America
MARCH 2025
THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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From America's editors and staff

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The Joan & Bill
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FOR THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE

"Is Catholicism's 'Woman Problem' a History Problem?"

Teilhard de Chardin Lecture
Featuring Bronwen McShea

The Hank Center is honored to welcome the Spring, 2025 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. Fellow in Catholic Studies, Dr. Bronwen McShea, to offer this year's Teilhard lecture.

Sixty years after Vatican II, eyebrows still go up when women assume leadership positions in the Catholic Church. Yet forms of female leadership were integral to Catholicism's development long before modern times. McShea links Catholicism's often perceived "woman problem" to chronic forgetfulness about this within the Church and urges more mature engagement with history *per se* in Catholic intellectual life.

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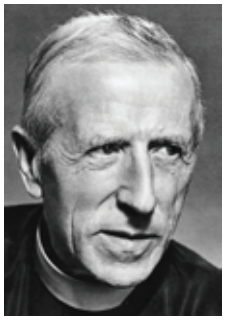

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The Problem With What Would Have Happened

In one of C.S. Lewis's Narnia books, a character asks Aslan, the Christ figure of his allegory, "what would have been the good" of her breaking away from friends to follow him when they did not believe that she had seen him. Met with silence, she pleads with Aslan to explain how it could have turned out well if she had followed him alone, saying, "Am I not to know?"

"'To know what *would* have happened, child?' said Aslan. 'No. Nobody is ever told that.'"

Since the presidential election last November, there has been a drumbeat of criticism of the U.S. bishops for not speaking out clearly or boldly enough against Donald J. Trump. I have even seen a few comments on some **America** articles castigating the bishops for "endorsing" Mr. Trump, which they never did.

In the background of this critique is a reaction against fear-mongering from some, who misuse what the bishops have said and tell Catholics that they can only vote one way, based on abortion. That kind of attempted domination of conscience must be rejected. While such abuses do not fairly represent the bishops' teaching, the bishops do need to take much more seriously how readily their attempts to offer moral guidance about voting have been distorted, leading to a widespread perception that the church explicitly or implicitly backs Mr. Trump. But some go so far as to demand that the bishops should have pivoted completely to the opposite position, forbidding Catholics from supporting Mr. Trump.

That is a step that Pope Francis refused to take when asked about the U.S. election, saying each person must decide according to their own conscience. **America**'s editors adopted that position also, even while continuing to warn, as we have in his first administration, during the 2020 and the 2024 elections, and again in this issue ("Our Take," p. 8), about the threat Mr. Trump poses to constitutional norms.

A secular parallel of this dynamic of critique about what should have happened can also be seen in criticism of Joe Biden for staying in the race too long or at the Democratic Party for choosing Kamala Harris without serious consideration of any other candidates. While the criticisms are fair enough, they are often presented as a retrospective silver bullet, an "if only" hypothetical that fixes everything.

But these kinds of critiques run into the "what would have happened" problem that Lewis has Aslan point out. What would have happened if the bishops had denounced Mr. Trump in unison? What would have happened if there had been a Democratic primary? What would have happened if Mr. Trump had been held to account sooner or more firmly for his lies about the 2020 election?

Or to frame such questions more clearly, what would have happened if those people in power had done what their critics would have done in their place?

Nobody is ever told that.

Nobody is ever told how the better judgment they have now would have worked out for themselves had they had it back then, much less how their better judgment would have worked out for other people.

I am not arguing that the bishops or the Democrats or anyone, including myself and my colleagues at **America**, should be above critique when they speak about politics simply because no one can predict the future. Arguments need to be judged, both when they are being made and as results become clear, by how honest, realistic and morally cogent they are. Those making public arguments also have a responsibility to account for the readily foreseeable outcomes of the positions they advocate and to acknowledge when the unfolding of history makes it clear they have gotten it wrong.

But there is no retroactive responsibility for everything that could have turned out otherwise if someone had argued differently. There is no ongoing obligation in regard to "what would have happened" in an alternate timeline—and it is a moral and spiritual dead end to focus on such phantoms. It is hopeless first because it replaces the complicated reality of prudence with the seeming simplicity of hindsight, and second because it distracts us with the feeling of moral courage regarding an imaginary replay of a real choice that has already been made differently.

