common. Being a counselor of law requires some of the same skillset as a clinical counselor. In my experience, empathy and patient listening are key. On multiple occasions I have listened to a mother crying on the other end of the phone, trying to empathize with her feelings of helplessness as she prepares to send her children for another required week-end visit with her abusive ex-husband. And sometimes all I can do is agree that it's not fair. As much as I'd like to, I can't change her legal circumstances. But I can say her sharing her life with me has broadened my understanding of my own vocation.

We in the legal profession are privileged. We have had access to training and opportunities that most will never have. I believe the law is, must and can be a force for great good. We live in a fallen world. Good law and fair legal processes can help. But the law can also become a hurdle and a

burden, especially for those who are poor and disadvantaged.

A lawyer's right to practice law brings with it a duty to assist those in need. That doesn't mean that we can or should represent every person who comes to our doors. We need to practice discernment. But how we respond to those we cannot help in legal matters can still make a difference. We must at least lend our ear to those in need. Can that be the cup of cold water we offer back to Jesus? Or will we be like those disciples who time and again tried to send away the poor, the sick, the lame and those who chased after Jesus, crying out for help? Jesus always had the time for them.

Today, I love being an appellate attorney. I still love ideas, the joy of diving deep into a challenging legal issue and the thrill of obtaining a favorable judicial ruling. And I believe that my passion for my work pleases the Lord. This is how he made me. But I am also convinced more each day that my call to be a lawyer is not just for my own good, or even the good of my wife, but is also for those in need. As a lawyer, I still feel God's presence in the pages of my books and the papers on my desk, but I also see it more clearly in the people before me.

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*Jeffrey Wald is an appellate attorney with Nelson, Mullins, Riley & Scarborough. He lives with his wife and five sons in Winston-Salem, N.C.*



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# A Catholic Yes to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

*D.E.I.B. is an integral part of the mission and identity of Jesuit high schools*

By Carlos Jiménez, Amanda Montez and Deena A. Sellers



The work of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in Jesuit secondary schools is neither a novelty nor a reaction to recent shifts in society. D.E.I.B. has always been a component of our mission as Catholic institutions. But in the summer of 2020, there was a reckoning in the United States: Thousands of people took to the streets to protest police brutality and systemic racial inequality across the nation, sparked by the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. Shortly after, the alarming rise of cases of discrimination and violence toward Asian Americans, derived from their wrongfully perceived connection to the Covid-19 pandemic, amplified the need to elevate D.E.I.B. work in all Jesuit school communities.

During this time, diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging practitioners across the Jesuit Schools Network began collaborating, sharing resources and supporting each other as we helped our respective schools navigate these challenging situations. A group of us has also continued our education and leadership formation as doctoral students in the Catholic Educational Leadership program at the University of San Francisco, where our research interests and commitment to this work are fortified.

A few months ago, **America** published an article by Christopher J. Devron, S.J., of Regis High School in New York City that suggested Catholic social teaching's core values of "belonging, dignity and justice" could provide a valuable framework for doing D.E.I.B. work at Catholic and Jesuit schools. Father Devron's article raised some important and thought-provoking questions. Our goal in this article is to respond to those questions, but also to affirm and empower the current work in our spaces as D.E.I.B. practitioners at Jesuit schools. As we considered the best ways of engaging a culture of encounter in this article, we recognized that there is strength in collaboration.

As active D.E.I.B. practitioners, we feel a call to con-

vey to our schools and communities—and to Catholics on a global scale—how this work thrives in Catholic communities. We contend that D.E.I.B. is an integral part of the mission and identity of Catholic secondary education. Catholic social teaching reminds us of the importance of centering the "dignity of the human person," which can be interpreted as a call for *compassion*. Pope Francis describes compassion as "the kind of regard needed when we find ourselves in front of a poor person, an outcast, or a sinner." As D.E.I.B. practitioners, we approach our work as a call to compassion, love and deep care for our students, parents and colleagues. For many of us, it is our vocation.

## D.E.I.B. and Catholic Values

At the heart of D.E.I.B. work are themes found in the stories of the Gospels. In Lk 15:1-7, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep as a reminder of the preferential option for those in our communities who feel isolated or ostracized and who seek inclusion and belonging. Mission and identity are core components of any faith-based institution, but in Catholic, Jesuit schools, they are the keystones that connect all aspects of campus life.

These institutions all consider and incorporate the tenets of Catholic social teaching, the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, and biblical teachings (1 Cor 12:12-26) in order to bring those aspects to life, and the work of D.E.I.B. is no different. Without this foundation, our role as Catholic educators falls flat. As practitioners, we find that this grounding becomes the nucleus of how we see, hear and value our students, live out our mission, and deepen our calling as Catholic educators.

Though the concepts were expressed differently in many cases, Catholic schools in the United States were founded with an inclusion and equity mindset—one designed to meet the social, linguistic and cultural needs of



The “rites of passage ceremony” at Brophy College Preparatory honors graduating senior members of the Black Student Union.

Catholic European immigrants from Germany, Italy, Ireland or Poland. Amid a prevailing anti-Catholic sentiment across the country, Catholic schools not only served the needs of these communities but also became a safe haven for marginalized populations. Thus, it can be said that Catholic education pioneered culturally responsive pedagogy before the term existed.

Starting in the 20th century, Jesuit college preparatory institutions have primarily served students who are male, white and from high socioeconomic backgrounds. Still, motivated by shifts in local and national demographics, they have widened the definition of diversity and equity to address the signs of the times. As their students, faculty, staff and administrations have become more diverse, so too has the commitment to increasing diversity, equity and belonging.

Many years ago in the Woodstock Letters, Francis K. Drolet, S.J., tasked to respond to current events and how they connected to the Society of Jesus, reported the statistics of Black youth in Jesuit secondary schools for the 1946-47 school year. At the time, there were 26 Jesuit high schools in the United States, serving a total of 23,494 students; only 20 of these students were Black.

Black students continue to be underrepresented at

most Jesuit high schools in North America. For example, Black students make up just 5 percent of those educated in traditional Jesuit schools on the West Coast. Of the 11,652 students enrolled for the 2022-23 school year in the 11 traditional high schools in the Jesuits USA West Province, 482 were Black. Compared with other traditionally underrepresented demographic groups, Black students remain one of the smallest communities at these schools.

### A Call to Diversify

Amid the civil rights movement and in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, the Jesuit superior general, Pedro Arrupe, advocated for the diversification of Jesuit schools in the late 1960s. This diversification entailed addressing the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic representations to ensure that schools would not become isolated spaces designed for the elite. A number of schools created outreach programs to reach marginalized populations, increased tuition assistance funds to allow for greater access, and charged adults on campus with accompanying students from underrepresented backgrounds to help them navigate predominantly white spaces.

Other efforts that later grew out of that call to serve a larger and more diverse population included the estab-



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lishment of Cristo Rey high schools and of Nativity schools, whose objective is to provide Catholic education to underserved students from grades six through 12. Of the 62 Jesuit high schools in the United States, 48 are traditional models and 14 are Cristo Rey schools, a model that includes a work component and exclusively serves families with limited financial resources. Almost 99 percent of Cristo Rey students come from Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) populations.

The call to radical kinship in Jesuit education is deeply intertwined with its mission, and the work of D.E.I.B. has become a part of the effort to remain true to this identity. When considering the many ways in which Catholic schools can assist our students and families, one may ask, “Why D.E.I.B.?” Although in our American political climate there are some who suggest divisiveness is a common product of D.E.I.B. work, the ever-evolving nature of this program in Catholic schools demonstrates how it *builds community* and helps to foster belonging.

Tarik Roberts, a parent of a Black freshman at a traditional Jesuit high school, says this about the intentionality of equity and inclusion initiatives at school: “The benefit and comfort my son receives from being surrounded by a

population that looks like his city is immediate and obvious. It allows him to focus on the task at hand, the character of his classmates, and relieves the anxiety that comes with real or perceived isolation.”

Mr. Roberts describes the importance of representation on campus, which ideally should mirror that of the surrounding city, a common practice of several Jesuit high schools. Students seeing themselves reflected among their peers and educators at school leads the way for true belonging and engagement among Bipoc students; it can also foster greater connections between Bipoc faculty and staff.

### A Culture of Encounter

In October 2023, the Jesuit Schools Network of North America published its first-ever framework on the work of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in Catholic, Jesuit schools: “What Great Love! An Ignatian Framework for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.” It mentions the importance of approaching D.E.I.B. as a *culture of encounter*: “The people we encounter each day are diverse windows through which the living God enters our lives. With open hands we help, with open minds we listen, with open hearts we welcome.”



