

America

OCTOBER 2024

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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and the liturgy

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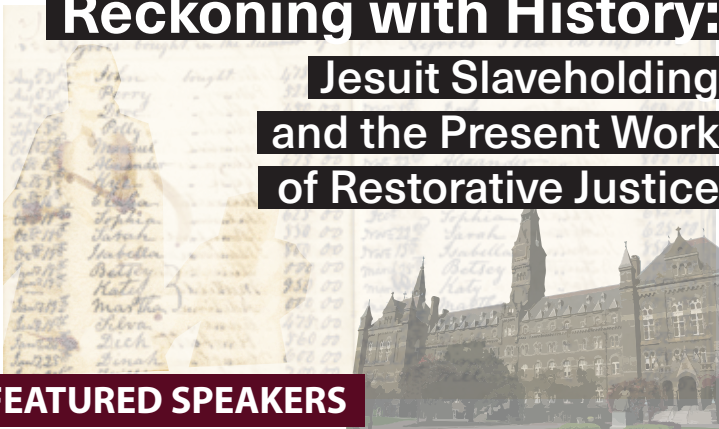


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Reckoning with History:

Jesuit Slaveholding and the Present Work of Restorative Justice



FEATURED SPEAKERS



Rachel L. Swarns
Author of *272: The Families Who Were Enslaved and Sold to Build the American Catholic Church*



Monique Trusclair Maddox
President of the Descendants Truth and Reconciliation Foundation



Fr. Tim Kesicki, S.J.
President Emeritus of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States. Rector Bellarmine House of Studies, Saint Louis University

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Rachel L. Swarns, longtime correspondent with the New York Times and author of *The 272: The Families Who Were Enslaved and Sold to Build the American Catholic Church*, will serve as keynote speaker.

Rachel will be joined by Monique Trusclair Maddox, President of the Descendants Truth and Reconciliation Foundation, Fr. Tim Kesicki, S.J., President Emeritus of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, and a superb array of scholars, practitioners, and leaders for this two-day event.



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LOYOLA
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In Praise of the Imperfect Art of the Possible

In late May, when I arrived in Johannesburg for the second session of my tertianship, the final stage of Jesuit formation, the power had been on continuously for 55 days. When I was there at the same time last year, there had been electricity outages (“loadshedding,” in South African parlance) for at least a few hours each day. While I expected the locals to be relieved by the steadier service this year, almost everyone I spoke to about it had the same response: It’s just for the election. Don’t get used to it.

South Africa was preparing for national elections, held once every five years, on May 29, 2024. This was the first election since the end of apartheid in 1994 in which it seemed likely that the African National Congress would not win an absolute majority—and indeed it did not, leading to the formation of a coalition “government of national unity.”

Loadshedding was widely understood as a problem of corruption at the state-owned electric utility: underinvestment in basic maintenance, theft of supplies as basic as copper cabling and incompetent political appointees more interested in their own status than in fixing problems. There was a long history of the A.N.C. patching things up, even just filling potholes, during each campaign to mollify voters enough to return the party to power for a few more years. Following an understandable “fool me once” logic, many of the people I met were unwilling to trust that this time was any different.

The multiyear electricity crisis certainly contributed to the A.N.C.’s loss of its majority, but broader concerns about corruption and economic malaise were also in play. And a new player had emerged in the months just before the election: the populist party

uMkhonto weSizwe (“Spear of the Nation”), referred to as M.K., named after the military wing of the A.N.C. during the struggle against apartheid. Largely a personal vehicle for former president Jacob Zuma, who could not officially stand to serve in Parliament due to a conviction related to corruption charges, it took almost 15 percent of the vote, coming in third after the A.N.C.’s 40 percent and about 22 percent for the Democratic Alliance (D.A.), which had long been the official opposition to the A.N.C.’s government.

In the days following the election, there were fears of violence. M.K. made vague assertions, without evidence, about election irregularities and warned South Africa’s well-respected independent elections body about “starting trouble.” In 2021, when Mr. Zuma had been imprisoned after being convicted of contempt of court for refusing to participate in a corruption inquiry, the province of KwaZulu-Natal, his stronghold, was rocked by riots that resulted in more than 300 deaths.

Despite these fears, violence did not ensue in 2024. Instead, the country waited while the A.N.C. deliberated about whether to cooperate with the D.A.—generally seen as its longtime rival, ideological and economic opposite, and the “white party” racially—or to forge an alliance with M.K. and another radical populist party, the Economic Freedom Fighters, both of which were threatening reforms which would abandon significant commitments of South Africa’s landmark post-apartheid constitution.

Eventually, about two weeks after the election, the outlines of a government of national unity emerged. The A.N.C. and D.A. were the major players, along with the Inkatha Freedom Party and seven other much smaller parties.

Neither the negotiations for the coalition nor the months following it were completely smooth. Arms were twisted and backroom deals made; politicians and parties finessed campaign pledges and accepted compromises they had previously ruled out.

But the government formed and continues to muddle through, a messy, conflicted and partial unity but a unity nonetheless. The “art of the possible” is being performed in real time and without script or rehearsal. And—at least for now—the power is still on in South Africa, three months past the election and counting.

While I think South Africa’s example of messy and imperfect compromise is an example Americans could and should learn from, that does not mean it should be the limit of our aspirations for politics.

In Johannesburg, I visited Constitution Hill, the home of South Africa’s highest court. It is built on the site of an old fort, later used as a prison, which held both regular prisoners and political detainees arrested for protesting the government, both before and during apartheid. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela were held there, in detestable and inhumane conditions.

Half the complex has been preserved as a museum. But the “awaiting trial” wing of the prison was torn down, and its bricks were used to build the new courthouse, whose doors are carved with the 27 fundamental rights enshrined in South Africa’s constitution. We should not hope for perfection from politics or politicians, but when they show us a glimpse of something that points the way toward “more perfect union,” we ought to pay close and grateful attention.

Sam Sawyer, S.J.

Pope Francis is welcomed by Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, Indonesia's minister for religious affairs (at the pope's right), after landing at Jakarta's international airport on Sept. 3, 2024. Francis arrived in Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population, at the start of the longest trip of his pontificate.

Cover: iStock/James Coleman



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Breaking bread and ending culture wars

In the September issue of **America**, Tim Busch, the founder of the Napa Institute, described one effort to help lessen polarization in the U.S. church. He hosts dinner gatherings of “prominent Catholics from across the ideological and theological spectrum” to have civil conversations. “It is hard to hate someone who has shared a meal with you,” Mr. Busch wrote. “It is even harder to convince someone of your own position if you have never even spoken to them.” His proposal drew a range of comments from readers.

I agree that Catholics of all persuasions need to talk to one another and find common ground. Where they do this doesn't matter to me. My personal preference would be for this to happen while volunteering at a local charity, but I could see it happening at the park, school or child's play group. Anywhere two or more are gathered in his name, Jesus is there.

Margaret Burch

Thank you, Mr. Busch. I don't agree with very many of your views on the church or politics, but I deeply respect your efforts to bridge the divide through food and conversation. It's a model that should be shared in parishes and Catholic groups throughout the country.

Bruce Daigle

I appreciate Mr. Busch's effort to have dinner with other people of faith who have a view of the faith that differs from his view. Some Catholics seem focused on church teachings about legalized abortion, homosexuality and gender ideology, while others focus on church teachings on care for the poor, the stranger, the environment and the dignity of all people including those on death row. Dialogue among people of faith with different views may help all of us remember aspects of the faith we do not usually think about or emphasize.

Tim McCormick

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. In this case, the journey is seeking to fulfill the request “That they all may be one.” To quote a former boss, “Look for the good.” What better way to build respect for each other's God-given dignity than feeling a person's faith journey and breaking bread? Reminds me of the road to Emmaus.

James Engler

The author lost me at the word “prominent.” I am still wondering who qualifies as prominent and why.

Jill Caldwell

What he proposes is exactly Pope Francis' synodal process for discussing our faith and our different understandings of how we live that faith out. This is exactly how we approached our synod discussions in our parish. As long as everyone is open to hearing the stories and experiences of others, to step into their shoes and see how they have walked with God, as long as people respect one another's faith experiences, then this is a great process. It would be wonderful on the parish level as well as the diocesan level. But participants must understand it is about experiencing faith in others, not winning the discussion or proving their own beliefs are superior.

Peter Devine

I would love to have the opportunity to share a meal and conversation with others who view things differently than I do. I wish all parishes had such a program.

Barbara Schell

Some of the reader comments seem to have missed the point and simply perpetuated the differences and disagreements. They are verging on ignoring the phrase “we can disagree without being disagreeable.” Instead, look at Mr. Busch's account as a wonderful example of synodality—of allowing oneself to listen to others, especially those with whom we disagree. This would never have happened a few years ago. I am grateful to those who accepted the invitation even if it went against the grain. Let's all try to find some good in people and examine our own consciences about how destructive our critiques of others can be.

Bridget Taumoepeau



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2010

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Professor of Virology; Department of Infectious Diseases,
St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

American Democracy Needs to Move Past McCarthyist Fear-Mongering

One of the darker moments in modern American political history was what became known as the McCarthy Era, that period in the late 1940s and early 1950s when politicians and government officials conducted a witch hunt for communist and other “subversive” elements in American life, exploiting fear of a shadowy enemy and deepening divisions both in political and everyday relationships. Senator Joseph McCarthy was often the public face of the craze and one of its most adept manipulators.

For Senator McCarthy and his allies in government and out, the imagined subversives provided the perfect scapegoats. Any focus on them distracted from the real issues facing the country, as well as the personal and political deficiencies of those who targeted them. Senator McCarthy at the time faced accusations of stolen valor, tax evasion and bribery. Among Senator McCarthy’s most staunch supporters were many American Catholics. When **America**, under the editorship of Robert C. Hartnett, S.J., weighed in against his fear-mongering tactics, the pushback from readers was extensive and vitriolic—and pressure on the magazine’s editors to turn away from the issue came from politicians and church figures alike.

Seven decades later, our political skies are darkened by new forms of demagoguery, paralleling McCarthyism in their exploitation of anxieties and fears for political advantage. Many Americans, motivated by concerns around crime, job security and changing demographics, direct their gaze toward those different from us and find in them a convenient enemy. The emblematic example is the rancor focused on migrants (and those who would help them). They have been

falsely portrayed as violent criminals or noncitizen voters trying to undermine the American way of life. Donald J. Trump has said as much in statements meant to dehumanize those who come to the U.S. border seeking a better life.

To a lesser extent, we have also seen concerns over abortion exaggerated to maximize fear of enemies plotting in the shadows. Some opponents of Mr. Trump insist he intends to implement a national abortion ban (a goal he has disclaimed) without exceptions or any nuance for medical crises, conjuring up dark images of a “Handmaid’s Tale” future. Again, we hear the whisper: Be afraid.

With political discourse already rife with fear-mongering, it can be difficult to find common ground to talk about even the most serious issues. Many Americans understandably reject Mr. Trump’s demonstrated disdain for constitutional norms and refusal to accept his defeat in the 2020 election, about which **America’s** editors have repeatedly warned. Yet many Americans, perhaps because the constitutional system survived Mr. Trump’s chaotic attempts to undermine it and even the violence of Jan. 6, 2021, still support the former president. Those who do not should remember it is possible to sincerely oppose Mr. Trump by focusing on what is best in the American constitutional tradition rather than trying to convince everyone to see him as hell-bent on its destruction. Americans can disagree without succumbing to the temptation to depend on fear to drive home the seriousness of our concerns.

As voters prepare to go to the polls in early November, they would do well to remember the demagoguery of the McCarthy Era not as a quaint relic

of the past but as a stark warning for the present. But to heed that warning properly, Americans of every political stripe should acknowledge that those who think and vote differently are not necessarily motivated solely by the rhetoric and policy goals that we most fear, whether on the left or the right. Our political system generally presents voters with a binary choice, but very little in politics or life is a binary reality. To say, “I disagree with you” is not the same as to say, “You are my enemy.”

At times, confronting demagoguery also requires taking the long view. There will be more elections after November; there will be further policy initiatives and new politicians; political seasons will follow one another as they always have. Taking the long view means trusting the system in which Americans participate, and not viewing every crisis—much less every news cycle—as the brink of an abyss.

The morning after Nov. 5, your political opponents will not have disappeared. Those some might have called dishonest or un-American or un-Christian or worse will remain neighbors, coworkers, parishioners, fellow Americans. Once that is acknowledged, Americans can see how foolhardy and destructive fear-mongering and a cultivation of hatred can be for a healthy and functioning society.

There are many Americans who are afraid these days, and it is not fair to dismiss their legitimate fears about their future and the future of our nation. It is possible, however, to recognize and acknowledge those fears without taking the pernicious route of piling further fear and mistrust atop genuine concerns. St. John Paul II was fond of quoting Jesus’ most frequent

phrase in the Gospels: “Be not afraid.” Perhaps we all need to hear that phrase more often.

The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius includes a principle that **America** has tried to inculcate across our ministry: “the presupposition,” the conviction that one should at first assume the best of another’s speech, behavior or beliefs. For St. Ignatius, this principle was the key to spiritual conversation, but it is easily extended to most other areas of human relationship. It does not mean one should be a Pollyanna or a naïf: St. Ignatius knew far better than most what evil can lurk in the hearts of humanity. Instead, it is a way of proceeding that seeks to go deeper than suspicion or superficial rejection of the other in favor of honest, genuine dialogue.

What does the Ignatian presupposition look like in a political sense? First and foremost, it means we do not assume bad faith on the part of those with whom we disagree—be they politicians or fellow voters. To take others at their word requires that we see their position as one worth considering, even if we reject it; it also means we recognize the human dignity of the other from the start.

There are times, of course, when the presupposition is insufficient to establish true mutual dialogue; not all of us are acting in good faith, and not all of us are telling the truth when we advocate a particular policy or object to the behavior of a certain group. But if we presuppose good faith on the part of another and are proved wrong, it is the facts that prove us wrong. And facts, of course, are the great enemy of the demagogue. As Senator McCarthy discovered so many years ago, you can only tell a lie so many times before people realize there is no truth behind it.

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Marriage prep is different for the children of divorce

I was 7 years old when my parents divorced. If they sat down together to share the news with us, I don't remember the conversation.

Our family home was eventually sold. Somehow, in the process of preparing the house for fumigation, our beloved family cat got stuck in the tent and subsequently died. I *do* remember the "Oops, the cat died" talk that my parents had with us. Feeling devastated by my pet's death further confirmed my childhood intuition about divorce: that this *really bad thing* leads to other *really bad things*.

Compared with the aftermath of many divorces, my family was fortunate. My mom, brother and I moved in with my maternal grandparents, who provided a sense of security during the following years. The daily example of their marriage over more than 40 years ultimately validated my own vocational call to family life.

Despite a cultural normalization of divorce, the medical and psychological communities widely recognize parental separation and divorce as what they call an adverse childhood experience. ACEs are correlated with increased anxiety, depression, insomnia and substance use disorder in adults. Research also suggests that adults who have had ACEs are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors like self-harm and drug or alcohol dependence, as well as suicide attempts. These factors should be taken into account when members of the clergy and mental health professionals advise adults who are considering marriage.

We should recognize that divorce may be unavoidable for the overall health and well-being of a family. As a regular facilitator of Catholic divorce support groups, I estimate that one in four participants disclose some form of intimate partner violence or

abuse, consistent with the percentage of women nationwide who report such abuse. Dioceses and individual parishes working in divorce support should recognize the prevalence of intimate partner violence and be prepared to offer referrals to social service providers and mental health professionals. But even in these cases, there will be lingering grief and trauma for anyone closely associated with family separation and divorce.

Fortunately, Catholic marriage and family life ministries are now paying more attention to adults from divorced families. I can attest to the power of offering adults from divorced families the space for reflection necessary to grieve the loss of their parents' relationship. To be able to confront this reality in a Catholic retreat setting allows participants to recognize that the church is truly invested in their ongoing healing.

Many adults from divorced families struggle in relationships. Cynicism is common; it is easy to focus on the negative aspects of relationships and to keep expectations low. Anxiety arises from a heightened sense of distrust and from regularly feeling "on guard" in relationships or in dealing with the prospect of one. Adults from divorced families may fall into negative patterns of behavior, originating in their own parents' impulses and mistakes. Some may settle for subpar relationships, having internalized the belief that they are less worthy of mutual love and affection. Parental divorce primes people to view relationships as conditional or transactional.

Adults raised in divorced families may develop coping strategies that include some form of self-protection or isolation. This strategy backfires when the individual is not able to develop the vulnerability and inti-

macy necessary for authentic love to flourish. Pastoral ministers working in marriage preparation should be proactive in inquiring about each individual's family history. If an individual seems initially reluctant to share, the pastoral minister can gently press by pointing out that every couple can benefit from learning from key familial relationships in their lives, both as positive and negative influences.

Difficult conversations in marriage preparation can serve as encouragement to those called to the sacrament. A young woman once confided to me that she was increasingly anxious as her relationship progressed. She radiated joy when she spoke of her boyfriend, but she had concerns that were rooted in her parents' divorce.

I told her what I believe to be true: Adults from divorced families who intentionally focus on healing will have distinct advantages in committed relationships. They intuitively understand that marriage requires work. They know that the relationship necessitates mutual respect. They recognize that the occasional romantic gesture will never compensate for the daily, consistent decisions made in consideration of the other. They value constructive communication and hone conflict resolution skills. They ultimately grasp the importance of never taking one's spouse for granted.

Those who have prioritized their own healing will ultimately bring greater empathy and resilience to their marriages. For their witness, we should all be grateful.

Janelle Perego is the associate director of separated and divorced ministry in the Office for Family Life and Spirituality at the Diocese of San Diego. She is a frequent contributor to the Catholic Mom and Grotto Network websites.

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Northern Ireland's summer of discontent

'Irish Patriots' and Ulster loyalists find common cause against immigrants

By Kevin Hargaden

A summer of discontent over immigration policies was marked by violent protests across Great Britain in August. Parallel protests were organized by right-wing and loyalist agitators in Northern Ireland, and they also descended into violence.

The protests were sparked by a knife rampage at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in Southport, England, on July 29 that claimed the lives of three children—with the lone perpetrator at first being erroneously identified on social media as an immigrant—but they quickly became an expression of widespread grievances among some native-born Irish and British citizens. Demonstrations in Belfast and nearby towns explicitly targeted immigrant communities.

The protests included attacks on police vehicles and businesses owned by immigrants and included at least one serious assault. But church leaders deplored the violence and racist and anti-immigrant sentiment, and strong opposition quickly emerged. When right-wing figures on social media planned another anti-immigrant demonstration for Aug. 9, a counterprotest dedicated to opposing racism was thrown together that dwarfed the anti-immigrant demonstration.

One of the most troubling details of the social disorder

in Northern Ireland was the counterintuitive allegiances that emerged. Loyalist paramilitaries seem to have played a central role in organizing the unrest in Belfast, but it was a surprise on both sides of the Northern Irish border when they were joined by self-proclaimed “Irish patriots” from the Republic of Ireland.

Masked men waving the Union flag shouted racist slurs in tandem with another group of masked men waving the Irish tricolor. For those in the north who lived through the decades of the Troubles, when republican and loyalist paramilitary groups waged a low-level but highly destructive civil war, the sight of these figures marching together added a further chilling dimension to what were already unsettling images of xenophobic and racist protests.

The “Irish patriots” who marched in Belfast were not aligned with the Irish Republican Army or any of the organizations that traditionally made up the militant side of Irish nationalism. In fact, representatives from the contemporary counterparts of those nationalist movements were part of the counterprotests. The republic’s “patriots” who joined protests in Belfast were, in fact, representative of a far-right campaign that coalesced around opposition to the development of housing facilities for asylum seekers in a part of northern Dublin.

Northern Ireland, where 97 percent of the people describe their ethnicity as “white,” has a population of 1.88 million. It has not been a region that welcomes many immigrants. Emigration has been by far the more definitive historic experience.

Recent census figures report that only about 9 percent of the population of Northern Ireland was born outside of the United Kingdom. That is half the rate of foreign-born found in the Republic of Ireland, also better known as a source of emigration, not a destination for immigrants.

While there are now more immigrants arriving than emigrants leaving, the annual numbers of new immigrants in Northern Ireland remain small—a net gain of less than 3,000 in 2022. The number of asylum seekers living in the region has been growing, but only 2.6 percent of those who are seeking asylum in the United Kingdom have been settled in Northern Ireland.

But the August protests did not come out of nowhere. Anti-Muslim racists skirmished with police in Belfast earlier in the summer, and reports of race-based hate crimes in Northern Ireland are at an all-time high. Meanwhile, the government in Dublin has heightened its own border security measures after concerns were raised in the spring that migrant people were using Northern Ireland as a point of entry into the republic.

A Racial Hierarchy

Siobhán Garrigan is not entirely surprised that people who present themselves as “Irish patriots” would end up allying with Ulster loyalists on the issue of immigration. Dr. Garrigan, the Loyola Professor of Catholic Theology at Trinity College in Dublin, has frequently assessed the Northern Irish peace process in her work. In an influential essay published over 10 years ago, she argued that the traditional account of Catholic-versus-Protestant sectarianism in Ireland obscured how the communities were ordered in a sort of racial dynamics, whereby the Protestant-loyalist community was put to use to sustain the status quo of British rule.