The seductive feeling of righteousness in hindsight can even become an obstacle to solidarity. It can pull us into a self-satisfied purity, when what is needed instead is the humility to make common cause with people who may well share in responsibility for the very problem that needs fixing. "What would have happened?" can easily become the perfect acting as the enemy of the good.

Instead, as Aslan says: "Anyone can find out what *will* happen," simply by beginning to do what is right and necessary now. With the many challenges that require solidarity going forward, including advocacy for the human dignity of our migrant brothers and sisters and defense of the checks and balances of the American constitutional system, there is an overwhelming need for such courage.

Sam Sawyer, S.J.

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Above: Guatemalan migrants deported from the United States under President Donald Trump's administration arrive at La Aurora Air Force Base in Guatemala City on Jan. 27.

Cover: Cardinal James Michael Harvey opens the last Holy Door of the Papal Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls in Rome on Jan. 5.
Galosi/Vatican Pool/Spaziani/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images

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Has the 'cult of youth sports' reached your family?

In our February issue, the Rev. Joshua Whitfield discussed the frequent tension between competitive youth sports and children's faith lives, particularly with respect to Sunday rest—and Mass attendance. He further warned that "in their likeness to religion, sports often seem to offer falsely what only authentic religion truly offers, and that is the genuine experience of transcendence." Our readers weighed in with both heartfelt appreciation and thoughtful critique.

This really resonated with me. We actually pulled out of a travel volleyball league when the tournaments on Sunday mornings became all-encompassing. When I was growing up in Chicago, the Catholic League (think hundreds of grade schools and dozens of high schools) had a hard and fast rule: No game or practice before noon on Sunday. Some coaches would even require that, for a Sunday afternoon game or practice, you bring your parish's weekly bulletin to participate. Did some kids just stop in and grab a bulletin before the game? Sure. But the rule spoke for itself: God was first on Sunday. Your afternoon was for recreation. But your morning was for God.
Mary FioRito

Everyone should have a day of rest, including children. Sunday is a logical day to declare off-limits to scheduled sports for children. This business of scheduling children for activities from the time they can walk is detrimental. "Play" is free, unstructured time by definition. Children learn a lot simply by playing without goals to win games. I once told a young relative, whose time was very scheduled, that when I was young, "we got to take life off until we were 18." This relative looked at me like the very idea of taking time off was incomprehensible. Children may be far richer in material things now, but they are impoverished when it comes to time.
Lisa Weber

Interesting essay, and while I agree with some of the points, there are a few I would have liked the author to address: the opportunity to attend Saturday evening Mass, and the fact that many communities include families of different faiths. For example, many teams will also have Jewish families who observe Saturday as the Sabbath.
Christine Leahy

Thank you for this; it has been on my mind as my 12-year-old has gotten involved in club baseball and we are figuring out Sunday Mass with games. Another piece to be examined is the "elite Catholic high school sports" problem. In our area, Washington, D.C., your kid won't play high school sports at a Catholic high school unless he or she is an exceptional player and you have bought into the elite sports culture. The Catholic high schools all went in this direction to attract students.

I don't have any great aspirations for my son to play college baseball or beyond, but I would love for him to play high school sports, just to keep him busy and out of trouble. So, though I never saw our family being involved in any sort of Sunday sports, we are now doing that because we want him to play at whatever Catholic high school he goes to.
Julie Penndorf

I think this is more about moderation, rather than an either/or decision. Please do not throw the baby out with the bathwater, though. As the author mentioned, fewer kids are participating in sports, resulting in increasing cases of obesity and diabetes in children. Furthermore, for a lot of kids who struggle academically or socially, sports is a good outlet and a way to make friends. I agree that these teams are often too focused on winning and not focused enough on children's health and family time. The pushback will have to come from parents. But it is hard because of the competitive culture of these teams. The fear is that if you complain, your child will not be allowed to play.
Jeri Graham