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This is a testament to our approach to D.E.I.B. work. Such work involves seeing God in all things, finding love in it all and placing that love into action. As children of God, we are called to walk humbly in God's path, creating space for truth, testimony and accompaniment, as the Holy Spirit graces us with the gift and ability to speak (Acts 2:4). The work of D.E.I.B. also calls us in this way, but encourages us to bear witness, act as companions, and be active participants in the lives of our students and each other. This creates a powerful way to promote a conversion of heart, where the minds and spirits of all constituents may reflect and heal with courage.

William Muller, S.J., is the vice president for mission and identity at Brophy College Preparatory in Phoenix and a former principal and president of Jesuit high schools. He is also the former executive director of the Jesuit Schools Network in Washington, D.C. "Implicit and explicit D.E.I.B. work challenges all community members to engage equitably and authentically in the life of the school," he told **America**. "Everyone—students and adults—is called to be companions in a mission of reconciliation and justice."

This affirmation sets a clear path for the work of D.E.I.B. to happen at our schools—while celebrating what is already happening on Jesuit school campuses across the country.

### Why Is This Important Today?

Since 2023, 23 states have introduced 85 bills to limit D.E.I.B. efforts on college campuses. These bills seek to disallow D.E.I. offices and staff; ban mandatory D.E.I. training; forbid diversity statements for hiring or promotions; and prevent colleges from considering race, sex, ethnicity or national origin in hiring or admissions. While this impact is primarily on higher education, the bills indicate that there could be further implications for our secondary educational institutions in the years to come.

Given the legislative landscape, it is critical to clearly articulate how Catholicity enhances the work of D.E.I.B. and how these initiatives are actualized on our campuses. In Jesuit secondary schools, D.E.I.B. initiatives often focus on student formation, faculty professional development, family support and formation for members of the board of trustees and the board of regents.

The outcome of a focus of D.E.I.B. on accompanying and empowering students who are part of underserved communities can include, but are not limited to: affinity clubs and celebrations, tuition assistance, support for first-generation college-bound students, summer opportunities focused on belonging, and restorative justice practices.

For D.E.I.B. practitioners in Catholic, Jesuit spaces, it is well understood that Catholic social teaching *does* provide a framework for anti-racism initiatives in our schools.

D.E.I.B. work is particularly rooted in three core precepts of Catholic social teaching: the dignity of the human person, the rights and responsibilities of every individual, and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. Catholic social teaching also enriches D.E.I.B. initiatives and provides us all with a central theoretical framework to form and inform the work of D.E.I.B. To do anything less would be ineffective and detrimental to our commitment as Catholic educators.

Grounded in our Catholicity, we are called to listen to the current needs of our students, understand the signs of the times, and adjust our culture to cultivate a community of companionship that resembles the Kingdom of God. One of our recently graduated Jesuit high school students described in an email to us how the Jesuit charism of the *magis* is connected to D.E.I.B. efforts:

During my time in Jesuit education, I have learned and embraced the concept of *magis*. This constant search to understand, love, and serve more fully, is directly aligned with our school's D.E.I.B. office. Participating in conversations of critical thinking and learning from the voices of historically marginalized people is an essential component of being a "man/woman for and with others"—someone willing to sit with their neighbor and learn how they can love them more deeply.

It is clear that this student sees the deep relationship between the work of anti-racism, service and justice, faith formation, and D.E.I.B., which creates a strong relationship with the mission and identity of Catholic, Jesuit schools. D.E.I.B. offices are not stand-alone initiatives but are thoughtfully woven together with other mission-critical works in Jesuit secondary schools.

Although no institution has yet to achieve perfect equity and inclusion, we believe firmly that we as Catholic, Jesuit educators and D.E.I.B. practitioners are called to the *magis*, the more and deeper, continuing to imagine a society where all students feel that they authentically belong.

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Deena A. Sellers is the director of equity and inclusion at Brophy College Preparatory in Phoenix, Ariz.



## A Bronx Bluesman and ‘Ferocious Catholic’

By Angela Alaimo O’Donnell


Catholic that I am, I must begin by confessing: I was more than a little bit starstruck.

As a child growing up in northeastern Pennsylvania, about 100 miles from New York City, sitting on the floor of my family’s living room and listening to the records my older brothers and sisters would play on the big Magnavox stereo—records like “The Wanderer,” “Tell Me Why,” “Teenager in Love,” “Runaround Sue” and, later, the record that broke all of our hearts in that heartbreaking year of 1968, “Abraham, Martin and John”—I never imagined I would share a stage with the singer-songwriter who performed those songs.

But this is exactly what happened at Fordham University recently, when the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies hosted the legendary Dion DiMucci. I introduced him to the sold-out audience, who were eager to hear an evening of storytelling, conversation and music.

The rock star who has gone by the singular name of Dion for the past 65 years had loomed larger than life for my siblings and me, as did so many of the great music idols of that era—Elvis Presley, Sam Cooke, Roy Orbison, Chubby Checker and Buddy Holly, to name a few. He was an artist who made music that expressed the angst and the energy, the agony and the ecstasy of being a young person in America during a time of enormous social upheaval and change.

Dion’s music and that of his contemporaries shaped the experience and imaginations of a whole generation of young people, in much the same way that current artists like Taylor Swift have shaped the current generation of young listeners. Dion not only gave us great tunes that told our stories; he lent a voice to the voiceless, particularly in a pre-internet, pre-social-media era. Dion’s songs acknowledged young people, and the seriousness and the challenges of growing up in America. His music made young people



In 1960, Dion DiMucci, center, recorded several hit songs with Dion and the Belmonts.

feel *seen* and gave us a kind of agency we did not have before.

Fast-forward a few decades and I find myself with a much fuller and richer sense of who Dion DiMucci is, both as an artist and as a person, thanks in part to his terrific memoir, *Dion: The Wanderer Talks Truth* (2011). I discovered this book through a mutual friend, the writer Mike Aquilina, who collaborated with Dion on the writing of the memoir and also co-writes songs with him. I knew that Dion was a gifted musician and songwriter, a great artist who continues to create and record music even now, at the age of 85. What I hadn't known was that he is a devout Catholic, having returned to the faith of his childhood in midlife in a deliberate and serious way.

For someone like me, whose interest as a scholar, professor and writer focuses on the myriad ways in which Catholicism is present in American arts and culture, this was good news I had to follow up on. Thus began a relationship with Dion that culminated in his return to his old neighborhood (the Belmont section of the Bronx, still known as Little Italy) and to Fordham University, an institution he has had a lifelong relationship with, though not of any conventional kind.

### Dion's History

In addition to reading his memoir, I also learned much about Dion from a number of long phone conversations over the course of about 15 months. (Dion prefers to communicate via actual, real-time conversation rather than the less personal avenues of email and texting.)

Proud of his roots, Dion acknowledges that being born in the Bronx was a gift. At the time, the borough already had a history as a hotbed of musical invention and innovation. The Big Band sound, Afro-Caribbean music, jazz and R&B music all flourished in the Bronx during the first half of the 20th century. In addition to these environmental influences, Dion's grandfather would take him to opera performances, where he heard such classics as "La Traviata," "La Bohème" and "Turandot." He tells stories of his 7-year-old self standing on a chair at family gatherings to sing the heartbreaking aria "Nessun Dorma" to a captive audience of adult listeners.

Dion began adding to that rich musical history at the

age of 10, when he first heard Hank Williams on the radio and shortly thereafter received his first guitar from his parents. Despite growing up in New York amid all of this musical variety, listening to the radio gave him access to artists and kinds of music he had never heard before. It opened up a new world for him and gave to the young Dion, in his own words, "a first taste of transcendence and a hint of salvation."

Dion would pursue his passion for music, forming the group Dion & the Belmonts in 1958, thereby putting a Bronx stamp on the music he would contribute to American culture. Dion found success early, perfecting the doo-wop sound that American audiences loved. In the course of his long career, he would branch out into many musical genres, including classic rock 'n' roll, gospel, folk music and, perhaps most compellingly, the blues—a genre he describes as "the naked cry of the human heart longing to be in union with God." He would travel, perform and collaborate with many of the greatest musicians of his era.