Immigrant communities in Northern Ireland that do not fit in the binaries of Catholic and Protestant, nationalist and loyalist, nonetheless fit in the wider template of a top-down power structure. In Northern Ireland today, Dr. Garrigan said, “what you have is a racial hierarchy that is a continuum. The very real tensions between the [nationalist and loyalist] communities continue to exist, but for the rioters they can also be put aside as they assert their superiority in the face of the ‘racial inferior.’”

One way to think about this is that the two settled communities—albeit with the loyalist side preeminent—found their identity in battling with each other for power, influence and resources. The arrival of immigrant communities that cannot fit in this settled arrangement provokes a racial and sectarian anxiety: Now the size of each community’s “slice” is threatened. For Dr. Garrigan, the anti-immigrant

protests expose how “on some deep level, the [loyalist and nationalist] protestors know that they have way more in common than what divides them, even though their identity is based so much on that division.”

She views the counterprotests as a sign of hope. The people “came out in force,” she said, suggesting that the voices of fear will not have the last word in Northern Ireland. The community groups, which include churches, “are not just standing with immigrants in their words. They showed up in the counterprotest, and they showed up the next morning for the clean-up. That shows real solidarity.”

Jesuit Support for Migrants

Brendan Mac Partlin is an Irish Jesuit who has lived in Northern Ireland since 2009. He established the Migrant Support Service in Portadown, about 25 miles southwest of Belfast.

Portadown suffers from high levels of social deprivation and is infamous because of a historic standoff between the Orange Order, a sectarian Protestant organization, and residents in a Catholic area known as the Garvaghy Road in 1998. By the time Father Mac Partlin reached Portadown, the strong tensions between nationalist and loyalist communities had subsided, but he quickly recognized that the growing number of migrants in the area needed support.

The approach he took mirrors what Pope Francis has advocated. “I think Pope Francis’ description is dead good for what it’s about,” he said. “It’s about welcome and protect, promote and integrate.”

The Migrant Support Service is a means by which to “help migrants to settle in,” he said. The service offers English-language classes but it also guides new immigrants through the practical demands of everyday life in Northern Ireland, helping people open a bank account, register with a local medical clinic, find a place to live and land a job among them.

According to Father Mac Partlin, the present difficulties are in part a consequence of how the Good Friday Agreement—which brought an end to the Troubles—framed relations between different Northern Irish communities. The political structure of Northern Ireland resembled South Africa’s apartheid system to some extent, he said.

“I don’t think the Northern Irish government was good on integration at all,” he said. He argues that “the British approach of multiculturalism and approval of diversity and difference with no stress at all on integration means that people become isolated in their ethnic groups.”

For meaningful integration to happen, he argues, there

needs to be community connection, economic development and receptivity from the host society: “Integration is about participation.” The Migrant Support Service seeks to make that possible in a society that has lacked a rich tradition of crossing cultural boundaries.

Father Mac Partlin holds out hope for Northern Ireland. Like Dr. Garrigan, he was especially encouraged by the strong showing of counterprotesters. “Their message is: ‘We are not going to have hatred and racism and we’re pro-diversity, equity and inclusion.’”

But he cautions that there may yet be difficult days ahead, noting the Northern Irish government’s decision to call for assistance from Scottish riot police during the recent troubles in Belfast. “That would indicate that [over] the longer term, they’re expecting more trouble,” he said.

Dr. Garrigan suggests that theologians, church leaders and Northern Ireland’s Christians have a part to play in this tense moment. “In the long term,” she said, “we need betterologies that unpack the mistake of racial hierarchies.”

She argues that the “pattern of thinking” between what we might call old-fashioned sectarianism and the contemporary unabashed bigotry “is the same.” And this presses Christians to ask “who does it serve?” She likens sectarianism in Northern Ireland to a cancerous tumor that is now metastasizing in a troubling but not unexpected fashion.

The God that Christians worship is the one who makes himself known in fearless hospitality. “Ultimately,” Ms. Garrigan said, the anti-immigrant protests “do not represent that God.”

Kevin Hargaden *contributes from Dublin.*

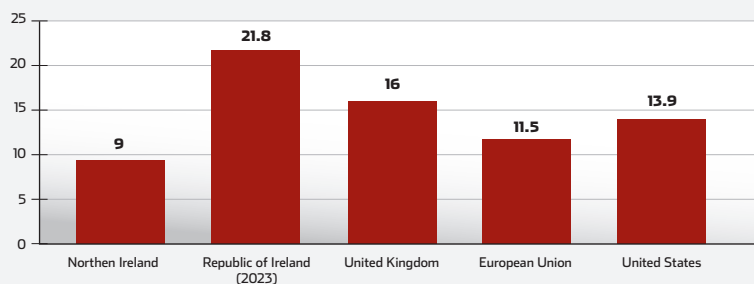
Despite the protests, the Irish remain strong supporters of immigration

Anti-immigration protests in August were a shock across the United Kingdom, and since 2022 the Republic of Ireland has experienced its own notable anti-immigrant demonstrations.

The demonstrations may represent simmering discontent among native born as numbers of new arrivals in the United Kingdom and the republic have soared in recent years following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. One of the primary drivers has been large numbers of refugees escaping the Russian Federation’s war on Ukraine. Ireland’s serious housing shortage and affordability challenges contribute to tension over newcomers.

Despite the anger and drama of the anti-immigration protests, however, Dublin’s Economic and Social Research Institute reports that support for immigrants and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers remain near historic highs in the Republic of Ireland, if slightly down from peaks in 2020.

Percentage Foreign-Born (2022)



Sources: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Eurostat, the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, O.E.C.D., U.S. Census.

5.38 million: the population of the Republic of Ireland; **1.9 million,** Northern Ireland; **68.5 million,** the United Kingdom.

82 percent of the Irish surveyed in November 2023 were “positive” about immigration from E.U. nations, down from 92 percent in August 2020; **65 percent** were “positive” about immigration from non-E.U. states, down from 71 percent in August 2020.

14 percent of Irish citizens surveyed in June 2023 said immigration was one of the top two most important issues facing Ireland, up from **3 percent** in July 2022.

16 percent: The foreign-born population of the United Kingdom in 2022, up from **9 percent** in 2004.

246,960: Ukrainians in the United Kingdom (Aug. 13, 2024).

108,970: Ukrainians in Ireland (Aug. 13, 2024); **67,000** arrived in 2022.

5.1 million people immigrated to the European Union from non-E.U. countries in 2022, more than double the **2.4 million** estimated to have arrived in 2021.

Sources: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Central Statistics Office of the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, CIA World Factbook, Eurostat, the Economic and Social Research Institute.

Jesuits urge Ortega to ‘stop the repression’ on anniversary of U.C.A. confiscation

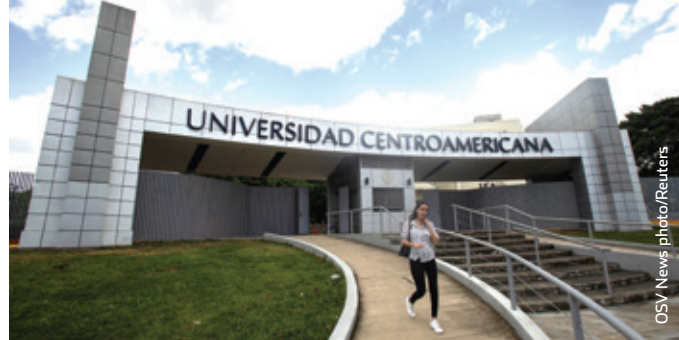
In August the Central American Province of the Society of Jesus acknowledged the first anniversary of the loss of the Central American University in Managua, Nicaragua, “with deep pain and indignation, but with unshakeable hope and an unwavering demand for justice.” In a statement released on Aug. 15, the province urged the Ortega government to “stop the repression, stop committing systematic violations of human rights, and release the political prisoners” and to “accept the search for a rational solution in which truth, justice, dialogue, academic freedom, and respect for the rule of law prevail.”

The university was seized by the Sandinista government in 2023 as part of a widespread clampdown on the Jesuits and the Catholic Church in Nicaragua. In their statement, the Jesuits deplored the loss of the university’s “research centers, libraries, collections of historical documents, catalogs of natural resources, properties, and financial resources.” They noted that “the unpunished and unjustified confiscation” of the university has done “inestimable damage to the scientific and cultural heritage of Nicaragua and continues to be a grave violation of the right to education of thousands of young people who were studying at the UCA.”

The Jesuits described the confiscation as part of a systematic nationwide repression, “which lamentably continues to this day, against any person or institution suspected of not agreeing with the regime, including religious institutions of various denominations.”

The church has proved to be the last institution standing against Nicaragua’s increasingly totalitarian government, now that Nicaragua’s independent media and political opposition have been neutralized by the Ortega family and the Sandinista government. Led by former Sandinista chief Daniel Ortega and his wife, vice president Rosario María Murillo, the central government first initiated various policies of civic repression in response to student protests in 2018. The brutal treatment of the protesting students—more than 300 were killed—initially provoked more Nicaraguans to oppose Mr. Ortega’s continuing reign.

The Ortega government responded with a vast clampdown on civil freedoms and civic bodies that might stand against it, expelling journalists and shutting down thousands of foreign and domestically based humanitarian and human rights groups. The regime has jailed dissidents, protesters and opposition politicians, exiled priests and critics, and shut down or confiscated Catholic educational institutions. Various Catholic orders have been expelled from Nicaragua, including the Missionaries of Charity and



The Jesuit-run Central American University in Managua is shown on Aug. 16, 2023, its last day of operations.

other orders and entities involved in important humanitarian and direct service efforts in a nation that is among the poorest in Latin America.

The researcher Martha Patricia Molina Montenegro, this year’s winner of the U.S. State Department’s International Religious Freedom Award, tracked 92 hostile acts against the church in the first six months of 2024, detailed in a report released on Aug. 15 and titled “Nicaragua: A Persecuted Church?” Those acts of government-sponsored aggression included death threats, arrests, robberies, expulsions, interference in liturgical celebrations, attacks on laypeople, and confiscation or destruction of church property.

Ms. Molina Montenegro recorded 307 such acts in 2023, a sharp increase from 171 acts of aggression recorded in 2022. According to the report, 245 members of the clergy, men and women religious community members, and Catholic laypeople are now living in exile, unable to return to Nicaragua or expelled by government officials. The majority of the exiled are native-born Nicaraguans.

The government ramped up its suppression of the church in August, revoking the legal status of the Caritas office in the Diocese of Matagalpa and continuing to arrest priests and laypeople in the diocese. Following a pattern used against many other church-related entities, the government found technical problems under registration regulations that were used to justify the revocation of the legal status of Caritas, in effect shutting it down. The social welfare effort’s assets are being transferred to the government.

The move against Caritas followed a wave of arrests mostly targeting priests in the Dioceses of Matagalpa and Estelí, where exiled Bishop Rolando Álvarez is bishop and apostolic administrator, respectively. On Aug. 19 the government initiated another wave of closures of church and independent civic entities. With the cancellation of Caritas and related entities, the number of nongovernmental organizations banned by the government since December 2018 has risen to more than 3,600, with most of their assets transferred to state ownership.

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent*.



E.U. states confront a sharp rise in unaccompanied child migrants

The plight of unaccompanied minors has become the latest challenge in the ongoing European migration crisis. In Greece, arrivals of teen migrants and children have increased by 400 percent this year, according to the international child advocates Save the Children.

One in four of these young people made the journey alone, without the help or protection of a parent or other adult relative. On Spain's Canary Islands, arrivals of unaccompanied migrants are on track to reach a historic high this year, and caring for the migrant youth has become politically contentious.

Unaccompanied minors are acutely vulnerable. According to Save the Children, "Until a guardian is appointed [by Greek immigration officials], these children have no one to bring them clothes, shoes or even a cell phone to call home and talk to their family."

According to Catalina Perazzo, a policy director at Save the Children Spain, most of these latest arrivals of unaccompanied migrants to the Canary Islands are adolescents between 15 and 17 years old from the sub-Saharan African countries of Senegal, Mauritania and Mali—nations that have been assailed in recent years by conflict, slumping economies and food insecurity.

According to Aid to the Church in Need, conditions in the Sahel region of Africa, which includes parts of Mali and Burkina Faso, continue to deteriorate. Large swaths of territory in the Sahel are held by Islamist insurgent groups. In addition to hunger and lack of economic opportunity, Christians in these territories face persecution and displacement.

African youth who see little hope for a future in their home nations, some as young as 12, are attempting the dangerous ocean crossing without their parents. Ms. Perazzo said that in many cases, the youth from sub-Saharan Africa have spent up to a year living on the streets of cities on the East African coast, waiting for a chance to escape to the Canary Islands. Government officials on the Canary Islands estimated in July that as many as 70,000 people were waiting for a chance to cross the ocean to the Spanish islands, among them as many as 20,000 unaccompanied minors.

Ms. Perazzo said that despite the difficult journeys they have endured, many unaccompanied minors arrive in Spain eager to learn the language, find work or seek out educational and professional formation programs. But orienting and connecting them to available opportunities takes a level of personalized attention that Spain's over-

burdened migrant centers are unable to offer.

José Luis Cámara from Caritas Tenerife challenges a suggestion pushed by some Spanish politicians—that unaccompanied minors create a serious security risk for Spanish society.

“Yes, there are a few that do cause trouble,” he said of the youth. “But we don’t have a crime problem on the Canary Islands. Islanders have been living with immigration for 30 years, since the first migrant dinghies arrived. Contrary to some media reports, there is not a palpable sense of fear or insecurity in the streets.”

He added that the immigrant youth have become a welcome addition to the island’s workforce. Caritas offers Spanish classes and orientation for migrants to help them understand their rights and to normalize their residency status in Spain.

The bishops of the Canary Islands called for solidarity with young migrants and urged an end to political fear-mongering, reminding the faithful in a letter on the issue that the causes of contemporary migration are complex. The Spanish bishops pointed out that insecurity, inequity in trade, conflict over resources, corrupt rulers, and lack of educational and job opportunity—a chance for a “dignified future”—are among the many drivers of migration.

“Without [adequate] living conditions, work, and dignity for the populations of the sending countries, it will not be easy to reduce migratory flows,” the bishops said in a statement to the media. “Many of these brothers of ours would not begin such an uncertain and dangerous journey if more just situations were experienced in their towns and countries and if Spain and Europe more effectively promoted paths for one legal, orderly and safe migration.”

Bridget Ryder contributes from Spain.



Pope Francis meets with Pedro Chia, S.J., in the Apostolic Palace on May 24, 2024.

Pope Francis shares advice for would-be Jesuits and a message of hope for China

Asked during an interview with a Chinese Jesuit how he deals with criticism and opposition, Pope Francis said that even critics who are not constructive “are always helpful because they make one reflect on one’s actions.” The pope told Pedro Chia, S.J., the director of the Jesuit Communication Office of the Chinese Province, that consulting and listening to others also helps him.

A video of the interview, conducted on May 24, was released by the Vatican on Aug. 9. During his discussion with Father Chia, Francis described the Covid-19 pandemic and the conflicts in Ukraine, Myanmar and Israel-Palestine as the greatest challenges of his pontificate.

“I have always tried to resolve [those challenges] through dialogue,” he said, “and when this does not work, with patience, and always with a sense of humor. The prayer of St. Thomas More helps me a lot, asking for a sense of humor. I have been praying that prayer every day for more than 40 years: ‘Grant me, Lord, a sense of humor.’”

Asked what he would say to a young man who wants to be a Jesuit, Francis quipped, “Let him become a Dominican!”

In a more serious vein, he added, “I would tell him to allow somebody to accompany him and to enter into discernment.” Pope Francis said the Society of Jesus must never lose its missionary spirit. “It’s interesting [that] the difficulties and resistance that St. Ignatius faced at the beginning,” he said, “were conflicts with people who looked inward and lost their missionary spirit.”

Pope Francis reaffirmed his heartfelt desire to visit China. If this dream comes true, he said, he would like “to visit the Mother of Sheshan, Mary Help of Christians.”

Asked what message he would like to send to the Catholics of China, Pope Francis said he would like to send a message of hope to the Catholics of China, then added “it seems tautological to send a message of hope to a people who are masters of waiting...masters of patience.... You have ‘the virus of hope.’ It’s a very beautiful thing.”

Gerard O’Connell, Vatican correspondent.



An Uncertain Path

By James T. Keane

What media
coverage of Vatican
II can teach us
about the synod



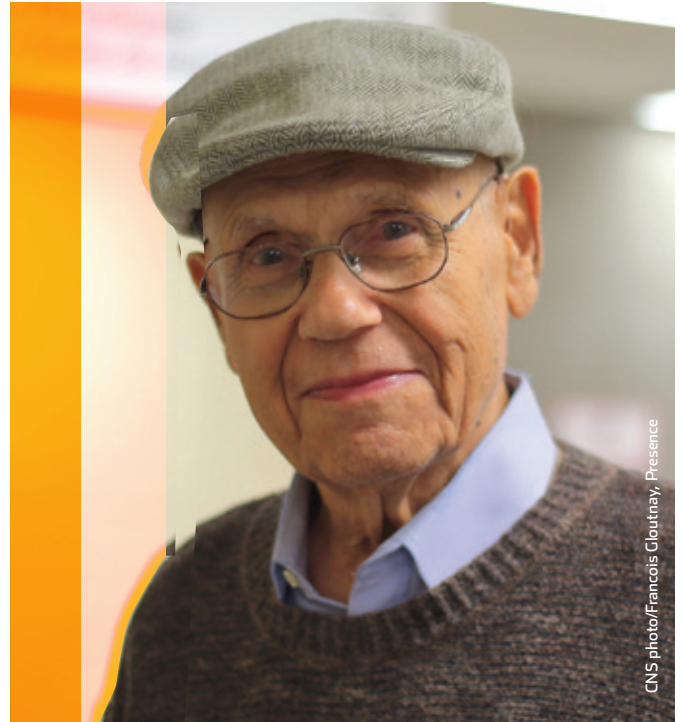
Pope John XXIII leads the opening session of the Second Vatican Council in St. Peter's Basilica on Oct. 11, 1962.

The ongoing Synod on Synodality has caused no small amount of discussion about the structures and future of the Catholic Church. Prophets and doom-sayers alike have focused on the synod as a once-in-a-lifetime event, one with potentially far-reaching implications for Catholics around the globe. But to what extent will we know what the effects of the synod will be during our lifetime? Will anyone truly be able to judge its impact—or its relative success or failure—for years to come?

History has something to say about this—including a journalistic history that has been a bit lost. A look back at the Second Vatican Council through the coverage offered by two American Catholic journals, **America** and **Commonweal**, shows that many of what we think of as contemporary challenges for the church were in fact similarly neuralgic issues in 1965. That the church navigated those crises then—even if in a state of occasional panic and anguish—suggests two things. First, we should not expect the journey of the church after the Synod on Synodality to be smooth sailing. Second, the church is very much capable of getting through such turmoil, and emerging stronger from it.

While today's scholars tend to focus in their study of Vatican II on “what happened at the council” or on how the implementation of the council's decrees played out, a less developed but still pertinent historical question is how the council was received and interpreted among Catholic circles even while it was taking place from 1962 to 1965. As the late historian John W. O'Malley, S.J., often noted, when we speak of the council as an “event,” we also must remember the sense of the dynamics and drama unfolding within the time period itself. At the time of the council, observers and participants alike were surprised, then shocked and then sometimes disappointed at what was emerging from the council with each passing month.

In the American religious press, the sense that something revolutionary was taking place at Vatican II was also eventually attenuated by a sense that the church was pulling back in obvious ways, unwilling to see the “spirit” of the council through to the more dramatic conclusions expected by some. A study of the content of **Commonweal** (run, then as now, by



The Rev. Hans Küng (left photo) and Gregory Baum, prominent theologians during and after the Second Vatican Council, contributed to both **America** and *Commonweal*.

lay Catholics and published independently of the hierarchy, and celebrating its 100th anniversary this year) and **America** (Jesuit-run and therefore connected in a variety of subtle yet still significant ways to the magisterial church) during the latter years of the council gives a sense of this excitement and disappointment.

Such a comparison also reveals valuable insights into the ways Vatican II would be officially and unofficially accepted by Catholics of varying positions and outlooks. In that sense, it might have much to teach us about what we will experience following the Synod on Synodality.

A Church in Turmoil

By the close of the fourth and final session of Vatican II in December 1965, **America** and *Commonweal* had diverged significantly from one another in tone and content in their coverage of the council, with *Commonweal* taking on a more progressive and even confrontational tone and **America** steering a cautious and sometimes timid course between progressive sentiment and defenses of traditional church structures and mindsets.

These journals illustrate a number of other important dynamics at work in the American church during the time of the council. The emergence of an educated Catholic laity became evident in the work of commentators like John Cogley, Daniel Callahan, Michael Novak and Peter

Steinfels, writers and editors who often seemed more prescient and well-informed than some of their counterparts in religious life when it came to their understanding of the church. The idea that one could identify as a practicing Catholic yet raise questions about doctrine also rose in prominence among both lay observers and men and women religious at the time. Third, the era also gave birth to the idea that church leaders had much to learn from its actual body of believers (the laity itself), a heretofore fairly muted notion that was already receiving new prominence even before the council had ended.

The result was a great deal of disillusionment (and more than a few defections from the church) alongside a tidal wave of optimism about what the church could achieve and acknowledge about itself in the future. This phenomenon, too, affected the content and tone of both **America** and *Commonweal* at the time, as the editors of both periodicals struggled to find a consistent editorial stance amid so many conflicting trends and expressions of “true” Catholicism.