Fifteen years ago or so, when our children started playing hockey, we had difficulty juggling church and games. One of the moms jokingly (or maybe not so jokingly) said, "Don't you know? You belong to the church of hockey now!" When I became manager of one of my children's teams, I did everything I could to avoid scheduling Sunday mornings. One of the teams we played only had Sunday morning ice times. In a way, it was lucky for us. It turned out the parish nearest the rink was a wonderful place; I still miss going there.
Stephanie Johnson

I think the issue is less about sports occurring on Sunday and more about the necessity of making space in life for prayer and worship. Integrate, integrate, integrate. Mix your spirituality into all your thoughts and actions of the day. You will be a superior athlete for the effort. We are all athletes of a sort, running in a race of life; emulating Christ, the greatest athlete of all.
Peter Arnez

Laudato si' @ 10:

Pope Francis and Caring for Our Common Home Today

A special panel & reception at the 2025 Loyola University Chicago Climate Change Conference, Shifting Waters: Water Security and the Emerging Water Crisis.

Loyola University Chicago was the first U.S. university to respond to Pope Francis' encyclical in 2015—and we are proud to host a special panel this year: ***Laudato si'*@ 10: Pope Francis and Caring for Our Common Home Today**. This event includes a hosted post-panel reception with beer, wine, and heavy hors d'oeuvres and is **one of the free sessions** offered by the annual Climate Change Conference. There is a concert that follows the reception, an original composition by Loyola's Dongryul Lee—Missa Laudato Si'—and we hope you are able to attend this as well. The concert is a ticketed event.

Panelists include: **Christiana Zenner** (Fordham University), **Thomas Hibbs** (Baylor University), **Chanelle Robinson** (College of the Holy Cross), **Mark Mackey, S.J.** (Loyola University Chicago)

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A Government of Laws, or of Trump?

In the first two weeks of President Donald J. Trump's second term, amid an avalanche of other executive orders and actions, three stood out not only for their moral and practical implications but because, exercised by unilateral decree, they assert executive power unconstrained by the checks and balances of our constitutional system.

1. Mr. Trump issued an executive order purporting to deny birthright citizenship to children whose parents are not citizens themselves or do not have lawful permanent residency. That order was swiftly put on hold by a federal district court, with the judge, who was appointed by Ronald Reagan, calling it "blatantly unconstitutional." During the hearing, the judge asked, "Where were the lawyers when this decision was being made?"

2. Mr. Trump also fired 18 inspectors general, ignoring the legal requirement to provide 30 days notice and specific reasoning for each dismissal to Congress. Senators Chuck Grassley and Dick Durbin, the chair and ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, sent a letter demanding further information and compliance with the requirement for individual explanations of the firings, even as they acknowledged the president's ability to fire such officials for cause.

3. Finally, on Jan. 27, the acting director of Mr. Trump's Office of Management and Budget published a memo directing all federal agencies to "temporarily pause" all activities related to federal grants that might be affected by recent executive orders "including, but not limited to, financial assistance for foreign aid, nongovernmental organizations, DEI, woke gender ideology, and the green new deal."

The confusion following this memo was notable, indicating that the administration itself did not fully understand the effects of its directives. The most significant example of confusion was an outage on the online portals through which states receive federal funding for Medicaid, which resulted in the O.M.B. issuing a clarification that Medicaid was not frozen. Later, the entire memo was temporarily blocked by a federal judge in a suit brought by nonprofit groups, after which it was rescinded by the O.M.B.

In the maelstrom of news from the opening days of the Trump administration, these three actions may not be the most morally costly. That distinction likely goes to the mass deportation effort, which is largely within established executive authority and has already kindled fear among communities across the country.

Mr. Trump's assertion of unfettered executive power, however, raises questions not only of policy but of fundamental constitutional norms. It is unclear whether he and his advisers accept that the constraint of executive power, and its balance with countervailing powers and norms, is good and necessary at all.

Each of these examples highlights different aspects of Mr. Trump's alarming disdain for restrictions on his authority. In purporting to end birthright citizenship, Mr. Trump claims to summarily reinterpret the 14th Amendment, contradicting both congressionally enacted legislation and Supreme Court precedent more than a century old.