In fact, this whirlwind of collaboration nearly cost him his life. On Feb. 3, 1959, a day immortalized by Don McLean in his 1971 classic "American Pie" as "the day the music died," Dion was supposed to board the single-engine plane that would tragically crash, killing all on board, including Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper. As Dion tells the story, he chose to ride on the tour bus with the rest of the band to avoid paying \$36 for his plane seat, the exact amount that his parents struggled and saved to pay for the monthly rent on their Bronx apartment. It has sometimes been said by friends of Dion that he has had nine lives. This was one of several brushes with death.

Shortly after making his mark on American music, barely out of his teens, Dion moved himself and his family out of the Bronx, first to suburbs and eventually to Florida, where he has lived ever since. His recent return to the Bronx constitutes a genuine homecoming—to his neighborhood and to his borough, but also to Fordham University.

One of the many fascinating things I learned in the course of our conversations is that Dion was actually born on the Fordham campus. The eastern edge of campus where the parking garage is currently located used to be the site of the Fordham Hospital, a public medical institution that offered free services to the people of the Bronx. This is the place, a stone's throw from great Bronx institutions such as the Bronx Zoo and the New York City Botanical Gardens, where Dion came into the world on July 18, 1939.

He would live for the first two decades of his life just a



# Dion's music shaped the experience and imaginations of a whole generation of young people.

few blocks from the university, a campus surrounded by a forbidding wrought-iron gate that loomed in his imagination as a place that was august, mysterious and inaccessible to working-class people of the Bronx like himself—many of whom did not complete high school, let alone aspire to attend college. Dion's fame and accomplishments as an artist would eventually bring him back to the campus where he was born. In 2013, he received an honorary degree from the university he felt shut out of for so many years.

## Dion's Catholic Imagination

Dion's Catholicism has been another constant in his life. He grew up Catholic, as did most of the people in Belmont. Though he was not particularly observant as a young man, his life was permeated by the presence of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church on 187th Street, originally founded as a mission church in 1907 to serve the growing Italian-American immigrant community. (The church now serves the burgeoning community of Spanish-speaking immigrants from South and Central America.)

Dion tells stories of the charismatic pastor of Sicilian origins, Monsignor Pernicone, who would challenge the young Dion when he ran into him strolling by the church, posing philosophical and theological questions about virtue, prudence and St. Thomas Aquinas. Dion admits he had no answers to these questions at the time. He was busy pursuing a life of music, pleasure and survival on the gritty streets of the Bronx. But they provoked him into thought. This is, of course, what Catholicism does best: invite human beings into contemplation of eternal questions. These are the questions he would come back to as an older, wiser man.

After years of success—which were also challenging years wherein Dion, like so many artists and musicians, dealt with the dark side of fame, particularly the twin curses of alcohol and drug addiction—he would set out on his own search for answers. Dion credits his wife of 61 years, Susan Butterfield, whom he met at the Bronx high school

they both attended, with saving his life. Susan essentially told him she could not stay with him and watch him destroy himself. Terrified by the prospect of the loss of the love of his life, Dion sought help through 12-step programs. As he notes, those programs have a strong affinity with St. Ignatius of Loyola's program for discernment, which enables people to surrender their will to God's.

Thus began the journey to recovery that would lead him to rediscover and embrace his faith. In his memoir, he states this eloquently: "I am a ferocious Catholic who loves the Church and its teaching." This love of Catholicism manifests itself in his music, as well as in his life.

For example, Dion wrote a blues song about St. Jerome, called "The Thunderer." He was inspired after seeing a statue of St. Jerome in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, learning about Jerome's mighty voice and contributions to Christianity as a church father and translator of the Bible, and reading a marvelous poem about St. Jerome written by the Catholic poet Phyllis McGinley. The song sets McGinley's verses to music—and features verses written by Dion, as well. It is a powerful tribute to one of Dion's hero saints.

Another song that reflects his faith is "Angel in the Alleyways," a piece Dion recently recorded with Patti Scialfa and Bruce Springsteen (another Catholic American music legend) that attests to the presence of the divine in the least likely of places. This is a theological vision Dion shares with many a Catholic artist, including St. Ignatius Loyola, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Flannery O'Connor. In Dion's work, we see the Catholic imagination at work.

## Dion's Legacy

Most readers who grew up listening to Dion are aware of his extraordinary accomplishments, but it is worth highlighting just a few of them for those who might be less familiar with his work.

Dion has been making music for over six decades, producing over 40 albums in a wide variety of genres. He has recorded many million-seller hits and has sold 28 million albums worldwide. Dion has been nominated multiple times for Grammy Awards, including a nomination for his gospel album "I Put Away My Idols" and for his blues album "Bronx in Blue." In 1989, he was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Bob Dylan particularly honors Dion's contributions to the blues, dubbing him "a bluesman from another Delta." Only two American musicians are featured on the ground-breaking, pop-psychedelic cover of the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" album: Dion and Dylan, acknowledging the influence two of America's greatest voices had on the Beatles' music and the British Invasion of the 1960s.



The author with Dion DiMucci at Fordham University on April 22, 2024

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

Bruce Springsteen once noted that Dion is remarkable in that he continues to produce new music, decade after decade, rather than simply falling back on the music that he produced when he was young. When asked why he continues to create new songs, Dion links his vocation as an artist with his vocation as a Catholic:

You don't have to go through the trouble of making new music—because it is a lot of trouble. You can just show up and sing the old hits, and you'll get what you want out of them. But it's different if you think your art is not for *you*. If you believe your art glorifies *God*, you're going to keep doing it as long as you can still breathe. When I make music, I feel like I'm crazy King David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant, singing a new song just because I'm still newly in love, or belting out the blues as a psalm of lament. As long as I can still breathe, I hope to be newly in love with the God who made me. He always gives me something to sing about.

In the coming months, a new musical will be opening on Broadway about Dion's life, titled "The Wanderer." A tale of transformation and redemption, the play tells his story and also demonstrates the ways in which music and the arts can save a person's soul. In addition, the newly founded Bruce Springsteen Archives & Center for American Music, at Monmouth University in New Jersey, recent-

ly honored four musically, culturally and politically significant artists—John Mellencamp, Jackson Browne, Mavis Staples and Dion.

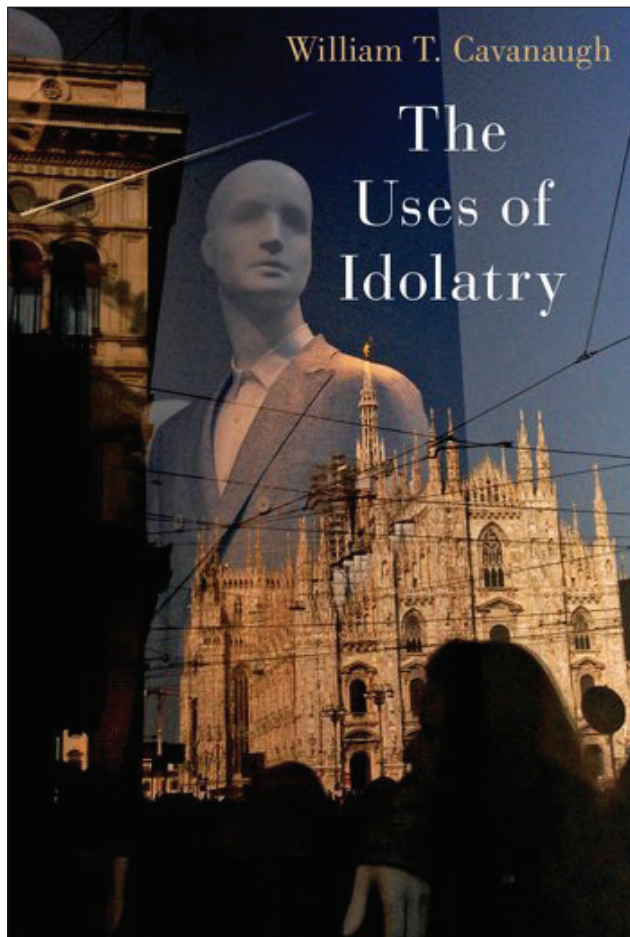
These four iconic artists were celebrated because, according to Springsteen, they "have contributed mightily to the American music canon and have demonstrated how the power of song can act as an agent for positive change in our country."

Dion DiMucci is an American artist whose music is relevant to each and all of the eras in which he has lived. One can only hope that the adage about his having nine lives proves true. If so, we can enjoy the inimitable voice of this Bronx bluesman and American Catholic troubadour well into his ninth decade and beyond.