Commonweal and the Council

The most radical difference (and perhaps the most obvious one) between **America**’s coverage of the final sessions of Vatican II and *Commonweal*’s can be found in the way each magazine’s editorial staff (through their selection of



We should not expect the journey of the church after the Synod on Synodality to be smooth sailing.

contributors, editorials and even choices of art and cover material) envisioned the post-Vatican II landscape. In the June 19, 1964, issue of *Commonweal*, for example, the former *Commonweal* executive editor John Cogley (who was appointed “religious news editor” at *The New York Times* in 1965) wrote a long essay heralding the death “of the clinging spirit of the Counter-Reformation” and declaring that “every attempt of *aggiornamento*—even discussion of it—brought on suspicion and attack from high places before the Council. If anyone but a Pope had used the word, it would have been outlawed from the proper Catholic vocabulary.”

Announcing that “*Romanità* has had its day. The *civilisation mondiale* is here,” Mr. Cogley added that the traditional method of proceeding in the Vatican “will die slowly and many good men will weep for it during the hours of its final agony. I will not be among them.” Respondents to Mr. Cogley’s “triumphalism” about the victory of progressive forces in the church included some predictable interlocutors, like the tradition-minded English writer Evelyn Waugh, and some rather surprising ones, like the Rev. Andrew M. Greeley.

In that same month, *Commonweal*’s contributors were a veritable all-star roster of scholars identified with progressive elements in the church, including Richard A. McCormick, S.J., Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., Gordon C. Zahn, Robert G. Kaiser, Thomas Merton, O.C.S.O., Daniel Callahan, James O’Gara and the Rev. William Shannon. That many of these contributors were lay men (women were still underrepresented) was always a distinctive mark of *Commonweal*, but this became even more dramatic during and after the council.

Another significant change in *Commonweal* coverage during and after the council was its new focus on church issues; while the magazine had always self-identified as Catholic, previous years had seen more of a focus on themes such as race relations, nuclear disarmament, church/state relations and other causes familiar to American political progressives. If one were to be glib, one might suggest that with Vatican II, a boring church became more interesting to readers; even the book reviews in *Commonweal*, for example, began to include a greater focus on Catholic authors.

Hope—With Caveats

Throughout the council, noted Peter Steinfels in an email interview with *America*, “*Commonweal*’s view was one of consistent approval, indeed enthusiasm, for what the Council was doing, although never without caveats.” Mr. Steinfels, who was hired at *Commonweal* in 1964 and later

served as its editor, commented that “this approbation was accompanied by constant concerns that the Council might be blocked from completing its agenda and fulfilling its promise and even greater worries about how, or whether, its achievements would be put into practice.”

Amid that enthusiasm and approval, some of *Commonweal*’s editors and contributors expressed frustration in its pages with the council’s progress. Shortly before the fourth session of Vatican II began in September 1965, the magazine published an essay by the Rev. Hans Küng, “And After the Council?” The subhead declared, “The spirit of Vatican II must not die.” Father Küng’s essay lamented that the inspiring ethos of Pope John XXIII, “although not actually extinct, is no longer the principal moving spirit of the Council” and that “the accomplishments of the Council to date obviously fall short of what was generally expected.”

Editorials later in the month criticized Pope Paul VI’s promulgation of the encyclical “*Mysterium Fidei*” and questioned whether transubstantiation as currently defined could be considered a dogma of the church, concluding that “Pope Paul has come very close to making a hash of historically nuanced theological distinctions.”

The shift in tone—though not across the board—from even three years before is perhaps the most remarkable element of these and many other articles from 1965 and 1966, as a number of articles and editorials appeared with a more challenging tone on matters about which the institutional church (particularly the Vatican) seemed increasingly out of touch with the realities of American Catholic life. When *Commonweal* published “The Council Ends,” a summing-up essay by Gregory Baum in January 1966, the editors indicated a new critical distance in their coverage of the church by adding the subhead “Was It a Failure?”

Father Baum didn’t think so, but he recognized the council could not (despite the headline) be judged just yet. “The Vatican Council was such an extraordinary event in



The church is capable of getting through turmoil and emerging stronger from it.

the life of the Catholic Church that it is impossible to evaluate it in a few pages. It is certainly possible to find fault with the Council; measured by the contemporary needs of the Church, it failed to supply all the answers,” he wrote. “But this belongs to the pilgrim state of the Church on earth. There is no perfect Council as there is no perfect liturgy, as there is no perfect anything in the Church.... At the same time, the historical reality of the Catholic Church and measured by what the Council started with, the achievements of the Council are nothing short of miraculous.”

America and the Council

For the editors of and contributors to **America**, the question of tone when addressing the post-council situation was made more complex because of the magazine’s status as a publication of Jesuits of the United States and its own assertion of its status as “The National Catholic Weekly.” Many of the magazine’s leading intellectual lights were involved with the council itself behind the scenes, including Walter M. Abbott, S.J.; Donald R. Campion, S.J., who was later **America**’s editor in chief; C. J. McNaspy, S.J.; and others serving as experts, commentators, translators and more.

The magazine had also taken on an increasingly progressive tone politically since the tenure of John LaFarge, S.J., as editor in chief from 1944 to 1948, particularly on matters of social justice and economics, and had achieved a reputation among American political liberals for its public confrontations with Senator Joseph R. McCarthy over red-baiting and William F. Buckley Jr. over Pope John XXIII’s encyclical “*Mater et Magistra*.”

However, the magazine was also quite clearly more cautious and traditional than *Commonweal* in its ecclesial outlook and its treatment of changes in the church. As the council drew to a close and prognosticators began to speculate about what the future would hold for the church, that instinctive reaction against rapid change became apparent in the magazine’s unsigned editorials,

including one from August 1964 that could have easily been read as a direct attack on other Catholic journalists. Titled “Angry Young Men,” it argued:

An age of *aggiornamento* is necessarily an age of change. Almost everyone in the Church agrees on that. There are some, of course, of whom it could be said they are so conservative that had they been present at the Creation, they would have voted for nothingness. But they are few. The rest of us acknowledge that the Church is and ought to be going through a period of marked change.

The differences among us are ones of emphasis and degree. How far, how soon, should the Church adapt herself in this or that respect? The answer, according to some voices in the Church, is: very far and right away. These voices usually belong to young men, and they are usually angry.

The angry young men include some of the more talented products of Catholic education. Others, if not the most intelligent, are at least the most vocal. They insist on being heard, and naturally they want to be taken seriously. They will be heard, too; the age in which authority could flatly refuse to listen is coming to an end. But these young men would have a better chance of being taken seriously if they would avoid making themselves more obnoxious than they have to be.

Any of the “more talented products of Catholic education” would recognize the harrumphing of an old schoolmaster in such a commentary. But it is also just one example among many of an obvious attempt by the editors and contributors at **America** to strike a delicate balance between embracing the changes of the council and forsaking too many of the strictures and practices of Catholicism that had so defined the church. In his regular “Letter From the Council,” Donald R. Campion, S.J., acknowledged that the energetic spirit of the second session in 1963 had waned a bit as the council progressed, but wanted to attribute it more to a “new sense of responsibility” and a “sobriety” around the council, a needed reality check about what was possible and what could change.

At the same time, Father Campion was quick to find fault with some of the documents under discussion, including the schema for a document on the laity in church life, which he criticized in the Oct. 17, 1964, issue of the magazine as “dominantly clerical. The result is that even



Bishops participate in a Vatican II session at St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

when it strives to recognize the layman's status and his legitimate autonomy, it still sounds patronizing."

Steering the Course

America also offered a great deal of space after the third and fourth sessions of the council to bishops who wished to write about their experiences in Rome. While this practice likely had as much to do with ecclesiastical politics as anything else, it also speaks to the more clerical identity of the magazine compared with its lay-run counterpart.

These bishops' reflections about sessions three and four of the council were generally optimistic. Bishop Mark G. McGrath, C.S.C., used the pages of **America** to describe a process familiar to many others who attended Vatican II, whereby the bishops began the council process by filling out questionnaires in a "perfunctory fashion" but quickly realized after arriving in Rome how momentous an event was upon them and upon the church. He and his fellow bishops, McGrath noted in the Aug. 21, 1965, issue, had never considered what it would truly mean to bring all the world's bishops together to reflect on the church's very identity.

At the same time, he was sharply critical of those who

suggested the council was not going far enough, or was addressing issues beyond the competence of the bishops: "One is amused by some of the Pollyanna optimists of the First Session, many of whom are visibly lagging as we go into the fourth lap. It is, in short, too soon for any final judgments."

Bishop Robert E. Tracy, writing in **America** in September 1965, acknowledged that many would be disappointed by the activities of the fourth session, particularly those seeking a reversal of the ban on artificial contraception, but also warned against prophets of doom. "Some of [them] utter nervous warnings, others betray extravagant expectations...the end result of the four sessions, they prophecy, will be a set of hollow and irrelevant proclamations to a world gripped in agony and urgently awaiting a solution to its problems."

Conspicuously absent from **America's** pages were the European *periti* so often featured in *Commonweal*, including Fathers Schillebeeckx and Küng, and many of the lay writers who were increasingly prominent elsewhere in Catholic publishing in the United States and Canada. To some degree, this obvious lack can be attributed to the simple matter of manpower: **America** could still rely on a fair-



Commonweal and America are in many ways still playing the same roles that they did in 1966.

ly large stable of Jesuit writers, some of whom were experts in the issues being debated before the council.

For example, when the magazine wanted to present an explanation of the decree on religious liberty in January 1965, the editors could turn to a writer few could accuse of not understanding the issue: John Courtney Murray, S.J., who gave the magazine almost 4,000 words on “This Matter of Religious Freedom.” Two years earlier, he had offered the magazine an essay, “On Religious Liberty,” that set the stage for some of the dramatic changes in church teaching on the subject that came later in the council.

By the close of the council, however, it was clear that while *Commonweal* had become more willing to be critical of the institutional church in the ensuing years, **America** remained in significant ways more of a defender and apologist, and its choices of authors and topics reflected that position. When it was possible to defend the institutional church while also praising new developments emerging from the council, **America**’s contributors leaped at the chance; when that chance did not present itself, readers might often find an essay or two on the religiosity of Flannery O’Connor or Dorothy Day.

A Church That Can/Cannot Be Criticized

Of course, the theological and ecclesial landscape that had so dramatically shifted between 1962 and 1965 did not suddenly find solid bedrock after that time, and it is striking to observe the ways in which the tumult of the time following the council affected both magazines. While many scholars focus on the publication of (and widespread dissent from) “*Humanae Vitae*” in 1968 as the real focal point of post-conciliar intra-ecclesial tensions, a close look at the issues raised in both *Commonweal* and **America** in the years between the end of Vatican II and the release of “*Humanae Vitae*” suggests a more complicated reality.

That encyclical—and the question of Catholic use of artificial birth control—may have provided the most visible evidence of ideological divides and the rejection of the teaching authority of the bishops under certain circum-

stances, but it hardly emerged out of thin air; rather, issues of episcopal authority and the primacy of conscience (both of which would play such a major role in the troubled reception of the encyclical) had already become prominent themes in the intellectual life of the American church, something reflected in these magazines.

For example, in October 1966, *Commonweal* published an editorial criticizing the archbishop of Cincinnati for “shackling” the Glenmary Sisters in his diocese, who were attempting to implement reforms inspired by Vatican II’s call for renewal of religious life. The editorial called his actions “severe, even childish” and described him as “responding to controversy in the old pre-Council fashion by curtailing every liberty in sight. This is hardly the answer.”

An issue that in previous decades might have been settled through the quick (and possibly unquestioned) assertion of episcopal authority was instead addressed in a national Catholic publication and framed as a question of liberty and authority. Similarly, when the famed English priest the Rev. Charles Davis shocked many in 1967 with his public announcement that he was leaving not only the priesthood but the church itself, *Commonweal*’s editors asked whether this was a question of “freedom of conscience,” adding “[t]hat a person must follow his conscience is now obvious in the Church, utterly necessary, in fact.”

In an essay on Father Davis’s departure that resulted in the writer’s ouster as editor of *New Blackfriars* (and, briefly, the suspension of his priestly faculties) and was reprinted in *Commonweal*, Herbert McCabe, O.P., actually criticized progressives for what he called their “triumphant radicalism” but described them as being “just as indifferent to persons and to truth *as could episcopal authority*” (italics mine). In other words, less than two years after the council’s end, a mainstream Catholic publication published an article that criticized the stifling of thought and the obstruction of truth by using the example of bishops who did the same—and needed to offer no further explanation.

That same year, Daniel Callahan (who would also eventually leave the church) wrote “The Renewal Mess” for *Commonweal*, noting that “[t]he renewal of the Church is not going well,” in part because newfound understandings of personal autonomy had created massive resentment between bishops and priests, as well as between priests and laity. More than a year before the release of “*Humanae Vitae*,” these twin questions of authority and conscience were already roiling the church, at least in certain intellectual circles.

In the pages of **America**, a similar but slightly more muted debate was playing out. In an unsigned editorial

from 1966, the editors noted and criticized the widespread silence of bishops on important social issues but offered a startling excuse on the bishops' behalf: The press itself was to blame. "What will happen, a bishop might ask himself, if I take this or that public stand? Will there be those predictably prompt news stories—often spiced with discreet ridicule—that follow on public statements that can so easily be made to sound stuffy, conservative, worried, defensive, authoritarian, triumphalist, preconciliar or simply pious?"

Later that year, advertisements for an "Institute for Freedom in the Church" began to appear in **America**, providing an avenue for stating far more directly what the editorial pages hinted at. With a board of directors that included Joseph E. Cunneen, Garry Wills, the Rev. Charles Curran and Daniel Callahan, the institute centered its mission on questions of conscience and authority in an invitation published in **America** in November 1966:

Ideally, the Church is a community which brings its members to the fullest realization of their freedom and autonomy; in fact, it fails to achieve this ideal and, to the extent that it does fail, needs reform from within. The direction in which Vatican II has moved the members of the Church is the direction of freedom, but the institutional structures of the Church are not at present capable of dealing with the results.

In December of that same year, John Courtney Murray, S.J., published a massive article in **America**, "Freedom, Authority, Community," in which he located the authority of the bishops in the realm of service to the community and strongly criticized the "corrective or punitive" function of authority. "The demand for due process of law is an exigence of Christian dignity and freedom," Murray wrote. "It is to be satisfied as exactly in the Church as in civil society (one might indeed say, more exactly)."

Murray also noted that classical notions of obedience were "not good enough to meet the needs of the moment" and that humanity's growing recognition of each human's dignity required "a consideration of the classical concept of the ecclesial relationship—a new development, doctrinal and practical, in the relations between authority and freedom in the Church."

The Council and the Synod

What about today, six decades later? An outside observer might note that *Commonweal* and **America** are in many ways still playing the same roles vis-à-vis the church that they did in 1966. With regard to the synod, however, the

history of both publications in how they covered Vatican II is instructive. The fact remains that neither journal knew what would come in the years following the council. Would it prove to be a success? Had it failed? Would its reforms be implemented, and how?

Should we expect a different response today to the Synod on Synodality? Or should we, too, be willing to offer hopes and concerns, while adopting a bit of a "wait and see" attitude?

There will be some in the church who—if the synod does not result in significant changes to church structures, disciplines and doctrines—will dismiss the entire process as a waste of time, money and discernment. Others will see any change at all as evidence of the "smoke of Satan" entering into the church through new windows. Still others will assign responsibility or blame to the synod for changes (or the lack of same) that were already sweeping through the church before Pope Francis or the other participants in the process even dreamed of such an event.

What might the historians say? Given that six decades after the close of Vatican II, we are still arguing about the meaning and impact of that monumental gathering, it is safe to imagine them agreeing on this much at least, regarding the Synod on Synodality: We don't yet know what its final results will be, and we don't yet know how (and where, and if) they will be implemented in the daily life of the church. Those questions cannot be answered this month, or this year. If one might unironically cite the conclusion of many an **America** editorial over the years, it bears watching.

But where is the fun in that, to receive no immediate and unequivocal verdict? There is a lesson in it, to be sure: If we think we have landed on a single and definitive answer to questions like "What happened at the Synod?" or "Did the Synod succeed or fail?," we are certainly not good historians.

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THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY
FOLLOW OUR COVERAGE FROM ROME
AMERICAMAGAZINE.ORG/SYNOD



‘LET JUSTICE PREVAIL’

What the biblical prophets can teach us today

By Cecilia González-Andrieu

The prophet Amos, as depicted by Gustave Doré

istock/Alaui333

August in the California high desert is covered by a cloud of dust, and everything seems to wither under the triple-digit temperatures without a cloud in the sky. Yet there we were, over 100 people from Catholic parishes, some coming from nearby, others having driven for hours, all standing together under the blazing sun.

My mind has often returned to that day in 2019 because it was then that I finally understood the biblical prophets.

This particular desert, just northeast of the picturesque Angeles National Forest, has many similarities to the deserts of the Middle East where our faith ancestors lived. In both places, everything is stripped bare, and water and shade are truly miraculous. On that day etched in my memory, the mothers pushing strollers, the *abuelas* relying on the steadiness of their canes, the teenagers hoisting high their signs of hope, the parish folks who knew each other, and those meeting for the first time were all there for the same reason.

An infamous prison called Adelanto—named for the nearby town (which, paradoxically, means “progress”)—had been transformed into a for-profit “detention center” filled with terrified immigrants. We were there to offer support to the incarcerated, to listen to the *testimonios* of their grief-stricken children and families and, most important, to pray together in the conviction that our God hears the voices of the suffering and those who intercede for them.

As we assembled, the guards told us that our efforts would be restricted to the other side of the road from the detention center, dashing our hopes that the interned migrants and asylum seekers would be able to hear the community singing hymns of consolation from our shared faith. Adding to our distress was the fact that a group of five anti-immigrant protesters had not been subject to the same restrictions and were allowed to set up multiple metal stands with large flags and signs right in front of the entrance to the detention center. Not just that, but each of them was equipped with a bullhorn that could mimic the sound of police sirens, as well as amplify their voices.

As our attempt at a prayer vigil began, the stories of the children of the detained were mercilessly drowned out by the blaring sirens. To make their antagonism even more explicit, the anti-immigrant protesters kept up a constant stream of verbal attacks demonizing those they had labeled “illegals” and those of us who dared to support them. It soon became clear that even our efforts to comfort or to pray would go unheard.

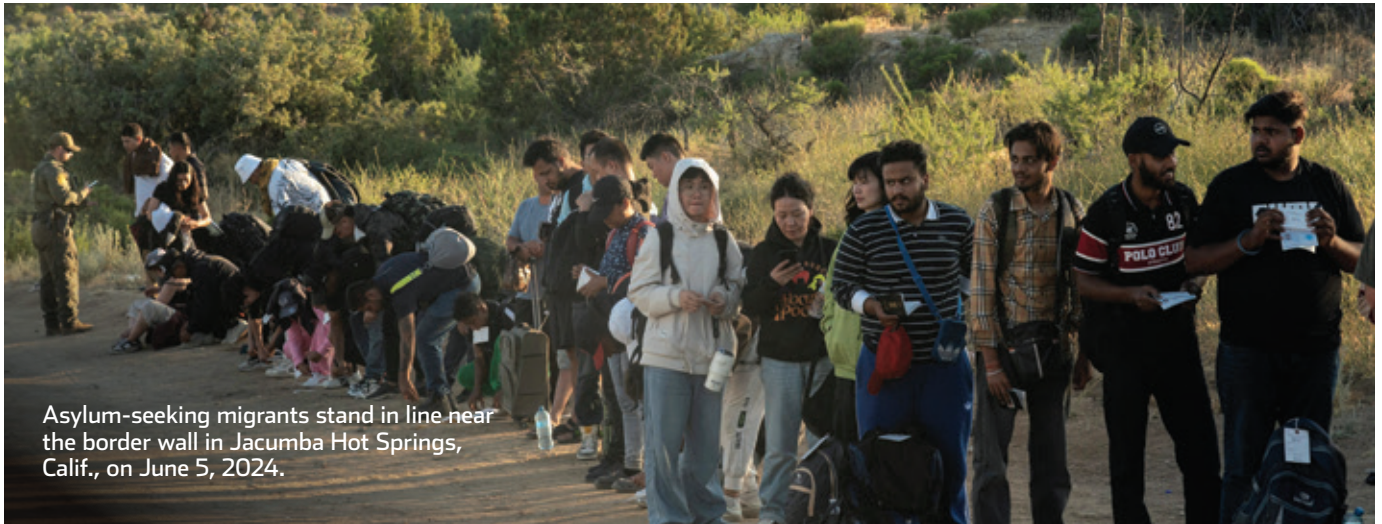
At that moment the tragic absurdity of it all overcame me. How was it possible that an aggressive group of five could overwhelm a peaceful community of 100? How could it be that voices in prayer were drowned out by insults? How heartbreaking was it that those inside would hear the shrieking, simulated police sirens instead of our songs? It was then I realized that the goal of the anti-immigrant protesters was in large part to cause despair: They hoped that the incarcerated and those who loved them would simply give up, put down our heads in submission and accept the inevitable. The restrictions, the pitiless interference, the invectives, made it so we felt completely powerless and crushed by a world that did not recognize the people inside the detention center as human beings and extended that indiscriminate dehumanization to everyone who supported them.