While he has not yet explained the firing of the inspectors general, Mr. Trump is likely asserting some form of "unitary executive" theory. Under extreme versions of this theory, procedural limits on the management of the executive branch—which previous presidents signed into law—are null and void, or at least apply only at the discretion of the president.

The funding freeze, as originally described in the O.M.B. memo, claims executive authority to refuse to disburse appropriated funds, saying that all funding must be evaluated "consistent with the law and the President's priorities." This amounts to an infringement of Congress's constitutional power of the purse, setting up presidential priorities alongside legislative text as a parallel criterion for federal spending. Additionally, the memo's broad and vague campaign-style language about "woke gender ideology" and the "green new deal" make it clear that Mr. Trump is not engaging in a dispute with Congress about the proper interpretation of legislative terms, but rather claiming that his ideological commitments should determine how the government spends the funds Congress has appropriated.

The editors of **America** have a long history of raising concerns about efforts "to expand the power of the presidency beyond its constitutional limits," as we said in a 2008 editorial about George W. Bush. In 2016, at the end of Barack Obama's two terms, we criticized his continued use of many of the expansive executive powers that he had spoken out against as a senator. After Mr. Trump's first impeachment in 2020—triggered by his refusal to spend funds Congress had appropriated for aid to Ukraine—we said that the Madisonian design of ambition counteracting ambition between the branches of government had failed, as "institutional self-interest was insufficient to overcome partisan self-interest."

The letter requesting proper notice about the firings of the inspectors general from Senators Grassley and

Durbin, which Mr. Trump has not yet complied with, may be a glimmer of hope that congressional self-interest will reawaken. It should also serve as a reminder that pushback against Mr. Trump's overreach requires more than just vigorous denunciation, which can be dismissed as mere political opposition to his agenda. Opportunities for bipartisan cooperation in defense of basic norms should be embraced.

The Catholic Church, which is itself monarchical in many respects and acknowledges the legitimacy of many different government structures, nevertheless recognizes the importance of checks on political authority—and has spoken in magisterial teaching on the question. In "Gaudium et Spes," the Second Vatican Council taught that "if the political community is not to be torn apart while everyone follows his own opinion, there must be an authority to direct the energies of all citizens toward the common good, not in a mechanical or despotic fashion, but by acting above all as a moral force which appeals to each one's freedom and sense of responsibility" (No. 74). In the United States, that authority and moral force has been committed not to a single body or person but to the structure of checks and balances embedded in our constitutional design and refined over the history of the republic.

Those constitutional norms protect the rights and freedom of all, including those without political power, and promote the common welfare, a vision broader than that promised by a populist leader pledging to restore an illusory golden age. In order for the United States to remain "a government of laws, not of men," all officials entrusted with elected authority must recognize the necessity and justice of constraints on their own power. Likewise, they must work together to reinforce such constraints against those who do not.

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How the church can support vulnerable migrants in the new Trump administration

Before the end of the administration's first week, President Donald J. Trump had declared a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border, deployed over a thousand U.S. soldiers there, severely curtailed access to asylum and suspended the U.S. refugee resettlement program. The Department of Homeland Security also reversed the long-standing policy limiting immigration law enforcement in schools, hospitals and churches.

In Newark and Chicago, federal agents engaged in highly publicized immigration raids, and in media appearances border czar Thomas Homan reiterated that once the administration has finished deporting those with criminal records, it will target the broader undocumented population. Administration officials also repeatedly took aim at the Catholic Church and Pope Francis, with Vice President JD Vance insinuating that the U.S. bishops' work with refugees was driven by financial greed.

Mass deportations and actions to turn away asylum seekers and refugees are irreconcilable with Catholic moral teaching and thus present urgent public policy challenges. On a more fundamental level, they represent major pastoral challenges, because the church's pastoral care extends to those crossing borders in search of refuge as well as to the many immigrant families in our parishes and communities.

The coming years will present a significant moral test. In the face of dangerous nativism and the possibility of state violence through deportation, family separation and the closure of the border to the vulnerable, the church will be challenged to offer a compelling and credible response. Here are three ways the church can support vulnerable migrants during the second Trump administration.