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## TEARING DOWN THE IDOLS



Oxford University Press / 504p \$35

How ought we describe our times? Which words can help us imagine the shape of our social world? Under what terms ought we to think about the dilemmas of our age?

Despite their depth and importance, answers to questions like these are more or less a dime a dozen. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, for example, Francis Fukuyama informed us that we were living at the End of History. It was Jean Francois Lyotard's fabled "Report on Knowledge" through which a generation of college students learned that theirs was a Post-Modern Condition. In an attempt to capture the overwhelming impact made by human beings on the biodiversity of the planet, ecologists have begun describing our age as the Anthropocene. Even Pope Francis, in his efforts to reform the Vatican curia and resist theological nostalgia, has insisted that we are living through not "an era of change, but a change of era."

Despite this proliferation of names, though, perhaps the most common title for our times is secular. Ours is, so the story goes, a secular age. In its usual telling, it goes

something like this: Once upon a time we were young and naïve and religious. The world was enchanted, back then, and the sacred was near at hand. But now, for good or ill—because the story can be told with glee or lament in the voice—we live in a universe, not a cosmos; we believe not in a deity but in ourselves. Now we inhabit an immanent frame and have no need for the hypothesis of God.

Whether told in one tone or another, this is a familiar story, and we know where we fit in it. Are we on the side of tradition or of progress, of immanence or transcendence? Are we for disenchantment or re-enchantment? Whichever part we play in this theater of argument, it seems, the positions come premade; the script is already written, all we have to do is act it out.

The aim of political theologian William T. Cavanaugh's new book is to shatter this stained-glass drama by introducing what he takes to be a better term for describing our age: idolatrous. In *The Uses of Idolatry*, he argues that we ought to think of ourselves not as disenchanting but as mis-enchanting, and in so doing he not only critiques the old secularization narrative, but begins to write us a new story through which we might better understand ourselves and our times.

Both of these tasks, the one critical and the other constructive, are necessary for his project. The former is necessary because, he thinks, efforts to describe our age as secular or disenchanting misunderstand what has changed in our modern times. "What has declined in the modern West is not belief in transcendence," Cavanaugh contends. "What has declined is belief in God." What is different is that the sacred is no longer "confined to gods but applies to all sorts of realities commonly labeled 'political' or 'economic.'" The holy has not fled through the wardrobe into Narnia, in other words; it has fragmented. And this means that the problem with secularization stories is that worship remains as prevalent as ever—it's just that what (or who) is being worshiped has changed.

In some ways, this line of critique is nothing new for Cavanaugh. In his first book, 1998's *Torture and Eucharist*, he mined the case of the Catholic Church under the Pinochet regime to show that these two titular categories ought to be understood not simply as conflicting ideas but competitive ritual dramas. That is, Cavanaugh read torture as neither an isolated horror nor a sad necessity of *realpolitik* but as the atomizing "liturgy" of Chilean politics under the rule of the dictator.

Cavanaugh's critique was that the Catholic Church struggled to resist this atomizing liturgy because it had vacated a thick sense of its own formative liturgy: the Eu-



charist. In Cavanaugh's thinking, the Eucharistic liturgy consistently appears not as a mechanism for personal salvation, but as an opposing ritual drama. It is a corporate practice that seeks to build up a rival social body—the body of Christ—possessed of a Eucharistic political imagination.

Cavanaugh's 2009 book, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, stands closest to *The Uses of Idolatry*. Both books are aimed at the academy. In substance, they are linked in that both seek to intervene in longstanding debates in theology, political theory and the sociology of religion. In both books, that is, Cavanaugh seeks to undermine the foundational binaries through which we narrate our lives. In *Myth*, this is the binary between religion and politics.

Contrary to the standard story, Cavanaugh argues that it was not in fact the case that “the holy was separated from politics for the sake of peace; in reality, the emerging state appropriated the holy to become itself a new kind of religion.” Crucially, it was through this “migration” of the holy from the church to the state that we came to understand religion—or “good” religion, at least—as we do today: a private, inner and voluntary thing that does not interfere with political life. What *Myth* demonstrates is that it is precisely when these things we call religions resist such relegation to the private sphere that they come to be seen as dangerous and threatening.

For Cavanaugh, the upshot of this is not that “religion” is vindicated while the state is castigated but that “what counts as religious or secular in any given context is a function of different configurations of power.” From his early work onward, in other words, Cavanaugh has sought to challenge the terms through which we modern persons understand ourselves so as to help us cultivate new imaginations, imaginations formed not by the ritual dramas of the economy or the state but of the church.

The criticism of the disenchantment narrative that Cavanaugh mounts in *The Uses of Idolatry* has similar ambitions. He makes his case in two carefully argued chapters, the first on Max Weber, the great theorist of disenchantment, and the second on Charles Taylor, whose monumental *A Secular Age* shapes so much contemporary discourse on these issues. Despite the depth of insight demonstrated by both thinkers, Cavanaugh's close reading seeks to reveal inconsistencies in their considerations of just what disenchantment is and how a disenchanted context shapes human experience.

If what ails us is best described as disenchantment, in other words, then the proper remedy is likely to look a lot like re-enchantment. But if the problem is not disenchantment but *misenchantment*, “not atheism but idolatry,” as

he writes, then constructing a stable response needs to involve an understanding of *what* is enchanting us and *how* it is doing so. It ought to involve the concept of idolatry.

Cavanaugh constructs this concept over the following three chapters by mining in turn the Scriptures, the theology of St. Augustine and the thought of the French phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion. From the Scriptures he shows that idolatry is not inevitable. We are not condemned to worship the work of our hands; we are instead invited to worship One who does not drain life but gives, expands and fulfills it. Further, in Cavanaugh's hands the Scriptures reveal that idolatry is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon but a matter of degree. We are all partial idolaters.

For Cavanaugh, this is true for both systemic and personal reasons—because we inevitably participate in idolatrous systems and because the “boundary between idolatry and right worship tends to run right through the human heart.” Although this means that idolatry is an ever-present danger, it does not mean that we ought to distance ourselves from creation as a threat to our purity or innocence. Instead, through his reading of Augustine, Cavanaugh shows that our relationship with creation can be lived either idolatrously or iconically—the material world can be lived as a gift, a “window to the divine.”

And it is from Marion, finally, that we learn that idols are made when we allow the innate and infinite desires of our restless hearts to settle on something less than God. Idols, then, offer deceptive responses to real yearnings; they cut our infinite desires down to the scale of the finite.

Assembling the insights of such admittedly strange bedfellows allows Cavanaugh to define idolatry as the “human creation of systems that react back upon us and come to dominate us as false gods.” False gods like an inescapable economy that always demands growth, eliminates traditional ways of life, hides sweatshop labor at the far side of the earth and transforms even those who receive its “blessings” into anxious, alienated, competitive consumers. Or false gods like the nation-state, for which so many are not only willing to die but to kill.

What this carefully constructed concept affords Cavanaugh is the opportunity to compare things we have been tricked into thinking are incomparable. “What is clear, to my mind, is that nationalism and Christianity (and Judaism, Islam, etc.) do not belong in essentially separate categories—one secular, the other religious—and that they do in fact compete for the primary loyalty of Christians.” The building of this concept of idolatry, in other words, helps fill in the details of a narrative he has been constructing for the entirety of his career.

It also gives him, in the final chapter of the book, a sketch of what his positive proposal needs to resist. Because if it is not disenchantment but idolatry that we must beware of, then it is not re-enchantment but sacramentality that will provide the remedy. Countering idolatry, then, means engaging in “material practices that embody a sacramental relationship between humans and created things.” Just as he argued in *Torture and Eucharist*, it is only by engaging in counter-disciplinary ritual dramas—shared, concrete practices like Confession and the Eucharist—that our imaginations, bodies and lives can be freed from the seductions of idolatry and “conformed to the sacrament of God’s presence in the world.”

In Cavanaugh’s hands, idolatry turns out to be an essential theological concept, and *The Uses of Idolatry* an important book for a post-Christendom church, like ours, that is frantically searching for adequate categories of self-understanding. Although there is much that theological scholarship cannot accomplish, one thing theologians can do is, as Pope Francis has recently put it, is serve as “the scouting party sent by Joshua to explore the land of Canaan,” and help us to find “right paths towards the inculturation of the faith.” With *The Uses of Idolatry*, Cavanaugh scouts further down this theological path, offering us in so doing a new frame through which we can see the shape of our social world, new words for telling the tale of our times.