It was then that a great appreciation for the prophets welled up in me. Suddenly, the distance of time between them and us disappeared. We raised our eyes, arms and voices in plaintive supplication for God’s mercy to rain down upon us while parishioners held up a banner proclaiming, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12:31). No, we were not going “back to where we came from,” as the protesters repeatedly commanded us to do. We were staying right there because God was present with us at that moment and in that place.

I learned something crucial that day: When we are truly attentive to the reality of human suffering, the Spirit will move us to a different kind of prayer defined by an unmistakable sense of our radical dependence on God. In the abyss, the light of God became brighter. Situations like what we were experiencing in Adelanto made it clear that a faith that does justice is not an abstract concept. It is made most present in the crucible of real life, and it demands we respond by turning to God.

The connection I felt to the biblical prophets that day prompted another question in me: What does it mean to be prophetic today? What can we learn from the lives of the biblical prophets that can direct us in the 21st century? A look at this question through the specificity of that day in the desert may help to guide us. Here are five qualities that today’s prophetic voices share with our biblical predecessors.

Attentive Unveiling. One of the most difficult things biblical prophets were called to do was to help their communities see with clarity those things that were contrary to God’s will. For this, they had to incessantly call their contemporaries to attentiveness. Sinfulness, they came to realize, did not always go around announcing itself.



Asylum-seeking migrants stand in line near the border wall in Jacumba Hot Springs, Calif., on June 5, 2024.

OSV News photo/Go Nakamura, Reuters

No, the denial of the vision of God was often concealed and had to be called out forcefully by the prophet. Over 700 years before Jesus would walk the same roads, the prophet Amos saw this and decided to go for broke. His piercing words, which even today sound like they could bring down mountains, sought to wake up his community.

He cries out, “Prepare to meet your God!” (Amos 4:12). And in between his announcements of the punishments that will come from God’s hand, the prophet makes clear the kind of human acts that offend God. His contemporaries have exiled whole populations, they have denied their kinship (1:6, 9) and they have used weapons and violence especially against women and children for the purpose of profit and obtaining more land. More explicitly, he tells them they have done this by “suppressing all pity” (1:11). Like his fellow prophet Isaiah, Amos makes clear that God’s will is often obscured by lies (2:4).

Explicit Measuring. But what is God’s will? Once aware of God’s indignation, the prophet makes plain the chasm between what God demands of us and what we are doing. In other words, those gathered in front of the prison on that day were there because the mistreatment of immigrants in our country needed to be exposed precisely as an offense against God. In these hyperpartisan times, it is good to remember the words of Martin Luther King Jr.: “a just law is a [human-]made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God.” Dr. King questioned those Christians who conveniently turned the other way in the face of dehumanizing segregation and racism, asking poignantly, “Who is their God?”

For his part, Amos was eloquent as he asked how it was possible that people would willingly “hand over the just for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals” (2:6). We must ask ourselves: How often do we get caught up in lies that deny the higher law and obscure our lack of pity for the desperate poor?

Redemptive Protagonists. Many moments in history present us with a choice, and the prophetic act is precisely about embodying our choices. The prophets were clear that it was the deeds of human beings “turn[ing] justice into wormwood and cast[ing] righteousness to the ground” (5:7) that they were denouncing. Yet those same humans participating in these offenses could choose otherwise and become protagonists for justice and collaborate in God’s redemptive desire for creation. To be protagonists, actors in a just world, means to “seek good and not evil” (5:14), to “let justice prevail at the gate” (5:15), and to “let justice surge like waters, and righteousness like an unending stream” (5:24).

Amos warned against the complacency of empty offerings and rituals (5:21-23), and he was to be echoed repeatedly centuries later by Jesus. In our own day, the elderly, the mothers and the children gathered at Adelanto felt the power of prayer deep in their bones, a power that turned them from victims to compassionate voices. As they purposefully entered into solidarity with the incarcerated, they discovered the Spirit’s promptings and trusted in the ultimate goodness of God. What did those busy drowning their voices with accusations feel at those same moments? Might they have gone home that night with the memory of someone’s tear-filled eyes still lingering? Might that memory of the suffering just transform them?

Cosmic Power. While it was the particularity of what was happening in Adelanto that called us there, the prophets teach us that God is God of the entire cosmos. As Amos describes it, our God is “the one who forms mountains and creates winds, and declares to mortals their thoughts; who makes dawn into darkness and strides upon the heights of the earth” (4:13). Such a view of God’s sovereign power—as the one who comes to the aid of the helpless—is fundamental to Christian faith. Confronted by those who think they are powerful because they can judge others and imprison



Participants at a vigil and rally on May 1, 2024, outside of St. Anthony Catholic Church in Davenport, Iowa, protest a state law that would have criminalized “illegal reentry” into Iowa. The law has been blocked by a federal judge.

them, prophets cry out for heaven’s ultimate power on behalf of the powerless.

Is anti-immigrant sentiment dependent on fundamentally flawed understandings? Do those who advocate separating families because of immigration status not realize that their perceived power is temporary and ultimately contingent on a situation? Might they eventually see that they are in fact usurping the power of God in an act of flagrant disobedience to the inviolable command to love one another?

Unbreakable Justice. The justification to treat others with cruelty over some perceived transgression depends on separating reality into two realms. Years ago, while working at the Franciscan Communications Center in Los Angeles, I found in their archives a television public service announcement from the 1960s, in which the Franciscans prophetically exposed this inconsistency. As I recall, the ad featured a white family making its way toward a church dressed in their Sunday best, while conspicuously avoiding a Black family and an Asian family. The voice-over simply stated, “If you can’t find God out there, you won’t find God in here.” Defining one’s claim to a superior faith by separating “the sacred” from “the secular” sets up a permission structure that says, “As long as you’re praying individually and spending a requisite time inside the church or temple, then you’re good with God.”

The prophets, on the other hand, stressed the opposite: All of reality is sacred and God’s grace cannot be contained. A repeated theme in Scripture is that the one acting justly often does not come from the ranks of the outwardly pious. Think of the searing indictment of Jesus’ prophetic parable

Prophets incessantly call their contemporaries to attentiveness.

of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37), where both the priest and the Levite (also a key person for worship) avoid the injured man, leaving him to die.

It is the Samaritan traveler, an outsider to their exclusive circle of the righteous, who is “moved with compassion” and cares for the victim. That most sacred act of saving someone’s life is performed out on a road; its protagonist is an outsider; and Jesus, the prophet, calls attention here and in many other places to the unbreakable unity of all reality. In Jesus, the lilies are sacred, the waters are sacred, the lepers are sacred, and those who have sinned are forgiven because they are sacred. The community praying out on a dusty desert road was making present God’s ultimate love for all God has made. In the scorching words of the prophets as they railed against the powers who trampled the weak, we can hear the promise of a different world.

We left the desert that day exhausted, covered in dust but also prayerful. God’s love, present in the many who showed up that day, was visible, abundant, resilient and hopeful. In Adelanto, the hard work of being prophets became real and the world’s sacredness surrounded us. The most repeated command in all of Scripture is: Do not be afraid. Violence needs our fear to stoke it, but nonviolence flowers and overflows when we allow our broken hearts to feel God’s generous accompaniment calling each of us by name. Will we answer?

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How Can We Make the Liturgy More Reverent?

*Editors' note: One of the recommendations of the first meeting of the Synod on Synodality was to explore ways to improve the quality of liturgies. Building on that proposal, **America** asked two contributors, Rachel Lu and Matthew Cortese, S.J., to reflect on the following question: How can we make the liturgy more reverent? Informed by their own experiences of Mass in various traditions and inflections, as well as church documents from the Second Vatican Council and Popes Benedict XVI and Francis, both then shared their reflections with one another. What follows is their conversation.*



istock/gordenko1

IT'S ABOUT GOD, NOT US

Liturgy should not cater to our personal preferences.

By Rachel Lu

I remember memorizing my prayers as a catechumen 20 years ago. Books helped me to familiarize myself with the parts of the Mass, which initially seemed foreign and alienating. This is normal for converts, and I'm grateful to have had those resources, but my children will have no such memories. To them, *Ave Maria*, *gratia plena*, *Dominus tecum* will seem like words that they always knew. *Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi* will feel like part of the fabric of the universe. I love that. Because it is true, and no book can teach that as effectively as reverent liturgy.

"I ask that you be vigilant," writes Pope Francis in

"Traditionis Custodes," his 2021 letter to the bishops of the world, "in ensuring that every liturgy be celebrated with decorum and fidelity to the liturgical books promulgated after Vatican II, without the eccentricities that can easily degenerate into abuses."

It seems to me that reverent liturgy has become a topic of renewed interest among Catholics, which is wonderful to see. We live in uncertain times, and the church faces many challenges, but nothing will sustain us through these trials like the fitting worship of God.

There are of course many facets to the debate about reverent liturgy, but two things in particular seem worth stressing. First, liturgy should be beautiful. Second, it should draw worshipers beyond themselves and into a relationship with things that transcend their particular place and time: the universal church, a rich Catholic tra-

Liturgy can only be reverent when its goal is to revere.

kneeling to receive his body, ideally on the tongue. Kneeling is an ancient practice, once used to honor kings. We still strongly associate it with both humility and reverence. It is unusual for Americans, since we no longer kneel before earthly dignitaries, but that only makes the gesture more effective. When we kneel before God, we clearly perceive the uniqueness of the occasion. With the help of altar rails, Communion can be distributed very efficiently to kneeling parishioners, and as a mother with young children I found that method far less anxiety-inducing than a Communion line. I had time to find my space at the altar rail and settle my children around me before my turn came. Then I could lead them away without feeling that I was holding up the show.

Looking back to the pre-Vatican II world, there are many other traditions and practices that I would like to bring back. Perhaps the point most worth stressing, however, is that *something* should be brought back, even if that something varies a bit from region to region and from rite to rite. There is no reason why Mass must be perfectly standardized across the entire world, and I am happy to see the Byzantine, Chaldean, Armenian and Maronite flowers bloom. Jesus had many apostles, and their evangelical efforts laid the foundations for many different (but still beautiful) liturgical traditions.

But the rapidity of liturgical change after Vatican II created what Pope Benedict XVI called the “hermeneutic of discontinuity.” In plainer terms, it seemed to many of the faithful as if all-new liturgical rites had simply been made up, as part of an effort to “get with the times.” Some found this disturbing and others welcomed it, but regardless of how anyone felt, the rapid transition had the unhappy effect of diminishing Catholics’ sense of liturgy as something that transcends time, place and our fallen world. Bringing back pieces of established liturgical traditions would help to re-establish that sense of transcendence.

This should go beyond Mass to encompass traditional prayers and devotions, such as the rosary. We should also rediscover the beauty of liturgical languages. Roman Catholics, in my view, should have at least some exposure to Latin, which is part of our heritage. Catholics should experience the profound joy in worshiping God in the very same



dition and, most importantly, God himself.

Liturgy can only be reverent when its goal is to revere. It can be difficult for people today to grasp this point, living in an age saturated in commercialism, materialism and myriad forms of entertainment. We expect as a matter of course that our tastes and preferences will be catered to, and it can be difficult to let that go. Having said that, there is nothing uniquely modern about the temptation to prioritize personal or community preferences over our duty to honor God.

In *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, written before he became pope, Benedict XVI makes this point by referencing the story from Exodus 32 in which the Israelites, sitting restless at the foot of Mount Sinai, create a golden calf and celebrate “a festival to the Lord.” Benedict notes that, at least according to Aaron, it is the Lord who is being celebrated, not Baal or Ra; the people are still ostensibly faithful to the God of Israel. But their feast is condemned, not accepted as real worship, because God never asked to be worshiped in that way. The golden calf is simply invented by a (mere) man as a morale-raising measure. Reverence has little or nothing to do with it.

Worship is difficult. It isn't always clear to us what God wants, and that uncertainty can open wide avenues to liturgical adaptations that are more ordered toward self-expression or communal catharsis than the honoring of our Creator. There is no simple resolution to this problem, but for the laity especially, I believe that the clearest and most obvious way of revering God in the Mass is by

words used by countless saints and faithful across the centuries, which also helps our easily distracted human minds grasp the reality of truths that endure across centuries.

Of course, we can still have some liturgy in the vernacular. But if parishes were encouraged to offer, say, one Mass each week using the Latin Ordinary (the current texts of the Roman Missal in Latin, of which the vernacular liturgy is a translation), most Catholics would presumably become comfortable with it. Children should also be taught basic prayers (at least the Ave Maria and the Pater Noster) in Latin, which will deepen their sense of standing with the rest of the universal church on the plain of eternity. Liturgical languages make intuitive sense to children; it seems right to them that there should be special words for honoring God. We should take advantage of that to form their sensibilities in ways that can endure for life.

Liturgy should not be frozen in amber, but it should be immensely respectful of tradition. Embedded within liturgical tradition are certain divinely inspired truths about how God wishes to be worshiped; and in striving to honor that, we open the possibility of reverence. At the same time, receiving and protecting liturgical traditions helps us to grasp the transcendent nature of liturgy. Worship is good for human beings, but we reap its full benefits only when our goal is to honor God. This is a truth that both Pope Francis and Pope Benedict have tried to communicate to the church, and by embracing it, we may find in our liturgy a tremendous source of grace and spiritual renewal.

Rachel Lu is a freelance writer, an associate editor at *Law & Liberty* and a regular contributor to *National Review*. She lives in St. Paul, Minn.

REVERENCE IS MORE THAN BEAUTY

For St. Ignatius, it is a disposition

By Matthew Cortese

As I think about reverence in the liturgy, a memory comes to mind. I was in elementary school, probably around 11 or 12 years old. My father was one of the leaders of our parish folk group, which would gather in the church basement every Sunday before morning Mass to tune guitars and run through the chosen songs. I learned a lot of liturgical music in that basement, and even more at Wednesday night rehearsals—and, of course, during the liturgy itself. But the song that comes to mind in this particular memory is

an alleluia, a Gospel acclamation penned by the Dameans, which is No. 175 in the *Glory & Praise* hymnal published in the 1980s.

I can't say that I would advocate for the song's continued use. It has a decidedly '70s tenor, one that perhaps verges on treacly. But there's something about the chord progression that I still find entrancing: the bold use of a D major chord in the key of E, and the repetitive back-and-forth between E and F#m7. And then there is the first verse—the one I remember being used most often in our parish during the Gospel procession—taken from Psalm 118. The translation of the psalm—the paschal psalm *par excellence*—still sticks in my mind: “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good/ His mercy endures forever./ Let the house of Israel say,/ His mercy endures forever.”

I still feel the vibrations of the strings, and the truth of the words, and I know in my bones that the singing of the Dameans' alleluia was reverent. Although not musically exquisite in the classical sense, it was nonetheless compelling and worshipful. It accomplished what excellent—or even, in my experience, mediocre—Gregorian chant can accomplish: a fostering of the love of God in the hearts and minds of those singing and hearing and praying. And the acclamation taught one Catholic child God's word, and how to honor it—and in so doing to “honor...our Creator.” I know in my bones that those folk Masses of my youth were indeed “ordered” toward God and not “toward self-expression or communal catharsis.”

I often find conversations around reverent liturgy to be decidedly slippery. On my more pessimistic days, it seems to me that the word *reverence* can be imprecisely used as the equivalent of “liturgical things I like” or “things that feel Catholic to me.” Dr. Lu offers a helpful and nuanced corrective to my (perhaps Jesuitical) pessimism. While she notes that “the debate about reverent liturgy” is decidedly multifaceted, she highlights two important, relevant elements: Reverence in the liturgy involves both beauty and an invitation to transcendent relationship.

I wholeheartedly agree. I worry, however, that reverence can too easily and too frequently be reduced to beauty alone, to mere aesthetics, to one's preferred style. I worry that a monolithic view of *the* Catholic liturgical tradition can quickly morph into its own golden calf, in which living tradition comes to be misconstrued and misused as a “morale-raising measure” among people (on all sides) who fear a diversity of Catholic views and a multiplicity of Catholic practices, who—like those at the foot of Sinai—confuse their own account of the shiny and the beautiful with the word of the living God.

What, then, is reverence? I find myself returning to St.



It is not always snobbish or prideful to be offended by a liturgical practice.

Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, a text saturated with reverence. "Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of doing this to save their souls," Ignatius writes. Reverence, for Ignatius as for Dr. Lu, is keenly associated with creaturehood, the duty to honor their creator that belongs to every creature, and especially to the human person. It is what the fallen angels lacked, caught up as they were in their pride.

St. Ignatius asks the person making the *Spiritual Exercises* to imagine him or herself as a little girl serving the Holy Family at the birth of Christ—someone who had reverence in spades. Each prayer period is concluded by making "an act of reverence or humility"—a movement, a gesture, especially associated with an act of the will.

Reverence is, for St. Ignatius, a disposition, one that principally manifests itself in gesture and action. I think particularly of his instructions for the application of the senses, when one is invited to reflect upon the imaginative contemplation one has completed. One is invited to imagine the very "places where the persons"—e.g., Jesus or Mary—"walk or sit," and one is to imagine oneself touching those places—embracing and kissing those places in one's memory, mind and heart. Though Ignatius does not here use the word *reverence*, he is obviously describing it: to cultivate and to surrender to an overwhelming love of and honor for Jesus, expressed in thought, word and gesture.

What I find most helpful about St. Ignatius' view of reverence is that he does not, in the *Spiritual Exercises*, insist on a uniformity of reverent gesture. While he cherished his own late-medieval Spanish piety—a devotional world that is, to many postmodern American Catholics, both beautiful and foreign—he does not define the "act of reverence" to be made at the end of prayer. He does not define one single Catholic way of being reverent. He is supremely and "immensely respectful of tradition," while also allowing for variation in time, place, culture and temperament. This, it seems, is key, as Dr. Lu has noted: to respect local and ritual variation while concurrently maintaining Catholic unity—a localism that always and

everywhere transcends itself.

There is, as Dr. Lu points out, the ever-present temptation for all of us "to prioritize personal or community preferences." I am certainly not immune from that. Indeed, I might go even further: There is the temptation to see one's own personal experience or taste as *the* Catholic tradition, to confuse spiritual growth with an influx of sentiment and to use nostalgia to justify either the flavor of the age, or the flavor of a past age or the status quo. And I heartily agree with Dr. Lu that there is much liturgically to recover. Following Vatican II's "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" ("Sacrosanctum Concilium"), Gregorian chant tops my list, not as a replacement for all vernacular song but as a necessary, traditional enrichment.

I hope that Catholic children learn to chant the *Sanctus* and the *Agnus Dei* and the *Pater Noster*, both in Latin and in their respective vernaculars, to be employed as the liturgical circumstances demand. Reverence, however, can be cultivated in a multiplicity of languages and in manifold ways and cannot be limited to one aesthetic or style. "For Christ plays in ten thousand places," as Gerard Manley Hopkins says, "lovely" even in the treacly.

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AGAINST BAD LITURGY

How can we convey a sacred sense of time and space?

Midway through our exchange, it seems Father Cortese and I are in danger of being in serious agreement.

My initial reflection stressed the significance of reverence, beauty and tradition as a means of ensuring that worship is oriented toward God. I cautioned against allowing worship to devolve into a form of community catharsis, or a "spiritual experience." Father Cortese seems largely in agreement, and he also shares my desire to see Catholics recover their appreciation of liturgical languages, ancient prayers and traditional sacred music, like Gregorian chant. He merely cautions that traditionalists can also be tempted by the golden calf of "personal preferences." Sometimes liturgical purists treat their recommended way of worship as the only good or authentic one, but Father Cortese reminds us instead that Christ "plays in ten thousand places," and in a wide range of languages and styles.

I happily concede the general point. Liturgical snobbery is a real phenomenon, one that can become self-righ-

teous and prideful. Father Cortese's reflection underscores another important point as well: It is impossible to know from the outside what impact different forms of liturgy might have in particular souls.

"I know in my bones," he writes, "that those folk Masses of my youth were indeed 'ordered' toward God and not 'toward self-expression or communal catharsis.'" He presumably wishes to avoid scenarios in which a community is ordered to discontinue liturgical practices that are meaningful to them, and I agree that sharp, sudden changes in liturgical practice are undesirable and will often cause real spiritual harm.

Nevertheless, I may spy a point of disagreement worth exploring. We agree that beauty, reverence and transcendence are all critically important for worship. But is there such a thing as bad liturgy? Can it be appropriate to discourage people from worshiping in a particular way? Maybe we don't entirely agree about that.

There are many reasons, certainly, to be careful and circumspect in the judgments we make about liturgy. Worship can be an intensely personal experience, even in a community setting, and we can never be certain what a particular practice means to a particular person. We do know that human beings have a deep desire to praise and honor their Creator, and that God also wishes to draw human souls back toward himself. So it is not surprising at all that grace often works through a wide variety of liturgical celebrations, including some that are not Catholic or even Christian. I still remember songs and prayers from my Mormon childhood, which continue to move me especially because they were my entry point to loving Jesus. I often think that children in general have the purest prayers of all, regardless of the precise form, because they have so much less experience of fallenness and sin.

It would not be fitting, however, for adults to content themselves forever with "Angel of God, my guardian dear" or (with a hat tip to the Mormons) "Jesus wants me for a sunbeam." Adults need adult-sized prayers and forms of worship, and as we grow we need to continue to cultivate and deepen our sense of the sacred as something set apart, holy and distinct from the everyday. Not all liturgical practices do this equally well.