Pastoral work to protect our communities. Mr. Trump is more prepared and disciplined as he begins his second term. Catholic institutions should organize and coordinate their response. Parishes must provide legal services and other support to those affected by deportation and the separation of families. Bishops, parish priests and pastoral agents in social ministry, including Hispanic ministry, are in need of formation to better equip them to serve those affected.

Clergy can also play a key role in mediating delicate relations between the community and local police, whom the Trump administration will press to cooperate in immigration enforcement. The church can work with local and state elected leaders in order to prioritize community security and mitigate the excesses of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's deportation actions. Because local ICE offices around the country may have significant discretion in determining enforcement priorities, dioceses should have open lines of dialogue and communication with local ICE leadership.

The church in the United States can supply bishops, priests and social ministry leaders with the resources to attend to these urgent pastoral needs. Faith leaders and parishes are trusted by the community and can provide critical and truthful information. They can shape a more humane and compassionate narrative on the issue of immigration with congregations and by engaging local media, and also mobilize their communities to live in solidarity with affected families.

Lead with human dignity and work for human fraternity. Mr. Trump won the recent election with restrictionist immigration policies at the center of his campaign. But a vote for Mr. Trump was not necessarily a vote against immigrants. On immigration, polls continue to show that the majority of Americans want a workable system, and the human, social and economic damage resulting from deportations could provoke deeper reflection.

Anxieties about global elites benefiting from mass migration are not misguided. Migration has its benefits and is a complex and multicausal reality, but some undoubtedly unjustly benefit from uprooting people from their land. Natural resources and pliable workforces are exploited. While we must establish mechanisms for migration, we must also vigorously promote human rights abroad to ensure that the right to remain in one's country is viable.

Immigration is not primarily political or partisan, but fundamentally about human dignity, mutual human obligation and the moral work of building up human fraternity. Our posture toward those who migrate is bound up with our personal salvation and the salvation of the world, for it is Jesus whom we meet in the stranger. During this new administration, the church's preaching and teaching must convincingly communicate that there are no classes of humanity entitled to less of God's love or deserving less of our compassion and care.

Rebuild the church's ministry alongside migrants, synodally. The church in the United States has a robust tradition of public advocacy for the common good, social action and institution-building to meet the needs of the poor and vulnerable, and immigrants in particular. But declining church attendance and giving, the ongoing financial impact of the abuse crisis, the sidelining of Catholic social teaching in formation programs,

fewer religious vocations and the politicalization of the U.S. church have all taken a toll and contributed to the atrophy of social ministry.

Younger priests and lay leaders are far less likely to be familiar with the church's tradition of engagement in public life or to have had practical experience in the church's work with labor, community organizing or immigrants' rights. In many places, diocesan programming dedicated to the church's social mission has been trimmed, bureaucratically outsourced to local Catholic Charities offices at a distance from parish life, or even eliminated. And multicultural and Hispanic ministry in many dioceses continues to suffer from a comparative lack of resourcing and prioritization in diocesan pastoral planning.

These trends have been reflected at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which last year downsized key departments tasked with social ministry and sharply reduced grantmaking to local social action organizations, including many immigrant-led organizations. The conference's influence with legislators and administration officials has waned; apart from some pro-life issues, there may be few areas of meaningful engagement with the Trump administration. On immigration, the U.S.C.C.B. no longer vigorously engages in forging coalitions with labor, the business community, organizing groups and other faith communities. The church's larger social service institutions are also understandably fearful of earning the ire of the Trump administration and may moderate their public advocacy.

For all of these reasons, the church in the United States does not have the same ability it once did to shape policy debates or organize a robust response to mass deportations. Even so, Pope Francis' invitation to rethink ministry in a synodal key may represent a path forward. In concluding the synod last year, the pope argued that "we do not need a sedentary and defeatist church, but a church that hears the cry of the world—I wish to say this even if some might be scandalized—a church that gets its hands dirty in serving."


AP Photo/Alex Brandon

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers attach a chain to a detained person on Jan. 27 in Silver Spring, Md.