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## WHEN IN ROME

Mary Ann Glendon’s new memoir, *In the Courts of Three Popes*, opens with a revelatory scene. The author is watching an American financier be sworn to the Vatican’s highest class of secrecy, the pontifical secret. “As I watched the time-honored ritual,...I could not help but reflect that no one had ever thought to put me under pontifical secrecy,” Glendon writes, surmising that at some point in her many decades of service to various Vatican bodies, “everyone must have assumed that had been done somewhere along the line.”

Laying out what will become a central theme of the book, she adds, “The oversight is revealing of the position of women in a court with many lords and few ladies.”

Glendon pulls few punches when describing her experiences of sexism in the Vatican, though readers will never know what she chose not to include. Her treatment as a “lady” by the “lords” begins on her first assignment, leading a Holy See delegation to a United Nations summit on women. One diplomat in the delegation, Archbishop Renato Martino, makes a point of telling Glendon at their first meeting that his friends think it is “not right that a woman should be the boss of an archbishop.” He later conveniently “forgets” to pass along an invitation to dinner with the pope and the rest of the delegation. Years later, in a public speech, the archbishop claims it had been his idea for her to be the first woman to lead a Holy See delegation.

“The incident was disappointing,” Glendon writes, “not only because I would have liked to have been there, but because I still had a rather romanticized view of the priesthood.” By the time she was writing *In the Courts of Three Popes*, that view had clearly disappeared, as it does for many who deal regularly with the Vatican.

Most readers familiar with Glendon’s name will associate her with her time as ambassador to the Holy See during the George W. Bush administration—a position that she held for just over a year—but her experience with the Vatican includes stints as a founding member and then president of the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences, an auditor to the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for America (held in 1997), and a member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. She also served on the central committee for the Jubilee Year 2000 and on a five-person commission tasked by Pope Francis with assessing the Vatican Bank at the beginning of his papacy.

While the portion of this memoir on her ambassadorship provides an inside look into an alternately public and secretive job, it is the part on the Vatican Bank commission that I found most interesting and most frustrating. Glendon describes conducting months of interviews with Vatican Bank employees, laying out a map of power relationships, describing problems in the workplace culture, and making recommendations, only to have the body dissolved after it turned in its final report. When she was named to a new group that succeeded that commission, she realized her and her colleagues’ earlier report had not been read, and she spent the next several years attending meetings where the new commission proposed solutions that her previous commission had already considered and had “found wanting for reputational, legal, or financial reasons.”

The dysfunction and her disappointment are palpable. When she again raises one of the bank commission's original questions—whether the bank should be closed—readers will be hard-pressed to come up with a reason it shouldn't.

Glendon's journey from Vatican outsider to insider learning the ropes provides a captivating frame for her examination of the Vatican's intertwined grandeur and dysfunction. Readers will appreciate her sharp humor and anecdotes that humanize some of the most famous figures in the Catholic world—like the time she and her daughter were invited to a private dinner with St. John Paul II, only to discover that the pope's culinary preferences could best be described as spartan. Upon leaving the apostolic palace, Glendon and her daughter look at one another, then walk wordlessly to a restaurant on the Borgo Pio for a second dinner.

Throughout the book, though, it is unclear whose interests Glendon understands herself as serving. She underscores the ways in which the Bush administration's goals were simpatico with the Holy See's priorities in the section on her ambassadorship and speaks about the public diplomacy initiatives she undertook "to promote the interests and values of the United States." But the only time there seems to be any tension between her religious and civic responsibilities is at the end of her tenure as ambassador, when Barack Obama had already been elected president. She is asked to speak at a Christmas event at the U.S. embassy in Rome and laments that out of the three ambassadors present, she was the only person to speak about the religious significance of the holiday.

Later, writing about a committee she was asked in 2010 to assemble "to oversee litigation against the Holy See in the U.S. courts," Glendon writes glowingly about the lawyer Jeffrey Lena and his team, who had "prevailed in every single case, some involving millions of dollars, that had been brought against the Holy See and the Vatican Bank in the U.S. courts," characterizing their victories as "brilliant." Some of those cases dealt with sexual abuse. Glendon and Lena saw themselves as protecting the Holy See's sovereign immunity, but if she had any misgivings about taking the Holy See's side in abuse cases, Glendon has left them out of this book.

In her various roles as an ambassador, a lawyer, a mother and a Catholic, Glendon certainly would have had to navigate some difficult personal questions about how these identities intersect in a Vatican setting. However, she maintains a cool distance from personal revelations throughout much of the book. One surprising example: She mentions her husband's death in the middle of a paragraph

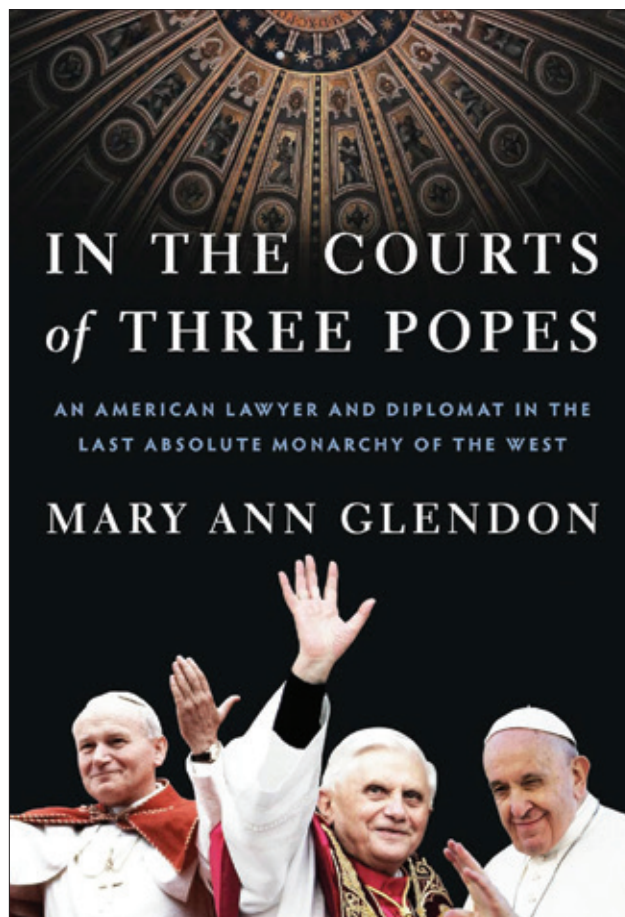


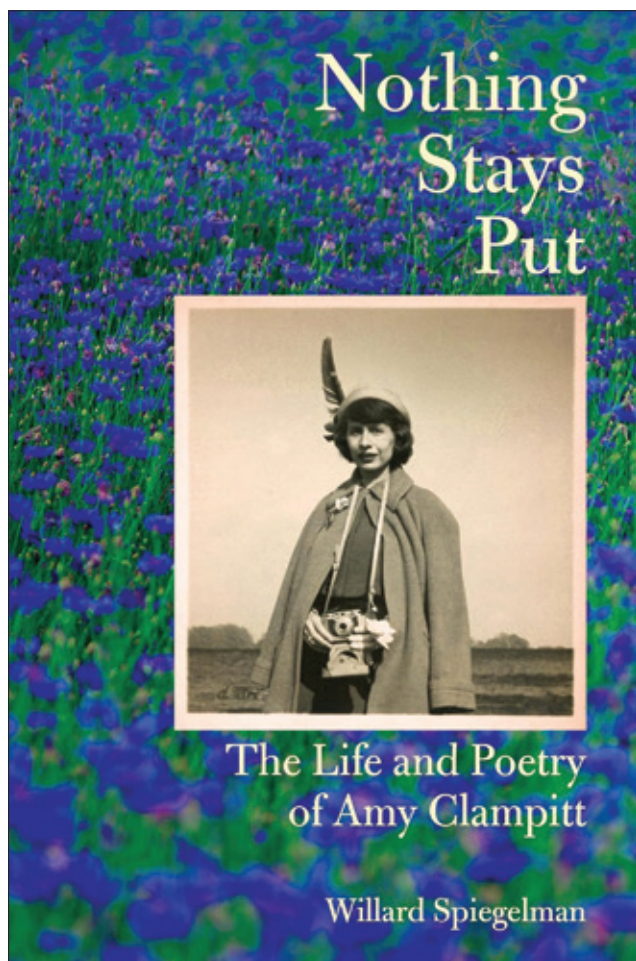
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that starts with recollections of her teaching at Harvard University and on the bank commission; two paragraphs later, she is back to business.