For instance, liturgical music that sounds like something one would hear on the radio or sing around a campfire does not convey the sense of the Mass as something distinct, transcendent and sacred as effectively as Gregorian chant. Kneeling tends to inspire a sense of reverence more than standing in a line does. More generally, it is easier to have a sense of liturgy as something that transcends our own time and place when we have inherited it across generations instead of making it up ourselves or inheriting it from the




generation immediately before us. Sometimes, careful consideration of these points may lead to a reasoned judgment that certain liturgical practices are not fitting and ought to be discontinued. They do not honor God as well as they could or lift human hearts as readily. In some cases, a particular practice might be healthy and appropriate for some setting, but not for Mass.

It is important to look on our fellow Catholics with charity and to recognize that it is not our prerogative to decide where and how Christ can work. But it is not always snobbish or prideful to be offended by a liturgical practice. If a person has cultivated a powerful sense of the sacred, he will inevitably see certain things as inappropriate in times or places that should be set apart for God.

In an unfamiliar cultural setting, I would naturally be slow to pass judgment, but I have memories of Masses that involved music, dancing and a general aesthetic that to me was powerfully reminiscent of a library story hour or a kindergarten. I have been to Masses that felt like a pop concert with some prayers added. I cannot say what others were experiencing, but to me there was a strong sense of profaning what is sacred. There is nothing wrong with pop concerts or library story hours, but what reason do we have for thinking that God has asked us to worship him in those ways? How do those celebrations convey a sense of sacred time and space, as something set apart for our Creator?

We cannot grow closer to God by scorning our neighbor, and we should always trust in God's willingness to



To say that Gregorian chant is to be given 'pride of place' is not to say there is no place for other musical styles.

accept our imperfect offerings and turn our half-converted hearts back toward him. Even so, it is sometimes appropriate to ask—or even demand—that the sacred be preserved as something set apart. We owe this to the Catholics who have gone before us and to God himself, who has honored us with his presence in our midst.

Rachel Lu

THE CASE FOR DIVERSITY

The liturgy can accommodate all styles

Dr. Lu's response gets to the heart of the matter, a point of tension in the midst of our substantial agreement. (And it is worth emphasizing, as she does, that our agreement is substantial!). I wonder, however, if the sticky-wicket question is not "Is there such a thing as *bad* liturgy?" (more on that below), but rather "What constitutes 'profaning what is sacred?'" Here, indeed, we might not be in full agreement.

Profanation, it seems to me, is a pretty high bar. To return to the story of the golden calf, that original profanation, idolatry is what elicits fiery concern on the part of Moses and of God: "Come, make us a god..." (Ex 32:1). Whether or not Aaron and the people think that they are worshipping the living God, they are not. While, from the perspective of worship, idolatry certainly poses stylistic problems, the chief concern is one of substance. It is not only how the God of Israel is worshiped, but also what is worshiped: the living God versus the work of human hands. It was not simply that the people at the foot of Sinai were praying in the wrong language or singing the wrong type of music; it was, rather, that in their idolatry, God became (to borrow Hosea's turn of

phrase) no longer "I am" for them (Hos 1:9).

I wonder, then: Can liturgical style profane? "I have memories," Dr. Lu writes, of Masses that were "powerfully reminiscent of a library story hour or a kindergarten" or of "a pop concert." She continues: "I cannot say what others were experiencing, but to me there was a strong sense of profaning what is sacred." I wonder if here a further distinction might be helpful, one drawn straight from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The council fathers of Vatican II state that Gregorian chant ought to be given "pride of place" in the Roman liturgy, that it is "specially suited" or "proper" to the Roman Rite (No. 116). To say that Gregorian chant is proper to the Roman liturgy is not to say that other liturgical musical styles are profanatory. To claim that one style is proper is not to say that other styles are unfit for God's presence or tantamount to idolatry.

Further, to say that Gregorian chant is to be given "pride of place" is not to say there is no place for other musical styles. Thus, while I am fully willing to affirm—with the fathers of Vatican II—that Gregorian chant is "specially suited" or "proper" to the Roman Rite, I am not willing to say that other styles cannot "convey the sense of the Mass as something distinct, transcendent and sacred"—nor even to say that other styles cannot convey such a sense "as effectively." One can, it seems to me, both affirm Gregorian chant's "pride of place" and make liturgical space for other styles. Here I think not so much of the folk Mass music of my youth, but rather of the Vietnamese elevated speech known as *đọc kinh* that makes the Mass in that language so poignantly beautiful.

In a similar vein, one can both affirm that kneeling—a venerable Western posture of piety—"tends to inspire a sense of reverence" and say that standing (in line or otherwise) can also be profoundly reverent. I think of experiences I have had in Latin America in which the rush to line up for Communion, and the controlled chaos it brings, is something of great beauty: the people of God hurrying to and waiting on their Lord.

To say, with Gerard Manley Hopkins, that "Christ plays in ten thousand places" is more than just a "general point" that honors the personal or communal preferences of particular individuals or communities. It is to make a central point about the incarnation: that Christ takes on all that is human and makes it God's very own, that Christ has truly assumed all human tongues and chants—even liturgically. It is to say that God can make even folk and pop redound to God's glory in the Mass—that "all languages and styles," even the music heard "on the radio," "around a campfire" or at a "pop concert," can be taken up into God's liturgical project. (I think of the Steubenville Youth Conference liturgies of my adolescence.) This is a bullet that,

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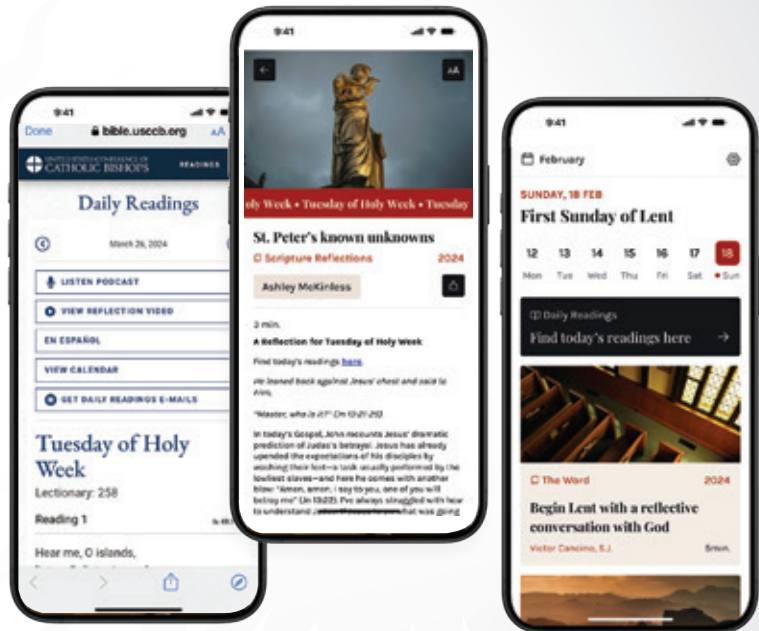
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on principle, I am willing to bite.

This is not, however, to say that we should be stuck playing the B-side tracks of the Dameans in perpetuity. This is not to say that we should aim for liturgies that approximate “a library story hour or a kindergarten.” It’s rather to argue that certain styles—musical and otherwise—should not be rejected out of hand as profanatory or straight-away excluded from the liturgy. It is to affirm that diverse and multiple styles can liturgically “set apart” “time and space” for God.

By way of conclusion, I want to return to Dr. Lu’s question: “Is there such a thing as bad liturgy?” Here, I think, Dr. Lu and I will find some terrain of further agreement. When I reflexively considered the question, my mind was drawn immediately not to musical style or to the gestures of the assembly, but rather to the role of the priest-celebrant. While any validly celebrated liturgy can be efficacious regardless of stylistic considerations, I would venture to guess that, at some point, we have all experienced Eucharistic presiding that was less than ideal. (And some of us, myself certainly included, have at times presided poorly!)

I think of additions and alterations—for example, the ad-libbed hospitality vamp at the beginning of liturgy (“Good morning! Welcome to Mass!”). This forced informality, it seems to me, comes across as more jarring than relatable. Conversely, I think of rigid formality in word and gesture, which conveys the extraterrestrial rather than the supernatural.

I think of unnecessary commentary, a sort of addiction to explanation that turns a holy desire (for the assembly’s comprehension) into an avalanche of words. I think of Shia LaBeouf’s now infamous line—both unfair to the Missal of Paul VI as it is written and not untrue with respect to practical implementation—that he prefers a Mass in which the priest does not seem like a car salesman.

I think that we—priests and people together—still have a lot of work to do to appropriate and live more fully the letter and the spirit of the liturgical rubrics and norms. But equally important is the call to listen more attentively to one another, to attend mutually to our liturgical joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties, to pay attention to each other’s liturgical desires. I am grateful to Dr. Lu for this exchange, one such opportunity for mutual engagement.

Matthew Cortese, S.J.

GIBBOUS MOON

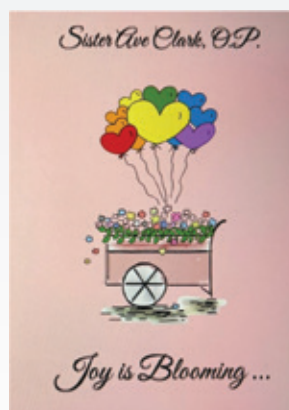
By Alfred Nicol

Unheralded, the gibbous moon
arrives too late, if not too soon,
a goblet neither full nor empty,
off balance there, like Humpty Dumpty
or one of us, afraid of falling,
having missed a stair or calling,
lopped mushroom cap, a thing diminished,
or handwork set aside unfinished,
a doily of discolored lace
moth-eaten in an attic space,
age-spotted face obscurely seen
peering through a storm door screen,
ragged moon in a ragged cloud,
Lazarus risen, trailing his shroud,
a powdered thumbprint on the sky
that blurs the stars we travel by,
thin wafer vagrant souls are fed,
wholly insufficient bread
we bless and break, and multiply.

Alfred Nicol’s books include *Animal Psalms and Brief Accident of Light*, a collaboration with Rhina Espaillat. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The New England Review*, *Dark Horse*, *Commonweal* and *The Best American Poetry 2018*.

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Finding time for a retreat can seem overwhelming. Finding a location for one is even more so. Our list of retreat houses can help guide your search. But first, let's begin with the basics.

What is a retreat and why should I go on one? Simply put, a retreat is an extended period of prayer, often offering periods of silence or opportunities for faith sharing. At a retreat house, a team of spiritual directors or speakers can help you find God.

What sort of retreat should I look for? There are many types of retreats, so you can choose a style that fits your spirituality. On a directed retreat, a person meets daily with

a spiritual director to discuss what is coming up in one's prayer life. A guided retreat may focus more on one topic (say, women's spirituality) and can offer presentations and opportunities to meet with a director. Preached retreats consist of listening to spiritual talks and praying on your own or sometimes in faith sharing groups.

How can I find a retreat that is a good fit for me? The retreat houses in this guide are good places to start. They offer the chance to connect with trained professionals who may be able to help you find a location and style of retreat that works for you or to connect with a regular spiritual director.



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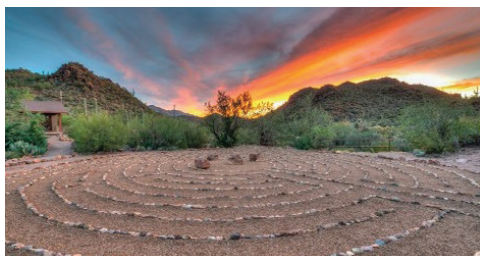
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READY FOR REVIVAL

In Indianapolis, I encountered the real presence of the American church

By Joe Hoover



The bishop whose voice cracked. The bishop from Crookston, Minn., who stood before thousands of people on a Sunday morning in the House of Peyton transformed into the House of God, and said in the final moments of the final Mass, “And now the Eucharistic Congress has ended.” Who got choked up, the emotion of the whole experience coming through for just a moment.

A woman who confided to me over bratwursts and lemonades, regarding the revival: “America needs it. Whatever side you’re on. Everyone knows we need it.”

A congress attendee at the Indianapolis airport who said how wonderful it was seeing the bishops pro-

cess out of Mass, all in white, like missionaries sent by the Holy Spirit to evangelize the world.

The overarching focus of the event was the “real presence”: talks, lectures, exhibitions, Masses, benediction, exhortations, musical performances, podcasts, panelists proclaiming Christ is truly present at the Eucharistic table of the Lord.

And then there was another real presence. The real presence of Christ in moments of unscripted honesty and truth and people just being kind of sweet.

Christ under the appearance of bread and wine, and under the appearance of people just trying to do their best and be Catholic and press forward with their lives.



OSV News photo/Bob Roller

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., chairman of the board of the National Eucharistic Congress, blesses pilgrims during adoration on the opening night of this year's congress at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

A Divine Invitation

The National Eucharistic Congress, held between July 17 and 21 at the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium, home of the Indianapolis Colts, was the centerpiece of a three-year Eucharistic Revival initiated by the American bishops in 2021. (The third year, taking place now, is called the mission year, in which Catholics are encouraged to “walk with one person” on a journey to faith and the church.) While there had been an International Eucharistic Congress held in Philadelphia in 1976, this was the first congress hosted by the U.S. Catholic Church in 83 years.

Outside of the crowds that gathered for papal visits,

including World Youth Day in Denver in 1993, it was perhaps the largest gathering of Catholics on American soil in decades. According to the congress press office, the event included participants from all 50 states and 31 countries, speaking 53 languages.

The revival itself was spurred by a poll in 2021 that indicated (correctly or incorrectly; people debate this) that an alarming number of Catholics do not believe in the “real presence.” According to the revival’s website, the event is the “joyful, expectant, grassroots response of the Church in the United States to the divine invitation to be united once again around the source and summit of our faith in the celebration of the Eucharist.”

And so upward of 55,000 people wearing orange canvas Eucharistic Congress knapsacks gathered in the heartland to hear about and experience the fundamental Catholic truth of God’s presence in the Eucharist. Sessions in the stadium bore a megachurch flavor, with the keynote presenters broadcast on large screens on either side of where they stood on stage. There were superb lighting effects creating visual backdrops ranging from red and orange stained glass to starry purple, while praise and worship music underscored speakers as they finished their presentations.

There were theological talks, history lectures and metaphysical exhortations on the Eucharist in breakout sessions and on panels: “I Object: Answering Fundamentalist Attacks on the Eucharist.” “The Martyrs of La Florida: A Great Eucharistic Defense in Our History.” There was a session for youth: “Finding Forever: Our Ache for Jesus in the Eucharist.” “The Miracle Hunter” shared stories of his worldwide search for the supernatural occurrences manifested through the Eucharist.

A man who plays Jesus on TV spoke to us wearing a T-shirt with the Flannery O’Connor line about the Eucharist: “If it’s a symbol, to hell with it.” Many people wore another T-shirt designed for the conference: “Body, Blood, Soul, Divinity.”

There was a chapel set aside for 24-hour adoration. There were holy hours and silent adoration and Benediction. If anyone doubts that Eucharistic adoration is a big deal for Catholics, particularly young Catholics, these days, their doubts would have been put to rest in Indianapolis. It seemed as if the topic of silent adoration was on everyone’s lips.

To light up the monstrance in appropriately dramatic fashion, the stadium’s lighting designer (I was told) studied the lighting of the gold idol in “Raiders of the Lost Ark.”

There was a Eucharistic procession in which 60,000



National Eucharistic Congress attendees listen to the music of Matt Maher during the nightly revival meeting on July 20.

people marched through downtown Indianapolis, carrying banners, singing and praying the rosary. Sisters of Life and Knights of Columbus and the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, among dozens of other lay and religious groups, were there. Members of Regnum Christi sang the old standby “Here I Am, Lord,” by Dan Schutte, while other groups shouted “Viva Cristo Rey!” as they followed a flatbed truck turned into a mobile Eucharistic altar carrying Christ in the monstrance.

Paul Shelton, S.J., wrote for **America’s** website that, while he was processing with 1,000 priests, “people shouted their gratitude at us: ‘Thank you, priests, for letting us have Jesus.’”

In all of this massive spotlight on the real presence, I could not help but think: The real presence of the Eucharist was being made large at this moment, so that it eventually could become small again. The church was reminding us over and over how vital, life-transforming and salvific the Eucharist is (we put it on a flatbed truck, lit it up like in a movie) so we would want to take it in to fit inside our own body and blood.

It was something like a new romance or the rekindling of an old one: hiring a Piper Cub to write your girlfriend’s name in dramatic vapor trails across the sky... so eventually, after years together, you find yourselves a quiet, undramat-

ic part of each other’s lives. The Eucharist perched at the top of a downtown war memorial, so that it becomes small and personal enough to slip into the heart. Metabolized and “invisible” except in the kinds of people it makes us.

Moments of Awakening

The discussion and exhortations throughout the conference were not solely about the real presence. The pro-life activist Lila Rose gave a talk comparing Joan Andrews Bell to Joan of Arc: Joan who went to federal prison for blocking an abortion clinic, Joan who was burned at the stake for refusing to recant her visions.

Gloria Purvis, the host of a podcast at America Media, said on the last night of the congress: “Racism is an affront to God’s declaration about humanity. It says God made some of us in His image and likeness but not all of us.... [Racism] attacks all of us because we are a family.” And, “No matter who’s in the White House, the governor’s house, the mayor’s house, Jesus Christ is always on the throne. We must obey God rather than men.”

The author Chris Stefanick, in a black T-shirt, gave a keynote talk sharing about the time years before that he tried to persuade a man to believe the church’s position on abortion. The man responded, “Yeah, but I just think my mom *should* have aborted me.”



Jonathan Roumie, best known for his television role as Jesus Christ in “The Chosen,” speaks during the National Eucharistic Congress on July 20.

It was a moment of awakening, Mr. Stefanick said, having marshaled church teaching as the initial sally into the life of someone who was immensely suffering. “We need to get back to basics,” Mr. Stefanick added. He quoted the words of Pope Francis: “The first thing on the lips of every saint should be ‘Jesus Christ loves you.’”

A group called Eden Invitation led a breakout session described as “exploring how discordant experiences of sexuality and gender can be united to the Paschal Mystery and Christ’s Eucharistic love.”

Mark Lemech of Detroit told me about Christ in the City, whose approach, he said, is to go into the city streets inviting people into faith. “Would you like a free rosary? Are you Christian, are you Catholic? Do you go to church?” They begin with these questions, he said, and then, “We challenge them to go a step further. ‘Come to my church, come to Bible study, come to my Mass.’”

In the Marketplace

Dozens upon dozens of stalls and exhibitions were spread out in a vast marketplace hall in the Indiana Convention Center. In more than a few corners it was a marketplace of strength, a marketplace of clarity, of vendors trying to help people stay true to what is Catholic and avoid what is not Catholic.

Aquinas Wealth Advisors helps investors align their portfolios with the U.S. bishops’ social justice priorities (avoiding investing in companies related to abortion, pornography, gambling, military contracting and other issues).

Catholic Owned advertises itself as a consortium of companies owned by people who are practicing Catholics in good standing, are faithful to the magisterium and pray the rosary daily. “Our company is consecrated to the Immaculate Heart” says its founder, Brooke Joyner, “and the work we do is in reparation for the blasphemies against her.”

Other groups advocating for strength and clarity and purity included The Knights of Columbus: “Protecting the Catholic family by strengthening Catholic men.” The Well-Ordered Family: “Reclaiming order and clarity in your family.” Templars: an order of young men focused on masculinity and a “heroic desire to do good—for the advancement of all that is worthwhile and of God.” Catholic Answers: “to explain and defend the faith.” Exodus 90: challenging men to realign their spiritual lives, freeing themselves from unhealthy attachments. (They do this through, among other things, 90-day regimens of prayer, cold showers, detaching from technology, exercise, dietary restrictions and fasting.)

There were Catholic comics, Catholic educational



OSV News photo/Bob Roller

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Pope Francis' special envoy to the National Eucharistic Congress, waves alongside Cardinal Christophe Pierre, papal nuncio to the United States, in the Eucharistic procession in downtown Indianapolis on July 20.

toys, Catholic colleges. Holy medals and priestly vestments and caskets. Boy Scouts and publishing houses and poverty programs. A Catholic doctors association, a nurses association, prayer apps. A Catholic miscarriage ministry, youth ministry, pro-life ministry, disability ministry. A Catholic peacemaking group.

Several religious orders had tables—among them Benedictine sisters, Carmelites, Marianists, Dehonians, Dominicans and several different orders of Franciscans. (My own order, the Society of Jesus, had a vocation table that five or six young Jesuits manned. I found myself surprised that, outside of that table, so few of us were present at the event.)

Next to the marketplace, volunteers in yellow hairnets worked an assembly line putting together food packages for the Million Meals Movement sponsored by a group called Helping Hoosiers Fight Hunger.

The congress was sponsored, at various levels, by Relevant Radio, OSV, the Knights of Columbus, the Augustine Institute, EWTN, Exodus 90, Legatus, the Franciscan University of Steubenville, the University of Mary and others.

There was a reliquary chapel, the Eucharistic Miracles exhibition, the perpetual adoration chapel, the Eucharistic Village. The Shroud of Turin replica and hologram. An exhibition about Blessed Carlos Acutis, a young man who

created a website advertising the Eucharistic miracles all over the world and who will soon, after his canonization was approved in July, become the first millennial saint.

At one point, high school students from Cleveland spontaneously gathered under a bronze cross in the Eucharistic Village and chanted at the top of their lungs, “Let’s go Jesus, I love Jesus, we love Jesus, we love Jesus!”