Rather than attempting to organize a top-down response *on behalf of* migrants or prioritizing letters to lawmakers, the church must renew and rebuild its practice of the social Gospel by taking up Pope Francis' challenge to *walk alongside and with* those who will be affected.

In practice, this will require visible, concrete action by church leaders at the local level in defense of migrants, which Pope Francis has modeled with his own visits to detention centers, borders and refugee camps.

Our moral witness as a church will be strengthened by our ability to walk together. We must discern new ways to work with others, including organizations in the immigrants' rights movement and other faith traditions. The church must channel resources to grass-roots efforts and promote the leadership and capacity of affected persons and communities to defend and care for themselves.

In February 1979, Archbishop Oscar Romero wrote to Sister Reza Martha about her work with the undocumented community in the United States. His words remain pertinent:

> Continue challenging the members of the church—who are still not aware of the misery and pain of Hispanics in the United States. With them, defend their rights as humans and children of God. God wishes us to live in fraternity and justice, and he has confided to us the work of making it happen.

Dylan Corbett *is the executive director of the Hope Border Institute, a Catholic research, advocacy and humanitarian action organization on the U.S.-Mexico border. He is also a former official of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development and of the Vatican's Migrants Refugees Section.*

Trump plan to end birthright citizenship 'an affront to human dignity'

By Kevin Clarke

President Donald J. Trump began his second term on Jan. 20 with a shock-and-awe campaign of executive orders that left his political adversaries, and the nation, reeling. One of his most dramatic moves during his first week in office had been telegraphed by surrogates long before the election: The new administration appears determined to end the constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship in the United States.

Deriding the idea that the U.S. Constitution establishes place of birth alone as sufficient to secure citizenship, the president claimed that the United States was "the only country in the world that does this with the birthright...and it's just absolutely ridiculous."

In fact, unrestricted birthplace citizenship is accepted by 33 countries, including the U.S. neighbors Mexico and Canada, and 42 other nations maintain restricted versions of birthright citizenship according to varying residency and parental status stipulations. Most of the nations that recognize unrestricted birthright citizenship can be found in North and South America—New World nations, like the United States, that have historically relied on immigrant population boosts.

A Permanent Underclass?

Kevin Appleby, a senior fellow for policy and communications at the Center for Migration Studies in New York, deplores the plan to move backward in time on citizenship. "I think birthright citizenship has served us well over the centuries," he said. "It puts everyone on an equal footing. It gives every child a chance to reach their full potential.... It makes us a stronger nation because we all have the same opportunities and the same benefits from an early age and the same responsibilities as well."

Pedro Alemán-Perfecto, a policy advocate for the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, worried that "eliminating birthright citizenship will definitely diminish and separate families. It undermines the U.S. Constitution and the promise of equal protection." It represents "a drastic reduction of so many rights across the country and for individuals that haven't even been born."


OSV News photo/Carlos Barria, Reuters

Donald Trump holds up an executive order in the Oval Office at the White House on Jan. 20, Inauguration Day.

On Jan. 23, a federal judge in Seattle temporarily blocked Mr. Trump's executive order, calling it "blatantly unconstitutional" during the first hearing in a multi-state effort to overturn the order.

Mr. Alemán foresees innumerable complications emerging from the president's proposal, including new barriers to public education, health services, travel documents, and other social and civic services and legal protections citizens now take for granted. He worries about the emergence of new forms of family separation for immigrant families who may have older children "grandfathered" into citizenship while other children will be denied.

He said that the administration's reworking of the 14th Amendment threatens to create "a permanent underclass of stateless individuals." Those residents would likely feel little obligation to "integrate" with the broader U.S. society, he warned, perhaps beginning generational cycles of isolation and resentment.

The amendment the president hopes to reinterpret came into effect after the Civil War as an attempt to redress the Dred Scott decision in 1857. That infamous Supreme Court ruling had declared that any free Black American descended from slaves was "not a 'citizen' within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States." The ruling had essentially made it impossible for Black residents of the United States and their descendants to become citizens and to enjoy the rights and protections that accompany citizenship.