It is a disappointing lacuna, especially taking into account how much about her early life Glendon reveals in the introduction. Over the course of the book, she evolves from a passionate civil rights advocate raised Catholic in a social-justice-focused congregationalist community to a professor and diplomat with a reputation for political conservatism, even refusing the University of Notre Dame's Laetare Medal in 2009 when the university decided to give an honorary degree to Barack Obama at the same event.

Glendon writes briefly about her transition from political liberal to "independent," based on her concerns about abortion and a feminism that she perceived "harbored animosity to men, marriage, and motherhood." A look into how her understanding of herself and her church evolved over the many years following that transition and covering several papacies would, I think, have taken this memoir from being a good book to a great one.

Colleen Dulle is an associate editor at *America* and co-hosts the "Inside the Vatican" podcast.



Knopf / 432p \$35

Amy Clampitt, widely eulogized as a “late bloomer,” was 63 years old before she was recognized as a world-class poet. Rising to meteoric heights in the poetry world is by itself daunting, but when one considers her age and that most poets burn bright in their 20s and then steadily lose their fire, one is even more impressed. Willard Spiegelman’s probing biography, *Nothing Stays Put: The Life and Poetry of Amy Clampitt*, describes how she did it.

Examining Clampitt’s career, the influences behind her poetry and Amy herself—he calls her Amy—Spiegelman suggests Clampitt succeeded mostly because her work had a vitality and a spiritual component that other poets lacked. Her poetry teems with metaphors and buzzes with sound. It is nothing like the terse, imagistic poems that were popular in the latter part of the 20th century.

Much of the credit for Clampitt’s achievement belongs to the complex, exuberant poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., which inspired Clampitt’s luminous style. As Spiegelman describes it, she was first taken by the work of Hopkins at Grinnell College. His ornate imagery, sprung

rhythms and sense of the spiritual undergirding the physical had a major impact on her.

As Clampitt said in a *Paris Review* interview, her greatest debt was to Hopkins. She owed him her “delight in all things physical, the wallowing in sheer sound, [and] the extravagance of the possibilities of language.” In fact, Hopkins’s poem “As Kingfishers Catch Fire” served as the basis for “The Kingfisher,” the title poem of Clampitt’s first collection.

A professor of English at Southern Methodist University and a former editor of *Southwest Review*, Spiegelman previously edited *Love, Amy: The Selected Letters of Amy Clampitt*, whose positive reception led him to write this biography. He had met Clampitt on several occasions and published her work over the years, although he was initially taken aback by Clampitt’s poems because of their style.

Referencing Clampitt’s letters, essays, journals, poems, novels, one play and interviews, *Nothing Stays Put* includes reminiscences of family, friends, colleagues and professional associates. That last category includes well-known figures like Howard Moss, Clampitt’s editor at *The New Yorker*, the renowned literary critics Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler, and a longtime friend, the poet Mary Jo Salter, a retired professor at the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars.

Spiegelman focuses on Clampitt’s rise to literary fame and her years as a celebrity, but also covers Clampitt’s early life. He begins with her great-grandfather, who came to Iowa as an orphan and started farming, a vocation he passed on to his son and grandson. Both younger men graduated from college and had a penchant for reading and writing that Amy inherited—as she did their appreciation for nature. One of her first memories, Spiegelman notes, is of a patch of violets growing in the field.

The oldest of five siblings, Clampitt was raised in a family that valued simplicity in speech, dress and demeanor, and that attended Quaker religious services. She was a bookish child and enjoyed spending time in her grandfather’s library. She daydreamed about becoming a painter, although she had felt a connection to poetry from an early age.

After she graduated from college, Clampitt moved to New York to attend Columbia University but dropped out after several months. Living in Manhattan, she worked as a secretary at Oxford University Press, then later as a librarian for the Audubon Society and finally as an editor for E. P. Dutton. During these years, she also traveled to England and Europe.

Back home in the United States, she had several love interests before she found her longtime partner, Harold

Korn, whom she married a few months before she died. She also made frequent visits to the Cloisters, a part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City specializing in medieval European art and architecture, where she had an almost mystical experience that reignited her love of poetry with its connection to the divine.

Visiting the Cloisters during Holy Week, she was astonished by the medieval tapestries, especially in their rendering of flowers. As the regular Sunday program commenced with the *Kyrie*, the Greek prayer for mercy, the plaintive sound of its cry for help seemed to merge with the sunlight coming through a 13th-century window. She felt a profound sense of connection.

She referred to this awareness as a baptism not of water but of light. Many of her poems use the concept of a world flooded with light, referencing both the brilliance of sunlight and the religious connotation of the light of the world and the life-giving force of Jesus Christ.

After Clampitt became an Episcopalian, she joined St. Luke in the Fields, a High Anglican parish known for its “architectural beauty, gorgeous music, and political activism”—and for its pastor, the Rev. James H. Flye.

Flye, who had been a mentor to James Agee, impressed Clampitt. She dedicated her poem (which provided the title of this biography) “Nothing Stays Put” to his memory.

Clampitt also once considered entering the convent. During this time, she wrote and revised three novels. All were rejected as being short on conflict and unwieldy with adjectives. She also followed the monastic practice of *lectio divina*, meditating on Scripture “as a way to understand Christ.”

After Norman Morrison, a Quaker, immolated himself in an anti-war protest in 1965, she felt the deep call of her Quaker roots and joined the anti-Vietnam War movement, purposely carrying a banner that identified her as a poet. Gradually, she broke away from her church because she thought they did not take a strong stand against war.

Though she thought of herself as a novelist early on, Clampitt tended to put her most profound moments into poetry. This includes the Cloisters incident described above, which she referred to in “The Sun Underfoot Among the Sundews.” Published in *The New Yorker* in 1978, the poem launched her career and exemplifies her extravagant style. Even her final book, *The Silence Opens*, alludes to the Cloisters tapestry.

She was captivated by the poetry inherent in the moment. As she explained, “the sentences broke in a way that was not my usual style....” Then they began “to reach out for rhymes.... I didn’t have to look for them. They simply came.”

Clampitt eventually earned a place among the nation’s literary lions, and her poems appeared in prominent pub-

lications like *The Atlantic*, *The Paris Review* and *The New Yorker*. She received major awards for her work, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, a MacArthur Fellowship and several honorary doctorates, and was named writer-in-residence at prestigious colleges.

*Nothing Stays Put* ends with Clampitt’s death at 74 from ovarian cancer. In a bow to her love for nature, the poet William Logan sent rose petals “for the late bloomer” to be scattered over her remains.

Clampitt chose to have her ashes buried beside the birch tree growing in the backyard of her home. This was the tree she watched from the window beside her desk where she created the difficult, vibrant poems that fuel this cogent biography and give meaning to her life and legacy.

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Diane Scharper is a poet and critic. She teaches the *Memoir Seminar for the Osher Program at the Johns Hopkins University*.

## SWIFT WITNESS

By Jim Richards

A white-crowned sparrow  
plucks grubs from a deer skull.

From bone to nest, from nest  
to bone as morning blooms

with lilac light, the sparrow flies  
to feed her naked hatchlings.