One girl in the group told me that the congress “has been a sneak peek into heaven.”

She continued: “I’ve been going through stuff in my own life and thoughts from the devil entered my mind lately, but there have been talks [here] that have been opening my heart back to Jesus and casting those thoughts down to the pit of hell.”

Looking at who sponsored the congress and who had exhibition tables and the topics addressed at the congress and offenses against the Immaculate Heart of Mary and Jesus on the throne and would you like a rosary and casting the devil into the pits of hell and going to federal prison as compared to burning at the stake, the question arises: Was this *a church*, or was this *the church*? Was it merely one unique and like-minded segment of Catholics who reside among many different segments of the American church? Was this a particularly enthusiastic minority, the few kids on the yell squad in otherwise lukewarm high school



OSV News photo/Bob Roller

A pilgrim receives Communion on July 21, during the final Mass of the National Eucharistic Congress.

bleachers?

Or were those present at the congress representative of the majority of the church—at least the ones still going to Mass and keeping the whole enterprise alive?

The U.S. church plans to spend about \$14 million, all told, on the three-year National Eucharistic Revival. There have been the inevitable complaints about bishops spending \$14 million on this. (To my thinking, this reflects an unfortunate utilitarian streak in the church that discounts the power and efficacy of culture, beauty and mass worship gatherings like this one.)

The closing Mass of the event, celebrated by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, the Filipino prelate who is part of the leadership of the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelization, was accompanied by the 50-piece Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, all in black, which included 15 violinists. The Mass began with a 29-minute entrance procession with hundreds and hundreds of seminarians and deacons and priests and bishops, dressed in white. It was man after man processing in. And it hits home in a particularly vivid way as one looks down on a group of nearly two thousand men walking slowly through the stadium to take their seats in the front rows of a Mass: The church is almost thoroughly and completely led by men.

In his homily, Cardinal Tagle said, "Go and share Jesus'

tenderness to the weary and the suffering.... A Eucharistic people is a missionary and evangelizing people." He then went on to preside over the final manifestation of the real presence in the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

This Is a Big Deal

Bishop Cozzens, the prelate from Crookston, Minn., spearheaded the revival. During the congress he knelt before the Eucharist and carried it through downtown streets in front of the 60,000 people and talked to it and held it aloft shining and Spielbergian and in several other ways signaled that *this means something*. *This is a big deal*.

And then, at the end of the final Mass, before the final blessing, he stood up and said, "And now our Eucharistic Congress has come to an end," and he choked up.

This was the other real presence of the congress: Sweetly and spontaneously, and with no forced evangelical emotion, the bishop gets choked up and so manifests the kind of real presence that lives in a voice that cracks because what the man deeply cares about has ended. And in such a moment he is very easy to love.

The young seminarian from West Virginia in a crisp, black cassock (like many of the seminarians at the event wore) who said of the congress, "Maybe this will draw the



OSV News photo/Natalie Hoeter, The Criterion

Russ Hoffman, left, and Megan Ferguson, right, join Blake Brouillette of Christ in the City in talking with a homeless woman in Indianapolis on July 18. Christ in the City, a Denver-based ministry, organized a “street walk” for congress attendees to engage with the homeless.

wider church into unity. Young seminarians are asking themselves, ‘How are we going to build unity in the church and priesthood?’”

And saying that he wants to build a parish committed to good liturgy and the works of social justice. With such a parish, he said, it is impossible to have a lukewarm congregation.

That kind of real presence.

Or a man in the marketplace selling Catholic Lego sets. “You know, we had all these Lego sets [growing up] and we were going to Mass every week but there were no priests in Legoland. My hope is that one day that some kid says, *I first started thinking about becoming a priest when I was playing with my Lego set...*”

People kneeling cramped between the rows of blue seats on the hard concrete in the stands of Lucas Oil Stadium, silently adoring the host on the stadium floor below. Adoring beneath all those banners hanging from the rafters where it occurs to you that someone had to risk their life on a catwalk that seemed like it was 10,000 feet high to tell the

world that the Colts won the AFC South Division. And below, something greater than the Colts is here: the body of Christ that resides in the gold monstrance flanked by two gold candles, and is also kneeling in the stands surrounding it.

A woman at the Eucharistic procession pushing her disabled son in a wheelchair: “People are nice,” she said. “People offer to help. It’s inspiring, all these people. People say the world is horrible. You know it’s not. Look at all the people that are here.”

Caroline Mondello of Prairieville, La., who, when asked what she loved about the congress, said, “The kindness of everyone, opening doors. Acknowledging a giant group of Catholics...united in one purpose.”

As reported by her young son, Caroline told her children, “How beautiful it would be if every person here gave a poor person one dollar. They would have 50 thousand dollars!”

All of this, the other “real presence.”

Was the Congress “a segment” of the church, or did it represent “the totality” of the American church? The ques-



Bishops process in Indianapolis during the National Eucharistic Congress on July 20.

tion is ultimately a little inane, because it is a sociological question, one answered only through polls and studies and categories. And trying to understand the church through any socio-ecclesial category is like trying to use a slide rule to measure someone's vital signs. It can't be done.

This is what the church is: Wherever two or more are gathered in my name....

The first International Eucharistic Congress took place in Lille, France, in 1881. The laywoman Marie-Marthe-Baptistine Tamisier pleaded with the clergy for 10 years to make it happen. Her desire was to counter the effects of the French Revolution and bring religion back into the public square in France.

One hundred and forty years later and an ocean away, one woman articulated succinctly what Marie-Marthe-Baptistine was trying to do in France, and was now happening in the United States. Jennifer Razo of North Lima, Ohio, over a bratwurst at a picnic table in the Eucharistic Village, said, "America needs [the revival]. Whatever side you're on. Everyone knows we need it. It is part of a new movement. The

climate is right for this revival, because we are broken.

"America and even people of faith are broken in spirit because of the conditions of the world," she said. "As a nation I feel we're broken. As a group of Catholics our spirit is wounded, we're hurting, we're hanging in there, there's nothing else to do but press forward."

What got her there in the first place? "I need to be closer to Christ," Jennifer said. "I just want to absorb every opportunity."

And she was just there, with everyone else, showing up, pressing forward, present.

Joe Hoover, S.J., is *America's* poetry editor and producer of the film "The Allegory."



Albert Lop/NurPhoto via AP

Colm Tóibín on Dramatizing the World as It Is

By Emma Winters

More than two decades after Colm Tóibín published his beloved novel *Brooklyn*, he has surprised fans (and himself) by writing *Long Island*, a follow-up featuring many of the same characters. *Brooklyn*, which was made into a film starring Saoirse Ronan in 2015, followed Eilis Lacey, a young Irish woman who emigrated to America in the 1950s.

Flash-forward to *Long Island*. It is now the 1970s, and Eilis is settled in a quiet, suburban cul-de-sac with two teenage children, her husband, Tony, and her in-laws. Her life is radically disrupted when an Irish man comes to her door. The man tells Eilis that Tony has had an affair with his wife, and she is now pregnant. His family won't keep the child, and he will drop the new baby on Eilis's doorstep. This proclamation—and her family's response—sets the plot of *Long Island* in motion as it fractures Eilis's previously happy life and leads her to return to Ireland for the first time in two decades.

In July, I interviewed Colm Tóibín over Zoom about *Brooklyn*, *Long Island*, the writing life and more. This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

What brought you back to the character of Eilis Lacey?

I wish I knew. It never occurred to me I would do that. The only image I ever had in my head—and I had it quite strongly over a number of years—was sometime in the future after the novel *Brooklyn*. Eilis's brother would be walking on the beach at Ballincollig, the beach in Ireland that's mentioned in both novels. There would be two teenagers with him, and they're clearly in some obvious way not Irish, probably of Italian origin. They're tall, and they're good-looking. It's not just that they're good-looking, as much as confident.

Someone from the town would ask, "Who are these?" And he would say, "Oh, they're Eilis's kids. They're just back for the summer to see their granny." And the person from

Colm Tóibín has surprised fans by writing *Long Island*, a followup to his beloved novel *Brooklyn*. The author is pictured in 2022 in Barcelona.

the town would just say, “Hmm.” That’s all I had. And I, in fact, ended up writing that scene and then taking it out of *Long Island*. It’s not actually in *Long Island*, but it was in the draft for a good while.

Just before the pandemic, the idea of the opening of the book occurred to me. Normally, I wouldn’t entertain an idea like this because it’s too plot-led. Normally, I would have left it, but for some reason, it stayed with me. I didn’t write notes or anything. It just stayed in my mind, and then I began to work on the book.

Do you feel any of the characters have changed in significant ways since Brooklyn? If so, which ones?

This novel is dialogue-led. The main person who does the talking is Eilis. She’s become more articulate. She has a forensic way of examining things, and I didn’t want to overdo that. Looking at her character in *Brooklyn*, she’s someone who was hesitant in speech. She’s become less hesitant as time goes on. That’s the big change in *Long Island*.

Eilis’s mother is performing [at] being quite unpleasant, and she’s performing [at] being very pleasant. She’s been so lonely that, no matter what she does, it’s going to be inauthentic. Jim seems very much the same, although we get much more of him. Nancy is very much the same too.

With Tony, a lot of readers have come up with one way of looking at this. They believe the novel makes clear what a beast Tony is. This is not how I see things. These things happen and they’re not ideal, but it’s not as if Eilis is suddenly living with this monstrous figure. Some readers don’t buy this. Some readers think it’s horrible, it’s disappointing, and how could you do this?

The flippant answer is that God made adultery so we could have novels. This is one of the things the world knows, and if it’s in the world, it’s part of creation. It’s not as though I have decided to bring this into the world.

I don’t think Tony changes. This is one of those things that gives rise to the drama of the novel. Without it, there is no novel. I get quite a lot of emails about this through my website. Readers are so upset.

That’s interesting. I didn’t interpret Tony as a beast. When Eilis goes back to Ireland in Brooklyn, she has an emotional affair, at least, with Jim. It’s not unbelievable Tony could have had a similar experience 20 years on.

Exactly. This is what happens in novels.

One thing that always stands out to me about your writing is the rich internal life of the characters. How do you bring that onto the page?

This comes first when you’re aware that you’re dealing with someone whose silences matter, whose interiority matters, and they’re constantly moving away from a dialogue not into monologue but into a sort of reverie or silence.

You have to do this all the time as a writer. If you’re not doing it, then you’re just getting an adventure novel. “The dragon came toward him. He put a sword in the dragon.” You can do that, but you have to write what the dragon was doing that morning when the dragon was alone remembering a funny moment about some strange thing that happened.

That’s first. Before anything, you’ve got to give characters a rich interior life.

You followed three different people closely throughout the book. How did you decide when to follow Jim, when to follow Nancy, and when to follow Eilis?

It’s really crude. The general idea was I’d write 5,000 words and then switch perspectives. I broke that a few times, but the general idea was the blocks of words would be equal in length.

You need these people who have stayed in Ireland. They know more than Eilis does about some things. The only way you can give this knowledge to the reader is through other characters’ inner lives.

The first rule was the length. The second rule was as soon as I begin each section, without saying the name of the person, I go straight into something dramatic happening to them. That’s to avoid a moment where the reader says, “I wish I knew which of them this is.” When there’s a fire in the chip shop, you know it’s going to Nancy. With Jim, the bar is his thing. The reader doesn’t even notice the perspective shift because it’s total immersion within a few sentences.

Which scene in the novel was the most challenging to write?

I had real difficulty—I mean, real difficulty—with the scene where Eilis goes to the Montrose Hotel to meet Jim. The first time around I had a little moment where you realize she did go—with nothing descriptive, nothing dramatic. I thought that was enough.

My editor said to me, “Did she or did she not go to the Montrose Hotel? We need to know what happened. It’s too



‘At the moment, I’m doing nothing much but reading, and that’s lovely.’

big a thing.”

It’s always been a struggle, the whole matter of writing about sex. The general agreement is you can write anything you want in any frank way you want. I didn’t want to describe this for an artistic reason. The moderators were both Jim and Eilis. They would have been so shy, so nervous, so reticent that they themselves would never have, even in their own interior [monologues], gone through it with words. I just feel it’s not something they themselves would describe.

I didn’t want to write that whole scene, but I did go beyond the three sentences I wrote initially. There’s still a paragraph missing, almost. I feel the reader can work out pretty easily that this was very sweet for both of them. It took a lot of back and forth and writing.

Do you think anyone really wins in this novel?

Eilis’s mother wins.

I agree, and I loved seeing her win.

All along, from the moment she appears, you just presume she’s going to be horribly abandoned. This business of the grandchildren will be such a great memory for her. How will she live after they’re gone? And of course, she has got other plans.

She’s become even more shrewd since Brooklyn. She couldn’t find anything to do but just go up to her room and not come down in the end. Now, in Long Island, she’s found her ticket to America.

She got her ticket. She got her passport. She got everything ready.

This happened to a friend of mine. She had three tickets for the World Cup in Italy in 1990, a massive stadium in Rome. Her Irish mother in Dublin said, “I’d like to come.” She said, “You’re 80 years old. You’ve never been to a football match. It is impossible to get you to Rome.” The mother said, “I’ve got an airplane ticket, and I’ll go with you to the match.” My friend insisted, “But you’ve never been at

a soccer match.” She said, “I know, but I watched them on television.”

It ended up with this woman, aged 80 from Dublin, going to the match. It was always on my mind: the idea that she must have woken up one morning and thought this would be such a great thing to do, and so she did.

The Rev. Flood is central to Eilis’s journey and integration in Brooklyn. There’s not a religious figure in Long Island who seems quite as involved in anyone’s life. Does that reflect a change in the characters, in their religiosity, or a change in Irish culture from the 1950s to the ’70s?

Father Flood is very much an immigrant priest. This type of priest had a spiritual dimension, but actually what the priest was doing was looking after people. Now that Eilis is settled in America, she doesn’t have those needs.

In Ireland, it’s like that saying, “There are no camels mentioned in the Quran.” The reason there are no camels mentioned is because there’s so many camels it is presumed that they are there. In the same way, the cathedral is at the very center of everyone’s life, but it only gets mentioned a few times in the book. The church is fundamentally there to such an extent you don’t need to mention it all the time. I’m trying to dramatize a church that I understand and that I saw.

At the end of both Brooklyn and Long Island, we know Eilis is going back to America, but don’t witness her return. Why did you end both novels where you did?

There was a big debate in the 19th century about how to end a novel. With *Middlemarch*, George Eliot wrote this massive book, a sort of panorama of society. How do you end it? How do you end it on a single image, when there are so many different strands in the book? So what she does is tell you what happens to the characters over the next 20 to 30 years. That’s satisfying, but it is also as though you’re moving out of the circular realm of the novel into a straight line.

Henry James, about eight years later, ended *The Portrait of a Lady* with Isabel Archer going back to her husband. And it’s done. You turn the page, and there’s no pages, nothing. That’s it. She’s gone back to her husband, and people just put the book down and start blaming Henry James.

I felt if I gave all the characters an afterlife it would ruin the integrity of the books. *Long Island* is a single story that is over when summer ends at the end of August. If I go into too much detail, I would be telling you something you know already. I can’t give you her arrival home because you already know what it’s like when she goes back. It’s the same with *Brooklyn*.

In the last pages of both books, I am telling you something you do not know. If I go on, I am telling you something you already know. It's no use.

Are you done with Eilis?

It takes me ages to come up with new ideas. I have absolutely no ideas. At the moment, I'm doing nothing much but reading, and that's lovely.

I understand that Costco is now carrying Long Island, and your publisher recently released an Instagram clip that chronicled your first visit there. What do you like best about Costco?

When I was growing up in Ireland, chicken was really a luxury. You didn't have a whole chicken every week. I'm still a sucker for that pre-cooked, hot chicken.

It was something you could take out from a supermarket in Spain in the summer. It's a wonderful thing on a summer Sunday. At Costco, the chicken is \$4.99! And it's not just a bony thing. I did think that chicken was pretty impressive. This seemed to me to be a big, big chicken.

Writers do readings all the time. I thought [in that video] that maybe instead of reading a bit of my book on video, I would tell people about Costco chickens. To make myself more useful.

Emma Winters is a writer and student of narrative medicine at Columbia University. She is a former O'Hare fellow at America.

BIBLE STUDY

By Joshua Kulseth

The complimentary lounge coffee is predictably empty, yet every few minutes regular undergrads with mugs descend, and depressing the dispenser, suffer only its death rattle, settling instead for whatever cold leftovers sputter to the top. The drudgery of it makes me think of Camus: *should I kill myself*

or have a cup of coffee? The Sisyphean slog. I notice a woman working, her laptop covered in stickers; one says, *Coffee and Jesus*, so I fish the Bible from my backpack, hoping she notices. I turn at random, making only a moderate production of flipping pages, to Second Samuel: David's cry

for Saul and Jonathan, dead in battle—*Thy glory, O Israel is slain upon thy high places! How are the mighty fallen!* And she begins packing up to leave—*Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ash-Kelon*—should I kill myself, or have a cup of coffee—and a fresh pot appears.

Joshua Kulseth's poems have appeared and are forthcoming in Tar River Poetry, The Emerson Review and The Windhover. He has co-authored Agony: Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and the Greeks, and W. H. Auden at Work: The Craft of Revision. He is an assistant professor of English at Franciscan University of Steubenville.

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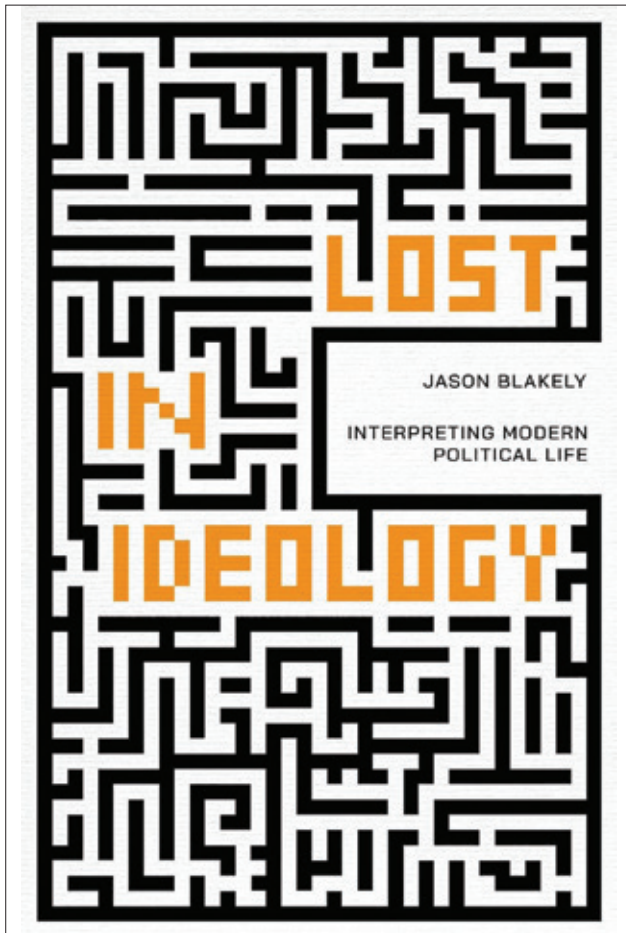


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LOOSENING IDEOLOGY'S GRIP



Agenda Publishing / 208p \$25

It's election season in the United States, and I, like many others, find myself contemplating the weighty question of how people can be so stupid.

I want a sarcastic lawn sign that reads "I'm an IDIOT, and I VOTE," but I have been too lazy to get one printed up. I have nevertheless recently taken a break from the outrage that fills my email inbox to read Jason Blakely's new book, *Lost in Ideology*, and it has been a balm for the soul.

More than just another anodyne admonition to dialogue with one another across political divides, *Lost in Ideology* lays out a roadmap of contemporary ideologies across the political spectrum, explains their appeal and tries to loosen their grip on us by diagnosing exactly how people get lost in them. Blakely's hope "is that the reader will fall slightly less in love with their own ideology, and have a more nuanced, if still critical understanding of one that is not their own."

Blakely likens ideologies to both stories and maps; we need them to make sense of the world. Yet both tend

to oversimplify a complex situation and to include some things while excluding others. The same tendency haunts our efforts to understand the ideologies of others. We dismiss rival ideologies as mere products of demographics, class interests or psychological traumas. Blakely tries instead to listen carefully to the stories that each ideology tells to discern what genuine goods it tries to protect and advance. At the same time, he offers tools for criticizing ideologies, tools that come from no particular ideology but apply to them all.

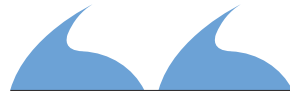
The main such tool is a recognition that ideologies are cultural, similar to other meaning-making activities like literature and theater. Ideologies do not simply reflect the world as it is but help to make the world. Ideologies go bad when they cannot tell their own story as cultural creations but claim instead to be natural, the simple product of reason or science or common sense. Once one regards one's own view as natural, opposing views are rendered unnatural, perversions that will need correction by force, since their adherents seem immune to reason.

Classical liberalism, for example, saw its view of rights as "self-evident," in the words of the Declaration of Independence. John Locke's view is appealing because it promises an anti-paternalistic contract that guarantees equality and self-governance. Locke thought the "state of nature" was one of autonomous individual property holders, but Blakely points out how unnatural would be a human condition without community, kin networks and revealed religion. Native Americans found the idea of private property blasphemous; Locke's view, Blakely notes, was a perfect fit with the settler colonialism that was remaking the world.