The 14th Amendment was backstopped in 1898 by another Supreme Court ruling, in the case United States v. Wong Kim Ark, which confirmed the precedent that any person born in the United States is a citizen by birth regardless of race or parents' status. This definition of U.S. citizenship, though periodically challenged, appeared by the turn of the 20th century to be settled law.

The language of the 14th Amendment, conferring citizenship on all persons "born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof," would seem reasonably straightforward; but in a nation capable of a lengthy debate on what the meaning of *is* is, the intent of the amendment's *and* has come under sharp focus.

Advocates for deconstructing birthright citizenship claim that *and* means new Americans have to be both born within the borders of the United States and subject to its jurisdiction for citizenship to be automatic. Are children born to parents who are unofficially resident in the United States "subject to its jurisdiction"?

Around the world, citizenship is based either on terrestrial birthplace (*jus soli*, the "right of the soil") or on ancestry (*jus sanguinis*, the "right of blood"). The *jus soli* tradition of citizenship applied in the United States is rooted in natural and British common law. In a nation like the United States, composed of people from all ethnicities and nationalities, the notion of building citizenship on blood and ancestry would appear to be a non-starter.

Demographic Anxiety

But since its earliest days, the United States has tinkered with citizenship and nationality, most often in deference to promoting a white and Protestant America. In 1790, the Naturalization Act allowed "any free white person" of good character who resided "within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for at least two years" to be granted citizenship after swearing allegiance not to the flag or the state but to the Constitution.

Immigration interventions of the 19th and 20th centuries, like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and quota systems enforced through the National Origins Formula in 1924, likewise sought to maintain preferences for immigration from Western and Northern Europe. By the 1950s, those policies were being scrutinized, and by 1965 an immigration reform law attempted to address historical imbalances, opening up immigrant pathways from Asian and Latin American nations.

Decades later, with white hegemony demographically precarious and with historically high rates of foreign-born U.S. residents, it could be that the white anxiety that propelled previous immigration policy may now be at least partly propelling this renewed focus on citizenship. Rhetoric over "anchor babies"—allegedly used by contemporary immigrant groups to get an infant foothold in the United States—has long powered conservative campaigns seeking to reduce immigration flows.

"There are a lot of implications to what [Mr. Trump is] doing," Mr. Appleby said. "In some ways, it's got racial undertones. There are immigrants from all over the world—different ethnicities, different races, different nationalities—and [ending birthright citizenship] is sort of a way to keep America white."

He shares Mr. Alemán's worries about the potential

emergence of a permanent underclass in the United States should the 14th Amendment be neutralized.

There are already some 200,000 stateless people residing in the United States, but such unfortunate and vulnerable populations, people bereft of citizenship in the nations where they were born and lacking documentation that connects them to the nations of their parents' births, can be found all over the world. An analysis conducted by the Migration Policy Institute reports that far from diminishing the population of undocumented residents, the president's plan to end birthright citizenship would likely more than double their number—from 11 million now to more than 24 million by 2050.

"The Dred Scott decision was an attempt to create a permanent underclass," Mr. Appleby said. "We're not dealing with abstractions here. We were on the verge of doing just that before the 14th Amendment.

"Not to tie everything to the Civil War, but if the South had had its way, it would have certainly maintained slavery, but also this permanent underclass of people based on race."

He described that potential outcome as "an affront to human dignity because it diminishes a class of person. It doesn't provide them with a full share in society based on their human worth" and "sets up different parameters by which to judge people, which leads to discrimination."

A decades-long failure by Congress to reform and modernize immigration policy to conform to contemporary needs and realities has led to this fraught and angry moment, according to Mr. Alemán. He said that returning to dialogue on comprehensive reform would make a far better use of the president's time than this leap into a new mire over birthright citizenship.

The country is on the verge of a historic Social Security crisis, he pointed out, with fewer young working people supporting higher percentages of retirees. That problem will only be exacerbated by a clampdown on immigration and the many unforeseen complications likely to emerge from a rewriting of the citizenship covenant.

—

Kevin Clarke*, chief correspondent.*

A timeline of U.S. immigration laws and policies

1790: The first law to specify who could become a citizen, the **Naturalization Act** limits that privilege to any "free white" person who resides within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for at least two years, showing "good moral character."