In this way the dead doe  
(a winter kill)

by way of the mother’s beak  
shares her squirming thoughts

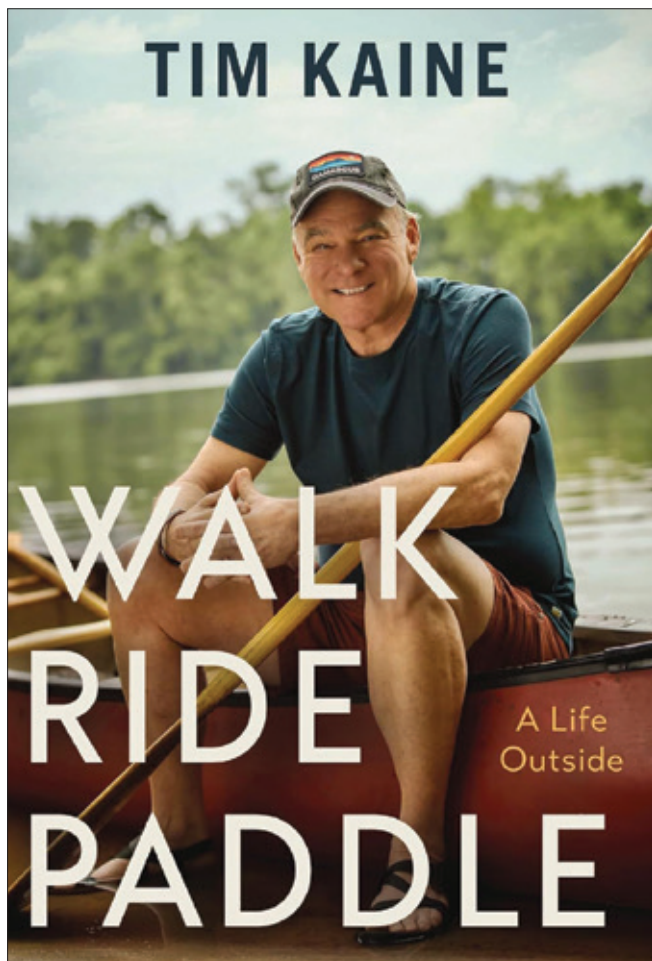
with the blind and flightless:  
*Take, eat my memory*

*of the woods. Swallow my swift  
witness of this earth. Carry*

*with your new wings this call:  
The forest floor receives us all.*

—  
Jim Richards’s work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Poetry Northwest* and *Prairie Schooner*, among other publications. His poetry collection, *Swift Witness*, is forthcoming in 2025. He lives in southeastern Idaho.

## SEARCHING FOR AMERICA



Harper Horizon / 384p \$30

As we suffer through another season of presidential politics, along comes a memoir from a man who once seemed like a fantasy candidate: a decent dad with strong values, good diction and keen intelligence. Senator Tim Kaine, who was on the ballot as Hillary Clinton's running mate in 2016, stands out as one of the most virtuous people ever to run on a national ticket, in the same class as Jimmy Carter, Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. A friendly neighbor with kindness and brains. In this season of dismay, Kaine reminds us what is possible in a big-ticket candidate.

In *Walk Ride Paddle: A Life Outside*, Kaine invites readers on a journey as he narrates his human-powered travels throughout Virginia, where he has served as senator, governor and mayor of Richmond.

Between 2019 and 2021, Kaine hiked 559 miles of the Appalachian Trail, cycled 321 miles along the crest of the Virginia Blue Ridge Mountains and canoed the James River from its headwaters in the Allegheny Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay.

Today, as it has always been, America is beautiful,

adorned with lakes and mountains and crossed by trails and rivers. If you want to find yourself (and your country), put a foot out the front door and keep going. No wonder the travel memoir is a great American genre, from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and William Least Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways* to more recent incarnations like Rinker Buck's *Life on the Mississippi* and Neil King's *American Ramble*.

Kaine needs this trip because he is middle-aged, "life is filled with pressure," and his vocation, politics, "seems more and more like an NHL game—point-scoring surrounded by a crowd that's ready to fight."

And, of course, there's the presidency, the Jan. 6 insurrection and now the *third* candidacy of Donald Trump. Kaine's vice-presidential run convinced him that he does not want to go higher in national politics. He wants to go deeper. "National politics is increasingly a branch of the entertainment industrial complex; a world that doesn't fit me," he writes. "How can I moor my future public service to something more meaningful?" So Kaine hops a train from Union Station in Washington, D.C., to Harpers Ferry, W.Va., to hike south on the Appalachian Trail.

Like any good traveloguer, Kaine tells us about the history of places he passes through, including the John Brown raid at Harpers Ferry in 1859. Brown, an abolitionist, tried to start a revolt among enslaved peoples by hijacking a U.S. government arsenal with 22 followers. They were defeated by U.S. Marines led by Robert E. Lee. Brown was captured and executed.

The Civil War, whose battlefields litter Virginia, is a constant theme throughout the book. That is welcome. History is interesting and important.

But history is also a little too safe.

What is missing from *Travels With Tim* is a hard confrontation with what ails America today. Trump did not win just because of strongman charisma and nightclub-level comic timing. He won because millions of people in the region Kaine is walking, biking and paddling through are grieving lost prosperity and saw in Trump a rebuke to elite people like Kaine. In 2016 and 2020 and 2024, these voters have felt maligned by trade deals, a tech revolution, low wages and anti-worker policies, and did not think Democrats had good enough answers. I was hoping for a book peopled by these characters, by Kaine's enemies as well as his friends. But that isn't the case.

The Catholic Church is an important part of Kaine's identity. He attended Rockhurst High School, a Jesuit school in Kansas City. He reverently quotes Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. ("The world is charged with the grandeur of God") and professes a love for Catholic social teaching.

After his first year at Harvard Law School, Kaine took a year off to volunteer with the Jesuits in Honduras as part of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. His dad had owned an ironworking shop when Kaine was growing up, and Kaine taught basic carpentry and ironwork to teenage boys in Honduras. That country, he notes, showed him Jesus. “I saw how poor Hondurans helped each other deal with adversity that seems unimaginable to me,” he writes. “Church provides a place to share burdens and joys, welcome life, and mourn death.”

But there is pain and suffering in America as bad as that in Honduras. The mystery of our existence is that the grandeur of God is suffused with so much heartache. America is beautiful, loving and funny, but it is also ugly, tortured and awful; and a serious writer, especially a Catholic, should play all the notes. Kaine does not always succeed here.

When traveling through small-town America, let us please name more specifically the current cruelties along with the charms: the corporations like Walmart and Amazon that don’t pay their workers enough to send their children to college; the hospitals and doctors that, like those colleges, abuse their monopolistic pricing power to price-gouge; the industries that still pollute rivers. All are as real as the soaring Blue Ridge Mountains and the spacious James River.

We should always, when possible, vote for reverence, curiosity and kindness, but political leaders should earn the power we give them by naming and dissecting our problems in accurate and painful detail. To paraphrase a line attributed to Karl Barth about preachers, if you’re going on a journey to discover the soul of America, carry a newspaper in one hand—and a cross in the other.

---

John W. Miller is a contributing writer at *America* and the author of *The Last Manager, a biography of Earl Weaver, coming out in March 2025*.

## ORIGINAL BODIES

By R/B Mertz

---

“You should be Women,  
and yet your beards forbid me to interpret  
that you are so.”

— Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Naked in the garden, I cut celebrities out of *People*,  
collected poems, histories, hid razors, prayed rosaries  
to hide what God had made of me: witch hazel, ace  
bandage, flannel shirt, haircut, television set, DVD.  
Western Civilization 1, 2 & the whole university  
system could not, Hollywood would not photograph us  
for two or three more decades, they cut away:  
the history of bodies like mine was torn out  
& swallowed down unnamable, untraceable throats.

People keep asking me if I’m on hormones & I say *as  
much as anyone*—I got my voice like this the old-  
fashioned way, with cigarettes, with fire/real traditional.  
You have to talk to men in a high register like dogs so  
I’ve stopped talking to men. They can still tell.  
It’s not that hard to see the reasons why we’re all so  
unlovable: my television friends can’t see me back, they  
look up just as someone cuts to commercial, see a flicker  
of me in the background shadowy corner of a circus tent.

Implicitly asked if I will shave for the wedding, I will not:  
my body is not a closet, it’s a testament, a scroll  
of psalms, a hand-written holy text, hand-and-god-made icon:  
all our bodies are the evidence that we’ve always been here  
*And I’m telling you, I’m not going*: I’m telling you you  
don’t have to listen to him just because he says he  
knows doesn’t mean he does but the truth is we are *not*  
leaving, we are not giving up this garden.

---

R/B Mertz has published work in *Guernica*, *Another Chicago Magazine* and elsewhere. They are the author of the memoir *Burning Butch* and the poetry collection *CU T* and teach writing at Sheridan College in Toronto, Canada.

## Ephphatha!

Last month's Mass readings held our attention with the discourse on the bread of life from the Gospel of John. There was a sense of comfort from hearing the proclamation "I am the bread of life" in different ways each week. September brings us into fall with five Sundays that bring us right back into the heart of Mark's Gospel.

A healing story of a deaf man is introduced on the second Sunday of the month. Jesus says, "Ephphatha!" (that is, "Be opened!"). "And immediately the man's ears were opened" (Mk 7:34-35). Mark translates the Aramaic word Jesus used into a Greek verb expressing a command in the passive voice: be opened. This can be used both literally and figuratively for the opening of ears, eyes and heart—three different ways to capture the sense that one is open-minded enough to understand an interpretation or explanation.