This does not mean that classical liberalism is without merit, but it does mean that liberal agents are a cultural production, not simply a product of nature. This realization could help restrain the imperialism that sees liberalism as the universal destiny of all humankind, to be encouraged or imposed by force as necessary.

Blakely's dissection of Lockean liberalism takes all of 10 pages. Throughout the book, Blakely displays a remarkable knack for getting to the heart of an ideology in a few deft strokes. For example: Utilitarianism promises a calculus for ethics based on increasing aggregate pleasure, but it results in a technocracy in which "science" is invoked to silence ideological foes. Another example: Civic republicanism invests freedom in communities, not individuals, but thereby risks localist forms of tyranny and racism.

Lost in Ideology is most interesting when it examines the contemporary split of classic liberalisms into left and right. Progressives believe in ever-greater freedom in ev-



Blakely displays a remarkable knack for getting to the heart of an ideology in a few deft strokes.

er-changing circumstances; they get lost in ideology when they think that everyone will eventually think like them, rendering those who disagree backward and anachronistic. Conservatives believe in defending tradition, but they get lost in ideology when they don't recognize that traditions change. Traditions are, as Alasdair MacIntyre says, ongoing arguments about what needs to be conserved in any particular circumstances.

The idea that traditions change can in fact be illustrated by the hybridization since the 1960s of conservatism with libertarianism, Main Street with Wall Street. Capitalism's restless "creative destruction" is anathema to conserving the landscapes, small businesses and small-town values to which conservatives appeal; the logic of "choice" underlies both capitalism and abortion rights.

Trumpism is a hybrid in which nostalgia for the past is harnessed to a desire not to conserve but to overturn. Trump combines conservative and libertarian themes with classic fascism: A once-great people faces peril from enemies, and one exceptional leader can save them. Fascism is both reactionary and revolutionary, and it relies on stories that are mostly untrue. But Blakely strives to understand its appeal, and he recognizes that fascism—like socialism, which he treats in another chapter—is rarely found in pure form but constantly changes and combines with other ideologies.

Marxist socialism, Blakely argues, evolved from an egalitarian ethos to a hierarchical, technocratic bureaucracy because it viewed Marxism as a science rather than a cultural and ethical system, again getting lost in ideology. One reason the scientific view of Marxism lost persuasive power was that capitalism did not behave as Marx predicted; it absorbed many of Marx's ideas through the welfare state.

Again, ideologies are seldom as pure as they present themselves to be. In the final chapters of *Lost in Ideology*, Blakely examines nationalism, multiculturalism, feminism and ecological politics and shows how these ideologies often cross left-right boundaries. Nationalism and environmentalism can be of the left or the right; feminists can critique multiculturalism as a cover for Muslim oppression of women. According to Blakely, the left-right taxonomy itself can have ideological purposes, with liberals putting themselves in the sensible middle between fascists and communists.

This book is quite simply the best guide to today's dominant ideologies. Blakely is concise, sympathetic, insightful, critical and fair. I have a few quibbles along the way: I think Blakely too neatly divides ideologies from "religions," and

nationalism from patriotism. But he practices throughout the general approach that he summarizes in the conclusion. To avoid getting lost in ideology, one must be "multilingual," able to understand more than one ideology and to understand why someone else's is attractive.

Blakely does not pretend to have discovered a neutral science from which to judge the various ideologies on offer. In fact, he criticizes empirical political "science"; trying to reduce political analysis to data describing people's behaviors and beliefs reduces political convictions to a mere irrational act of the will.

Blakely does not deny that we need normative criteria—for a Christian, theological and ethical criteria derived from the Gospel—to construct a worldview and judge ideologies. But his book is a more modest exercise in intellectual humility, of seeing our blind spots. Criticism from outside an ideology can show that a given ideology does not simply describe the way things are; race and ethnicity, for example, are invented, not natural, categories. Internal criticism can point to contradictions—conservatism's incompatibility with capitalism, for example—or show that an authoritative figure within a tradition is at odds with its ideology, asking, for instance, what Jesus would think of Christian nationalism.

Ideologies are not defeated by simple arguments, but neither are they immune, and some are more vulnerable than others. Blakely is not a relativist who thinks that all ideologies are equally good or bad. His hope is rather that, by loosening the grip of ideologies on each of us, we might be able to see the human beings in each camp: people whose value exceeds their own understanding. It is a timely reminder for election season.

William T. Cavanaugh is a professor of Catholic studies at DePaul University in Chicago.

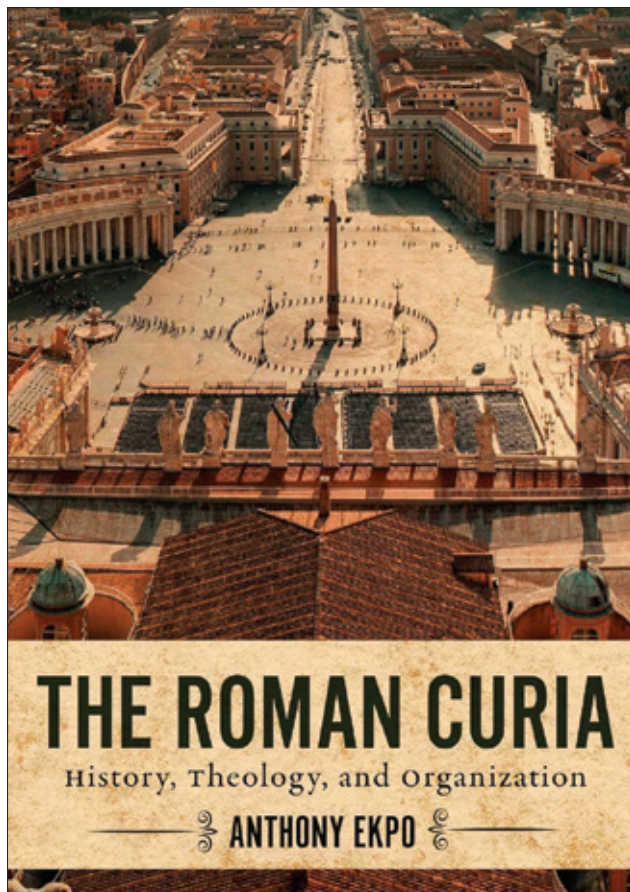


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Omnia rapiens, nihil dans. “Taking everything, giving nothing.” I heard this definition of the Roman Curia from a prominent archbishop many years ago. It illustrates the villainous image of the Curia in the minds of many. Pope Francis has perhaps unintentionally reinforced that negative image with his early Christmas messages to the Curia, criticizing pretensions and urging conversion.

From the perspective of my own service of eight years in the Curia (at the Secretariat of State from 1971 to 1973 and the Congregation—now Dicastery—for Bishops from 1973 to 1979), I can say that, although I did see some villainy, I also saw the greater good that the Curia does in service to the pope and the church. Officials of the Roman Curia are fallible human beings, but they do love the church.

Seven of my eight years were during the pontificate of St. Paul VI, truly a servant of the church. Many times in addressing controversies, he would send the directive: “Consult the president of the bishops’ conference.” My final year was the first year of the pontificate of St. John Paul II. His election was a shock to the Curia. After several months, one high-ranking prelate said to me, “Maybe a non-Italian is not so bad.”

The Curia is a mystery, but it need not be a shadowy mystery. Recently written by Monsignor Anthony Ekpo, undersecretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *The Roman Curia: History, Theology and Organization* contributes greatly to our understanding of the structures and organization of the Curia.

At the very beginning, the author distinguishes the Curia from Vatican City-State, which is a sovereign entity with its own governance and administration. He then also distinguishes the Curia from the Holy See, which is the papacy itself, internationally recognized as a spiritual and moral entity and which is served by the Curia.

Ekpo demonstrates that the Curia is a necessary institution. The bishops of Rome from the earliest years of the church have had to rely on collaborators. Over the centuries, this collaboration became more and more structured and formalized, coalescing ultimately in the 16th century into the organizational mold that we recognize today as the Curia. But, as Ekpo shows, subsequent centuries saw constant changes through the formation, merging, new nomenclature or dissolution of offices. The 20th century saw reforms enacted by Pope St. Paul VI and Pope St. John Paul II, and most recently by Pope Francis—with his apostolic constitution “*Praedicate Evangelium*” (literally, “Preach the Gospel”) of March 19, 2022.

Ekpo’s narrative of the history of the Curia easily leads to the conclusion that “*Praedicate Evangelium*” will not be its last reform. This is further enforced by the theology of the Curia, which is centered on the principles of communion and mission. If the church is a communion with God and within herself, she must engage in mission in order to bring more of humanity into that communion with God and among all peoples.

The Curia has to reflect that twofold nature of the church. It is itself a communion within the church whose mission is to serve the pope and the bishops in the building of universal communion and the engagement of the entire people of God. Since many of the ways of fostering communion and mission have changed over the centuries, so too will the style and offices of the Roman Curia. Just as *ecclesia semper reformanda*, so too *Curia semper reformanda*.

Ekpo’s book is a competent and thorough examination of the currently reformed structures of the Curia in service to the pope and the bishops, and in service to communion and mission. He details the origins of the dicasteries, their internal ordering and their responsibilities. But he does not enter into the dynamics of the operations of the Curia that reveal its inevitable humanity. For that the reader can still turn to the invaluable 1998 work of Thomas Reese, S.J., *Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church*. This book is not mentioned in Ekpo’s bibliography.

When I am asked what I learned from my experience in the Curia, I offer two lessons. The first is the importance of local churches; the second is the importance of networking. Both also reveal the humanity of the Curia's bureaucrats.

There is a dynamic reciprocity between the Curia and local churches. I read countless reports on the activities of local churches and almost always came away with immense appreciation for so much creativity and energy in building communion and mission. I tried to convey through memos to superiors and in the preparation of drafts for responses some of that creativity and energy.

The Curia could learn from that creativity, but two problems have often presented themselves in the past. The first was that sometimes local innovation was pushing the envelope and needed some caution. The second problem was that a curial official could not accept this creativity or innovation into his own understanding, and so opposed it. That led to some debate within a particular dicastery or among dicasteries. It could also lead to bishops getting letters unfairly criticizing some aspect of their governance.

At times during my tenure, I couldn't help but think that some officials were employed on the basis of what Bernard Lonergan once called the "principle of the empty head"—the less a person knew about something, the more objective he or she could be in judging it.

I have the impression that there is much less of that now, and that the Curia is much more accepting of diversity in pastoral action. Again, one of the significant innovations of "Praedicate Evangelium" is that the Curia must see itself as at the service of the pope and the bishops. It is not to see itself as second-guessing bishops. And as synodality is actualized more and more on every level of the church, that will include the Curia; this can only lead to a better relationship with local bishops.

"Praedicate Evangelium" also encourages the recruitment of more lay men and women. This is a dynamic that will bring more diverse energies and perspectives into the workings of the Curia. It is impossible to predict how this will change the culture of the Curia and impact the larger church, but it is a welcome phenomenon.

A second lesson that I learned, and that demonstrates the humanity of curial structures, was the importance of networking. This is true, I suspect, of most organizations. Beneath the formal communications to resolve issues, get information and formulate policies, there is the informal network of relationships that might be friendships, casual acquaintances, or referrals and recommendations.

An illustration: I was once in a line at the Rome airport to check in my luggage to go home for Christmas when there was a tap on my shoulder. It was a papal nuncio who

had just flown in and knew from a mutual friend that I was departing that morning. He was very concerned about an issue that had developed and was looking for a way to resolve it. I made some suggestions and a few months later the issue was resolved favorably.

Networking takes time. As Ekpo points out, "Praedicate Evangelium" says that officials should serve for a period of only five years. This is advantageous insofar as candidates might be more willing to serve for a defined term, and it allows for change in case an official turns out to be not very competent or has become too assertive in allowing his biases to influence his work. But it is also disadvantageous because it takes time to establish a network, especially if the candidate has no previous experience of Rome or does not know Italian.

"Praedicate Evangelium" allows for exceptions to the five-year rule, but that also creates the problem of those staying longer being able to accumulate more power. This is especially true of the Secretariat of State, some of whose officials are a part of the diplomatic service of the Holy See and so are permanent and more influential.

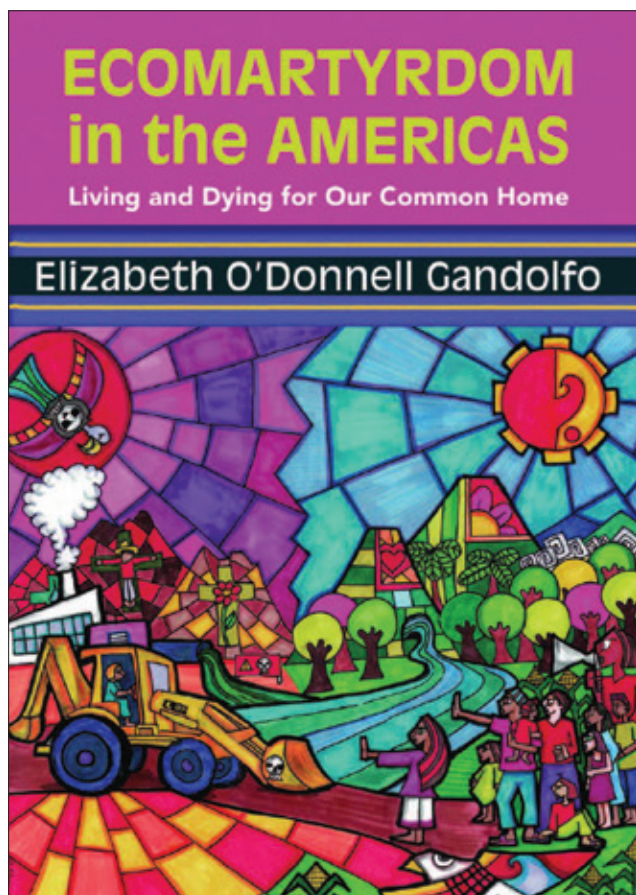
Ekpo, following "Praedicate Evangelium," recognizes service in the Curia as precisely that: service. It was my experience that many of my colleagues throughout the Curia saw themselves as serving the pope and the church in the anonymity of a bureaucracy, with selflessness and perseverance even within the stark conditions of our offices and the length of time required to bring projects to conclusion. As "Praedicate Evangelium" urges, most were engaged in pastoral activity outside of the Curia.

But service in the Curia inevitably means power, especially for those who have more influence in decisions. Even when officials did not have that much power, the mere fact of working in the Curia created an aura of power that gave them more power. The routines of bureaucracy were often disrupted as officials within a dicastery or among dicasteries fought to get their points of view across to one another but most especially to their superiors. Win some, lose some!

Pope Francis insists in "Praedicate Evangelium" that the reform of the Curia hinges on the renewal of hearts. Dedication to service demands a spirituality of service. I have the impression now that there is a greater sense of humble service, welcome and listening on the part of curial officials. But power and ambition abhor a vacuum. And that is why the reform of the Curia will never end.

Msgr. John Strykowski, a retired priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn, served in the Congregation for Bishops for six and a half years and at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for five years.

MARTYRS FOR THE EARTH



Orbis Books / 248p \$28

The Greek word *martyr* means simply “witness”—someone who testifies in court. But for many of us, it brings to mind the early Christians executed by the Roman Empire, perhaps even thrown to the wild beasts, like Perpetua and Felicity. One’s imagination is easily captured by their dramatic story, but a reader who steps back might wonder: What kind of “testimony” was so threatening to the Roman Empire that there was a need to execute a couple of nursing mothers? Martyrdom illuminates how the good news of Jesus Christ, the “dangerous memory” of his death and resurrection, posed a threat to the imperial authority of the Roman Empire.

Today, who or what might be threatened by the testimony of martyrs? Elizabeth O’Donnell Gandolfo’s new book, *Ecomartyrs of the Amazon: Living and Dying for Our Common Home*, reveals how Jesus’ message poses a deep challenge to certain patterns and powers of modern life. She invites us to look carefully at the lives of modern ecomartyrs as a guide to help us “re-imagine and re-embodiment the relationship between human beings and the earth.”

Echoing Pope Francis’ insight in “Laudato Si” that the human environment and the natural environment degrade together, she shows how both are damaged by extractive in-

dustries—mining, oil, logging and other industries. Water resources are threatened by oil spills, by the water-intensive practices of metallic mining and by the collapses of tailings dams that release toxic mining byproducts into local waterways. Deforestation and species loss seem inevitable, and human, animal and plant life are all threatened by the polluted air and water that result from the extraction and use of these resources.

Those who would resist—often, Indigenous peoples—are subject to criminalization and assassination. These dynamics are not new, Gandolfo reminds us; colonialist attitudes toward the Americas have long been characterized by what she calls “extractivism”—a willingness to force some lives and some lands to be sacrificed so that others might prosper. (Slavery, too, was an “extractive industry.”) In the words of Atahualpa Yupanqui (whom Gandolfo quotes), “Some people must ‘spit out blood’ so that others can live a more comfortable life.”

As the climate warms around the globe, it is becoming more and more obvious—even to those who would prefer to deny it—how much the fates of humans and other creatures all over the world are deeply interconnected and very much at risk. But these connections are complex, and the scale of the crisis is overwhelming. How can we begin to comprehend the complex web of connections and draw out some of the strands of our moral responsibility?

Many of us have a clear sense that we ought to do something to respond to such excessive environmental destruction (and its human consequences), especially as it becomes clear to all how vital the Amazon rainforest is for mitigating the effects of climate change. Yet we often struggle to know where to start, because the scale of the problem is overwhelming. This book provides a valuable service by offering a clear picture of our complicity with environmental injustice and revealing some of the ways that lifestyles in the United States and other rich countries are entwined with violence, a violence that ensnares both people and the earth. But Gandolfo does not stop there; she also points us toward clear paths of resistance.

In a chapter titled “Dying for Our Common Home,” Gandolfo describes how global human rights standards are being forced to evolve in response to these urgent problems. With the Rio Declaration of 1992 and the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations and other bodies have begun to establish the idea that human rights must include the right to a safe, clean and sustainable environment. A landmark regional treaty for Latin America and the Caribbean, known as the Escazú Agreement (2021), enshrines legal protections for “environmental human rights defenders.” And extractive industries themselves are arriving at the understanding that they cannot operate in places where they have not obtained the free prior and informed consent of the local populace—a standard endorsed by com-

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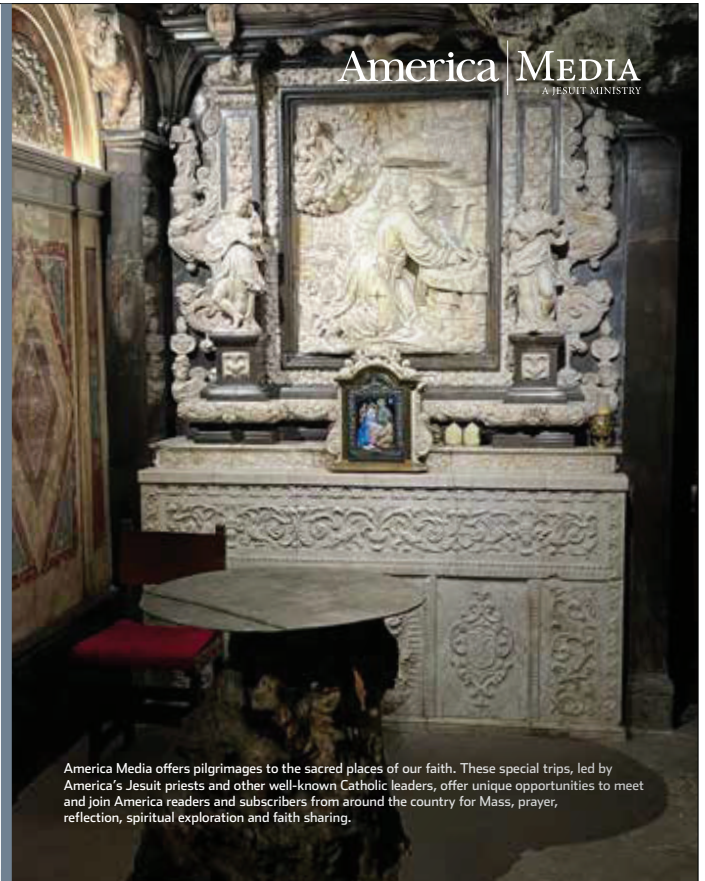
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panies that have signed the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

Just as the meaning of “human rights” must evolve as we acknowledge how much the fate of humanity is wedded to the fate of the broader environment, the category of martyrdom must also expand. As Gandolfo explains, the Latin American churches, at the grass roots as well as among liberation theologians, have for decades been “transforming the meaning of Christian martyrdom” as they cultivate the memory of St. Óscar Romero and other “martyrs of solidarity.” Thinkers like Jon Sobrino, S.J., Leonardo Boff and others have built upon Thomas Aquinas’s argument in the *Summa Theologiae* that martyrdom consists essentially of standing firmly with truth and justice “against the assaults of persecution.”

Christians who are persecuted for their defense of the poor and of land rights are rightly considered martyrs, as they testify to the truth of human dignity. With Romero’s canonization in 2018, “official recognition of this expanded understanding of martyrdom represents a significant development in the church’s tradition and an institutional witness to the preferential option for the poor and oppressed as a central commitment of the Christian faith,” Gandolfo writes. Yet this development must continue, as we come to recognize ecomartyrdom as an important form of Christian testimony today.