There is a lot of interpretation and explanation happening within the rest of September's readings. On the

first Sunday, for example, Jesus attempts to interpret the difference between moral and ritual purity as a means to bring genuine honor to God. In the last three Sundays of the month, Jesus begins to explain slowly his impending passion to his closest disciples. They in turn dismiss these important lessons because their minds are closed, focussed on their own vain concerns. When Jesus asks his closest ones what they are arguing about, the narrator reveals their narrowmindedness: "They remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest" (Mk 9:34).

Their silence speaks volumes. For disciples of Jesus, both then and now, the ruminations carried in the silence of the heart reveal whether one is truly open to receive Jesus' interpretations of the spiritual and moral life for today. May our intellect and heart respond to Jesus' command, "Ephphatha!"

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### TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), SEPT. 1, 2024

Moral hygiene and ritual etiquette as a means to an end

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### TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), SEPT. 8, 2024

Ephphatha as intellectual conversion

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### TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), SEPT. 15, 2024

Caesarea Philippi as the place of interpretation

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### TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), SEPT. 22, 2024

Rumination among the disciples: Who is greater?

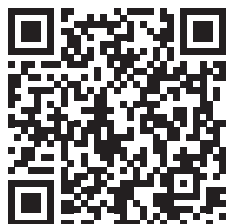
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### TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), SEPT. 29, 2024

The little ones at the center of the kingdom



Victor M. Cancino, S.J., lives on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana and is the pastor of St. Ignatius Mission. He received his Licentiate in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.



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# Turn Down the Heat

## Start by sitting down and speaking with each other

By Tim Busch



Politics isn't the only place where polarization is rampant and worsening by the day. The Catholic Church is increasingly divided, too. The growing chasm threatens to split the institution that calls itself the one true church. In the same way that Americans must re-discover how to disagree without being disagreeable, Catholics must relearn how to look beyond our differences.

The place to start, I think, is somewhere simple—by sitting down and speaking with one another.

Over the past year, my wife and I have convened four such gatherings at our Manhattan apartment, with more than 40 prominent Catholics from across the ideological and theological spectrum. Most of us do not otherwise interact. At best, we run into one another at Catholic events. At worst, we snipe at one another, not only in private but also in public, perhaps through speeches, aligned Catholic media outlets and social media.

On a superficial level, the guests reflect America's political divide. Words like *conservative* and *liberal* don't quite fit in a Catholic context, but we are often at odds over whether and how much the church should accommodate itself to modern culture, including whether core Catholic teachings should—or even can—be changed. Think of the differences between people like Sohrab Ahmari, the Catholic convert and journalist who warns against modern cultural excess, and James Martin, the Jesuit priest and *America* editor who has said Catholics can celebrate “Pride Month.”

To be clear, on many issues there

cannot be compromise. Irreconcilable understandings of right and wrong are at play. But the impossibility of compromise does not render conversation impossible. That is where we can move beyond caricatures, going from hating one another to better understanding one another's humanity and heart.

At our dinners, we do not start by stating our theological views. Rather, we begin with Mass and a rosary invoking the intercession of Our Lady. We then retire to the table, where we discuss our personal stories—how we came to the faith, how it has changed our lives, our favorite Bible verses and so on. The guests have movingly described their walk with Christ; many have been overcome by emotion. When we have broached the tough topics, we have maintained a spirit of mutual respect, not rancor. The focus is not on the issues themselves but on the relationships among those present. At the end of the meal, we take a group photo and share personal contact information, encouraging everyone to stay in touch.

Most attendees have continued the conversations, corresponding by email and phone, and planning one-on-one meetings. Such relationships can help repair the tears that threaten the church. For instance, before starting these dinners, I did not know much about Father Martin, except that I disagreed with him on many things. Now we talk on a regular basis, looking for ways to work together on issues where we align—from defending the unborn to advocating for immigrants—and he has suggested exporting our dinner

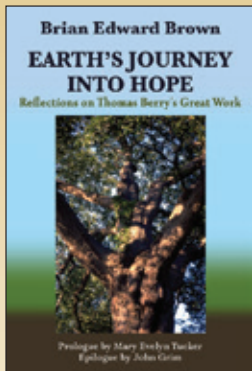
model to parishes nationwide. While it may not be feasible everywhere, there is a need to provide laypeople of all backgrounds and beliefs with more chances to interact. Similarly, the dinners introduced me to Father Ricky Manalo, a priest from the Paulist Fathers, which has set a four-year goal of reducing polarization. We're now partnering on this effort, both inside and outside the church.

Such conversations and collaborations—whether large or small—can help prevent the Catholic Church from breaking apart. While they will not (and cannot) overcome major theological disagreements, they can lower the temperature of such debates. In parishes nationwide, and in the pages of Catholic media outlets, the faithful are often tearing one another apart without taking the time to talk to one another.

It is hard to hate someone who has shared a meal with you. It is even harder to convince someone of your own position if you have never even spoken to them. As a church, we are less likely to split apart if we understand the stories of those we disagree with. If Jesus Christ took every opportunity to speak with his fellow Jews as they tried to do God's will, then so can we who follow him, for the sake of his church.

*Editors' note: Several members of America's staff have participated in Mr. Busch's gatherings, including Sam Sawyer, S.J., editor in chief; James Martin, S.J., editor at large; and Kerry Weber, executive editor.*

**Tim Busch is the founder of the Napa Institute, a Catholic organization.**



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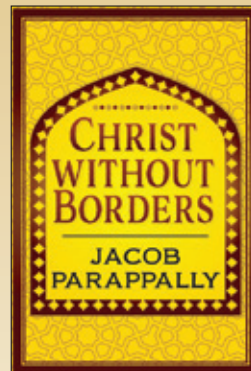
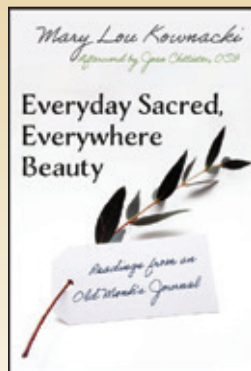
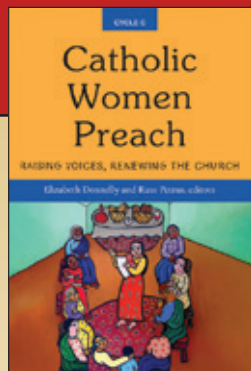
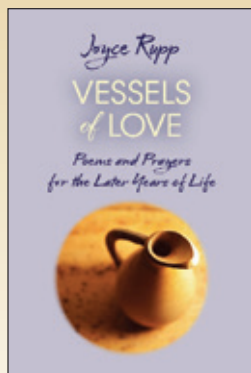
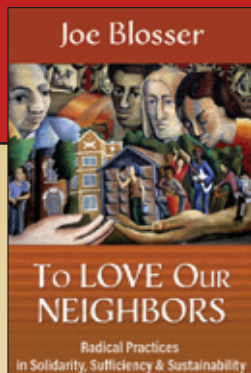
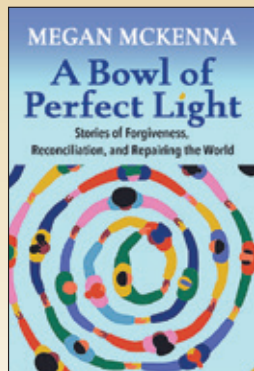
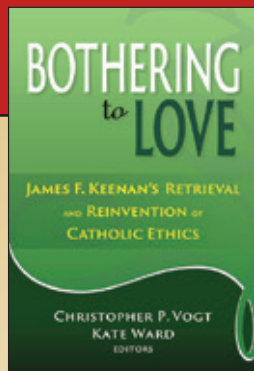
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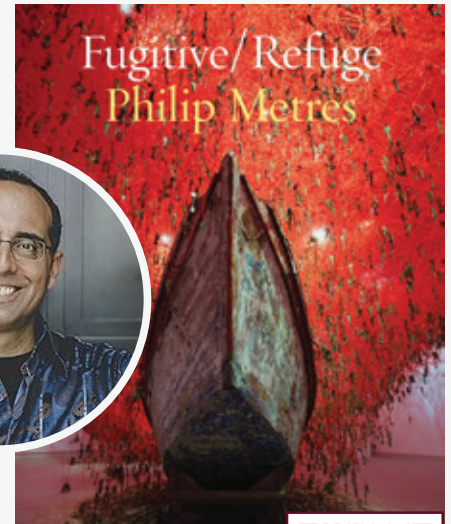
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