Today’s martyrs may still be those who are killed *in odium fidei*, out of hatred for the faith. They may also be those who, like Romero, are “killed by fellow Christians out of hatred for his insistence that the Christian faith demands solidarity with the poor and oppressed.” And they may also be those who, like Dorothy Stang, S.N.D.de.N., are killed by fellow Christians out of hatred for her insistent defense of both the rainforest and the people dwelling there. In other words: ecomartyrs.

No student leaves my classroom without hearing that name. Sister Dorothy Stang was assassinated in the Brazilian Amazon in 2005 by hit men hired by ranchers and loggers who saw both plants and people as obstacles. Sister Dorothy is among the martyrs Gandolfo profiles in a chapter titled “Narrating the Witness” that is really the heart of this book.

When my students encounter her story, they are initially baffled by the idea that this white-haired nun from Ohio could have seemed dangerous to anyone, much less so threatening that she needed to be assassinated by hired gunmen. But the more they examine her story, the more they begin to understand that we are all complicit in her death and in the deaths of so many people and places that face the consequences of extractivist ideology and economics. As the bishops’ final document from the Amazon Synod put it:

One of the most glorious pages of the Amazon has been written by the martyrs. The participation of the

followers of Jesus in his passion, death and glorious resurrection has accompanied the life of the Church to this day, especially in the moments and places in which, for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus, Christians live in the midst of acute contradictions, such as those who struggle, at great risk to their own lives, to defend the existence of this territory.

In addition to Sister Dorothy Stang, Gandolfo movingly profiles five other recent martyrs, including Berta Cáceres (Honduras), the Rev. Josímo Morais Tavares and Chico Mendes (both from Brazil), the Rev. Alcides Jiménez (Colombia) and Marcelo Rivera (El Salvador). Yet she also makes clear that she has chosen to write about these individuals not because they are unique (they are, sadly, far from unique), but because their communities’ memorializations of them have made them “palpably present.”

Their importance in collective memory is beautifully conveyed by a website that accompanies the book. There one can experience art, music and documentary films about the six martyrs and the communities that remember them, and can grasp at least part of the creativity and resistance they have inspired. A section on “Resources for Action” invites us to honor their legacy by becoming involved in the work of organizations that are “planting seeds, globally and locally, of fighting every day for environmental justice, climate justice, and ecological well-being.” This section complements the final chapter of the book, “Responding to the Witness: Honoring Ecomartyrs With Our Lives,” a closing reflection that is both theologically and practically astute.

During the Jubilee year of 2000, Pope John Paul II designated a church in Rome—the Basilica of St. Bartholomew, who was himself martyred—to be a sanctuary for the memory of modern-day martyrs. There, the Community of Sant’Egidio (to whom the pope entrusted the church) has collected relics of many martyrs: the chasuble of St. Romero, the tunic of Archbishop Faraj Rahho of Mosul, the trowel of St. Charles de Foucauld and a letter from Blessed Franz Jägerstätter written just before his execution. At the beginning of the coming jubilee year, 2025, St. Bartholomew’s will, for the first time, receive the relic of an ecomartyr.

Sister Dorothy Stang’s religious community will present a small vial of blood-soaked dirt collected from the site of her murder—an appropriate relic for a martyr who gave her life for the earth. Together with many other ecomartyrs, named and unnamed, her legacy is a reminder that care for our common home may indeed come at a high cost.

Laurie Johnston is a professor of theology at Emmanuel College, in Boston, and a member of the Community of Sant’Egidio.

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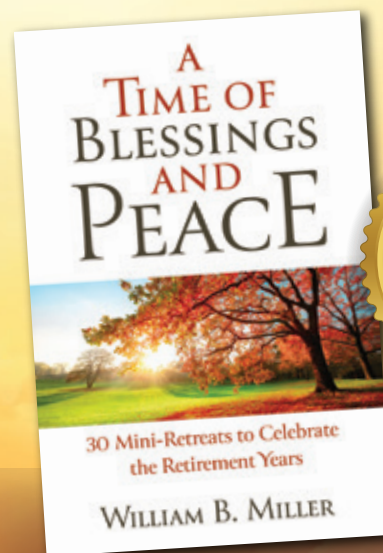
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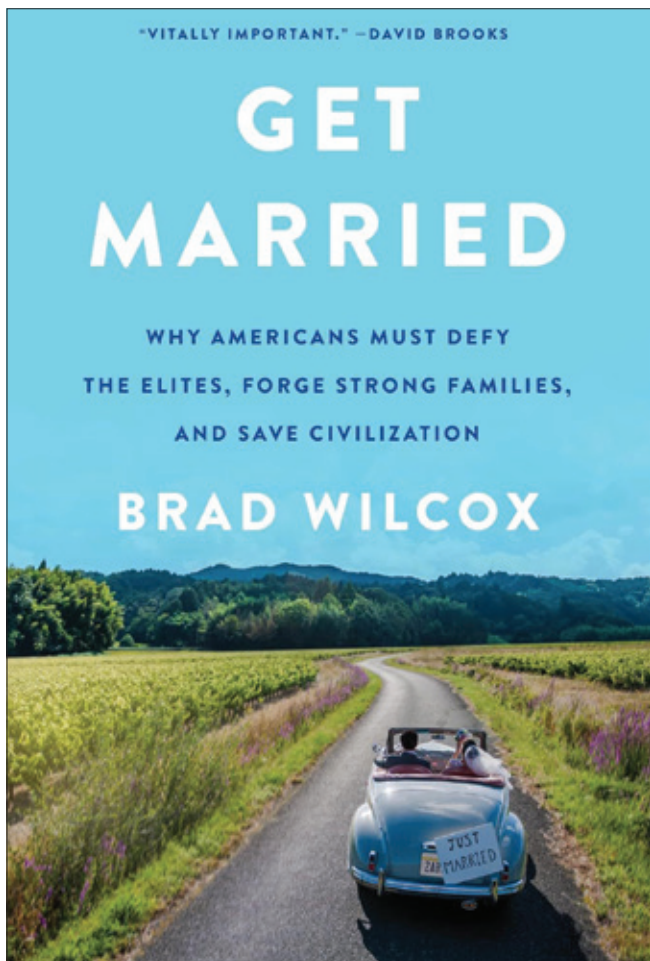


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MARRIAGE MYTHS



Broadside Books / 320p \$32

Almost 15 years ago, as part of a year of AmeriCorps service after graduating from college, I went on a program retreat where one of the sessions was about navigating relationships. Our retreat leader (who was then in her late 20s) shared with the rest of us (who were mostly 22 or 23) that her relationships with her two closest female friends had been strained since she had gotten married. Her friends were both single and struggling to relate to her, she thought, because they were unhappily dating and trying to make rent on a single income; they assumed her life was so much easier after tying the knot.

But actually, she said, life gets harder after marriage. Now there are two sets of parents and siblings, two careers and two sets of preferences to consider for everything. Soon, there would be children, with all their demands.

None of the millennial listeners asked out loud the question that hung heavily in the air: *So why would you get married?*

If the stark data on the declining rates of marriage are any indication, many Americans now assume that there is

no appealing answer to this query.

The University of Virginia sociology professor Brad Wilcox is not one of them. Wilcox, a Catholic convert and father of nine who has made a career of using data to promote marriage, serves as the director of the National Marriage Project. His new book, *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization*, argues that civilization itself depends upon convincing more Americans to tie the knot.

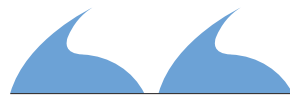
Although he subscribes to the baseline conservative view that marriage is good, Wilcox is not beholden to the political right. He criticizes political conservatives for both their hypocrisy (that is, touting family values while being on one's third marriage) and their shortsighted policies (that is, a misplaced certainty that "tax cuts, deregulation, and higher GDP growth" will revive the American family). But neither is Wilcox in thrall to the political left. He condemns educated progressives for insisting upon an "elitist and workist" idea of American life that is culturally deaf to what most working- and middle-class Americans believe and value, and for their "reverse hypocrisy" (denigrating marriage while being married).

Both in his recent book and in myriad articles, talks and papers going back many years, Wilcox busts the myths that he believes have undermined marriage as a social institution and touts the sizable and multidimensional benefits of marriage for individuals and for society.

Two of the former are the "flying solo myth" (the idea that marriage does not benefit people today) and the "family diversity myth" (the notion that all kinds of families are created equal—in other words, that "love and money, not marriage, make a family").

Different versions of the flying solo myth emanate from the left, parts of which have long held that women should "embrace education, work and freedom from family life," and from the right, parts of which now hold that "there's really no good return on investment for marriage" for men. For Wilcox, "there's not a dime of difference" between these two iterations of "pushing women and men to abandon love and marriage and embrace the life of the 'lone ranger.'" Both are destructive. Wilcox shows that marriage has positive, tangible—and, he argues, causal—effects on women's and men's finances, physical and mental health, and sense of community belonging.

Meanwhile, the family diversity myth is ubiquitous among many progressive elites, who insist, contra all data, that two-parent families are categorically no better for children or for society than single-parent families. These disproportionately influential apologists for nihilistic antitraditionalism, some of whom have taken specific exception



Wilcox is really arguing that we should view marriage not as just one more personal choice but as a vocation.

to Wilcox's evidence-based endorsement of marriage, live lives that betray a curious conservatism in revealed preferences. According to Wilcox, many elites "talk left and walk right," leaving the working class to suffer the indignities that a myopic emphasis on the virtues of "inclusion, individual choice, and progress" has wrought.

But perhaps the most common myth about marriage is the one revealed by my retreat leader's friends, the ones who believed that her life must be a tub of butter now that she was married. Wilcox calls this the "soulmate myth." According to Wilcox, the problem with basing marriage on the idea of finding a "soulmate," or "a person who gives you an intense emotional and erotic connection, who makes you feel happy and fulfilled," is its individualism. "As an ideal," Wilcox argues, the notion of soulmate marriage "can make it more difficult for husbands and wives to embrace a richer, more stable and ultimately more satisfying idea of marriage, beyond the me-first spirit of soulmate love." He contends that "any kind of serious relationship, including marriage, is going to be at times deeply challenging and hard and require a lot of work."

Before the birth control pill helped launch the sexual revolution, premarital and nonmarital sex were widely frowned upon. Out-of-wedlock births and cohabitation were almost universally considered unacceptable. Meanwhile, reaching age 30 without being married was viewed askance. But even after contraception became widely available, cohabitation had become normalized, and premarital sex was a given, Americans continued to get married. True, not as early or as universally—but, nonetheless, until the mid-1990s, marriage remained the dominant cultural script.

In what perhaps remains the iconic depiction of "sex-positive feminism" and aspirational hedonism, the 36-year-old protagonist of "Sex and the City," Carrie Bradshaw, who is "scared" of marriage, asks her fiancé, Aidan Shaw, "Why can't we just keep things the way they are, just live together?"

Aidan replies: "I looked at you tonight from across the room and I thought, I love her. And she loves me. And what are we waiting for?" He continues: "People fall in love, they get married. That's what they do."

"Not necessarily," Carrie intones.

Indeed.

As late as the turn of the millennium, when "Sex and the City" first aired on HBO, many of us were still running on the fumes of the old order. What made Aidan the show's apologist for traditional coupledness was his conviction that love and marriage go together. What made "Sex and the City" edgy was its assumption that they might not.

Even Aidan was not willing or able to offer any coherent

or convincing case for tying the knot beyond his own feelings for Carrie and his readiness to attain the expected state of matrimony. In other words, by 2000, the soulmate myth was as good as it got in our mainstream popular culture.

Those chickens have now come home to roost (or not). So slowly and yet so ubiquitously has "the long marriage" been discarded as an ideal that we are now like the proverbial frogs who remained in the water that boiled them; the heat was turned up so gradually that we did not notice. As a result, we have blithely turned society's very foundation into a personal, "take it or leave it" lifestyle preference.

Meanwhile, Wilcox, who was warning all the time that this pot would boil and that the nation would suffer as a result, is really arguing underneath it all that we should view marriage not as just one more personal choice but as a vocation.

I wish that every young American would read Wilcox's corpus. He provides a desperately needed corrective to a culture broadly addicted to a kind of individualism that undermines the importance of marital partnerships and married childbearing. However, the decline of marriage does not exist in a vacuum, nor does Wilcox's prescription to counter it. Wilcox tends not to incorporate his Catholicism directly into his case for marriage. This makes sense. To make any progress in resuscitating marriage, we need more Americans of all faiths and of no faith to embrace the nuptial life.

But Wilcox's argument for the embrace of (younger) marriage is ultimately predicated on a notion of marriage as the cornerstone of most well-lived adult lives. Can his promotion of marriage as a foundational commitment worth choosing, both in theory and in practice, persuade any significant number of people to tie the knot—and to do so sooner—in an increasingly secular age that moves ever further from the forms and formalities of its Judeo-Christian foundations?

I am skeptical. After all, Wilcox has been sounding the alarm about the decline of marriage, and offering good rea-

sons for individuals to get married, for decades. In that time, marriage rates have continued to plummet.

Why? Because at bottom, the answer to that question no one asked my retreat leader—*if marriage is harder than being single, why would you get married?*—cannot be answered by appeals to the data on why marriage is beneficial despite being hard. Willingness to embrace the hard thing is not really about returns in money or sex or the division of household labor.

It is about faith. Faith that I am called to embrace the responsibility of an outward-looking partnership. Faith that a discerning and other-regarding married couple becomes something greater as a unit than the sum of the two individuals involved. Faith that I am expected to take my place, not as a creator or as a ward, but as a steward of others. And faith that I am part of a broader national and international community—from my spouse and my children to those who have passed on to eternity and those who have not yet been born.

Faith also provides us with a reason to have hope. Perhaps I am being Pollyannaish, but I do hold out hope that young people who have been raised from infancy with the idea that perpetual singleness is normal and normative might be looking for something new, and thus be readier to hear Wilcox than their counterparts were a decade ago. And while I am far from optimistic, I also hope that the reaction against prevailing norms and search for meaning in the *verboten* (which has always driven young people to rebel against their elders) could eventually drive the youth of a secular nation back to religious observance. That would be correlated with more marriage, too.

After all, in addition to all the positives Wilcox cites, there is one thing counterintuitively working in favor of those who want to see more marriages among Americans: We have reached a point where vocational marriage constitutes an alternative lifestyle. And as Wilcox knows better than anyone, alternative lifestyles always have the potential to go mainstream and make inroads on seemingly intractable norms.

Here's hoping.

Elizabeth Grace Matthew is a regular opinion contributor at *The Hill*. Her work has appeared in outlets including *USA Today*, *Law and Liberty*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *FemCatholic* and *The Bulwark*.

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Beset by the Conduit of Weakness

All four Sundays in the month of October highlight passages from the Letter to the Hebrews and Chapter 10 of Mark’s Gospel. Without forcing a theme, it seems that one’s relationship to weakness or a personal limitation captures the heart of this month’s reflection. Within the theology of Hebrews, the moral limitations of the high priest do not serve as a kind of sacrificial impotency. That weakness becomes, rather, the conduit all must pass through if the church is to identify with Christ. “Because he himself,” says the author about the high priest, “is beset by weakness and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people” (Heb 5:2-3).

Concretely, this really is good news. On the Twenty-eighth Sunday the Gospel centers on the rich man who desires evangelical perfection. Jesus reminds him, instead, of evangelical poverty. The man turns away with a look of sadness on his face. The rich man’s weakness is attached to his wealth, but even through this limitation there is hope: “Jesus, looking at him, loved him” (Mk 10:21). Any future

sacrificial offering for the rich man will be made out of love and not from coercion. While the man is surrounded by wealth, he might also be haunted by Jesus’ loving gaze as he contemplates the next phase of his life.

The following Sunday brings to focus James and John, the sons of Zebedee, in their quest for ultimate glory to reign next to the Messiah in heaven. They are fixated on the role of authority, something that Jesus warns about. “You do not know what you are asking” (Mk 10:38). They will come to learn that authority over others also includes a sacrificial offering, as the next phase of the Gospel narrative unfolds. Finally, on the last Sunday in October, Jesus restores the sight of a blind person who begs him outside the city limits of Jericho, “Son of David, have pity on me” (Mk 10:47). This blind person’s particular limitation is a gloss compared to the fact that the visually impaired man can already “see” that Jesus is the one who restores all things to his Father.

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 6, 2024

Bone of my bone, we are from the same source

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 13, 2024

Haunted by wealth and by love

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 20, 2024

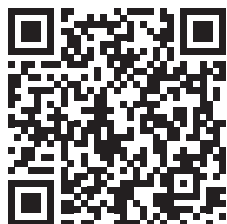
Drinking from the same cup as Christ

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 27, 2024

Beset by weakness but filled with promise



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Avoiding Election Anxiety

Some Jesuit advice on how to find hope

By James Martin



How many people have said this to you about the upcoming presidential election, or politics in general? “I can’t stand it!” Or “I’m so depressed!” That goes for both Republicans and Democrats. Indeed, the past few years in U.S. politics have been the most contentious, vituperative and violent that I can recall.

The storming of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2020, was perhaps the most visible outgrowth of these dark and violent tendencies. Many people worry that if there is a similar challenging of the election results and calls for “resistance” this year, the country will descend into chaos or even civil war. If you are on social media, you will see that political “dialogue” has mainly been reduced to bitter recriminations and name-calling. At times despair seems like the most logical response.

But it would be, according to St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, the least helpful response. So let me offer some Jesuit advice about how to combat despair.

In his classic manual on prayer, the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius invites us not only to enter prayerfully into the life of Jesus by imagining ourselves in various Gospel stories, but also to “discern the spirits.” That can sound bizarre to those unfamiliar with Christian spirituality, but it simply means that there are various forces, impulses or voices (I don’t mean audible voices but rather voices within) that move us away from God and others that move us toward God. St. Ignatius reminds us that the voice that is moving us toward God is *coming from* God. That is, God

not only wants us to make good and life-giving decisions, but God will help us do that.

To take a simple example, imagine getting into an argument with someone at work or in your family or with a stranger in a public place. In the heat of the argument, you might say to yourself, “Oh, I want to punch this person in the face!” But another part of you thinks, “I need to calm down and try to make peace with this person.” One impulse is clearly coming from God and one is not.

When it comes to despair, St. Ignatius is clear. It is never coming from what he calls the “good spirit.” In fact, in the *Spiritual Exercises* he describes how the good spirit acts in the lives of good people (those trying to lead a good life). “It is characteristic of the good spirit,” he says, “to stir up courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and tranquility. He makes things easier and eliminates all obstacles, so that the person may move forward in doing good.” In other words, God’s voice gives you hope.

By contrast, what St. Ignatius calls the “evil spirit” or “enemy of human nature” acts in the opposite way for good people. “It is characteristic of the evil spirit to cause gnawing anxiety, to sadden and to set up obstacles. In this way he unsettles these persons by false reasons aimed at preventing their progress.” The evil spirit leads you to despair.

I do not deny that life can be extremely difficult, that our political discourse might turn violent and that the election season may cause fear or even

terror. What Ignatius (and many other spiritual writers) is saying is that despair is never coming from God. Why? Essentially, because it denies God’s ability to act—and ours too.

So how do you avoid despair during the election season? First, by reminding yourself that this extreme form of hopelessness is not coming from God. Being able to identify those voices as moving you away from God is an essential step. Second, by not listening to the voices who say, “Nothing can be done.” Just say to yourself: “I don’t need to pay attention to that.” Third, by acting against it, or working against precisely what you fear—name-calling, divisive speech, violence—in whatever way you can.

In such situations, I find it helpful to think of the disciples on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, after the crucifixion but before the resurrection. Cowering behind closed doors, they were surely in despair, doubting that God could bring anything good after the shattering events on Calvary. I’m not suggesting that there will suddenly be an Easter-like outbreak of unity, concord and love after Nov. 5, but it’s also important to see that the disciples in their despair were, in the end, wrong.

In short, despair is never coming from God. Hope always is. Choose hope.

James Martin is a Jesuit priest, author, editor at large at *America* and founder of *Outreach*.



FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY Catholic Studies

FALL 2024 EVENTS



WEDNESDAY, OCT. 2 | 5 P.M.

Alumni House, Brennan Room

The 24th Annual Anne Drummey O'Callaghan
Lecture on Women in the Church

***"Theologizing the Local After Clergy
Abuse and Parish Closure"***

Susan Bigelow Reynolds, PhD | *Emory University*



WEDNESDAY, OCT. 23 | 5 P.M.

Dogwood Room, Barone Campus Center

Lectures on Catholic Studies and
Catholic Higher Education

***"Value and Vision: Catholic Higher
Education Today"***

Jason King, PhD | *St. Mary's University*



WEDNESDAY, NOV. 13 | 6 P.M.

Dogwood Room, Barone Campus Center

The 31st Annual Christopher F. Mooney, S.J.,
Lecture in Theology, Religion & Society

***"The American Catholic Experience 2024:
Tensions that Test Our Communal Identity"***

Hosffman Ospino, PhD | *Boston College*

COMMUNICATING CATHOLICISM

Fall 2024 Series on Religion
and Contemporary Culture

**Brenda Noriega on
Young Catholics**

Dogwood Room
September 11 | 5 p.m.

**John Grosso on
Catholic Social Media**

Kelly Presentation Room
October 16 | 5 p.m.

Registration is required for all events. To register for either in-person attendance or live-stream viewing, see fairfield.edu/cs.

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