1840-89: Waves of immigration to the U.S. come primarily from Ireland, Germany, and other nations of northern and western Europe; later immigrants arrive from Poland, Russia and Italy.

1857: The Supreme Court rules in **Dred Scott v. John F. A. Sandford** that enslaved people are not citizens of the United States and cannot expect protection from the federal government or the courts.

1868: The **14th Amendment** is ratified, granting citizenship to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof."

1870: The **Naturalization Act** confirms citizenship for individuals of African nativity or descent.

1882: The **Chinese Exclusion Act** denies Chinese laborers entry to the United States for 10 years and authorizes the deportation of Chinese immigrants.

1924: The **Immigration Act of 1924** establishes the National Origins Formula, creating a system that severely limits immigration from outside of Europe.

1942: In anticipation of labor shortages during World War II, the **Bracero program** allows guest workers from Mexico to be employed in the U.S. agricultural sector.

1952: The **Immigration and Nationality Act** allows individuals of all races to be eligible for naturalization but reaffirms the quota system from the 1920s and limits immigration from the Eastern Hemisphere.

1954: President Dwight D. Eisenhower begins a large-scale deportation of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the southwestern United States, using the offensive name **Operation Wetback**.

1965: The **Immigration and Nationality Act** abolishes the National Origins Formula, ending *de facto* discrimination against non-Western and Northern European ethnicities in favor of a preferences structure that emphasizes family reunification.

1986: The **Immigration Reform and Control Act** introduces civil and criminal penalties to employers who knowingly hire undocumented or unauthorized immigrants but also creates a path to citizenship for an estimated three to five million people.

2001: The **Dream Act** is introduced in Congress, intended to create a path to citizenship for undocumented people brought to the United States as children, but it is never passed.

2012: President Barack Obama issues an executive order that bars so-called Dreamers from deportation.

2013: A comprehensive **immigration reform package** passes the Democratic-controlled Senate but never receives a vote in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives.

Sources: Pew Research Center, Library of Congress, Council on Foreign Relations

With fewer missionaries, Catholic institutions in Africa seek new ways to support themselves

As funding sources for convents, seminaries and humanitarian agencies run dry, Catholic institutions in Africa are rethinking how they support their operations. Amid those challenges, some institutions find themselves making difficult choices between serving their communities as part of their apostolates and finding ways to raise funds from those same communities.

In the past, Catholic institutions in Zimbabwe and other African states could rely on support from retired missionaries who had returned to their home countries or on fundraising efforts those retirees sponsored.

Now the decline in the number of foreign missionaries has left religious communities in Africa facing a financial crunch. These institutions have had to devise new initiatives to sustain themselves amid increasingly tough economic circumstances affecting many countries across Africa.

This has never happened before in Zimbabwe, where Catholic missionaries have had more than a century-long presence that shaped the country's health, education and pastoral services.

"We need to find ways to support ourselves as most of our colleagues from overseas who helped source funds are no longer with us," said Caroline Busvumani, a Precious Blood sister in Bulawayo. Sister Busvumani directs an infirmary and greenhouse at the Precious Blood provincialate—projects set up as part of new fundraising efforts.

"The infirmary will help us raise much needed funds. We would love to extend it, but funds are not permitting [expansion] at the moment," she said. At many Catholic-run clinics and hospitals in Zimbabwe, the Precious Blood sisters charge patient fees that go toward paying staff and maintaining infrastructure.

The vegetables grown by the sisters in their greenhouse are also sold locally, with the money going toward the day-to-day running of the Precious Blood community.

Other convents and religious congregations say they are also facing a funding crisis. Aid to the Church in Need reports acquiring a machine that makes hosts for Mass for the Poor Clare Sisters, a contemplative congregation in the capital city of Harare, who plan to market the product. Such ancillary fundraising efforts were rare in the past, with challenges confined to local diocesan-based congregations that could count on support from foreign-based philanthropic organizations.

And it is not just religious orders that are facing funding challenges that lead to locally grown strategies to sustain their operations. Catholic humanitarian agencies in Zimbabwe also report exploring new ways to fund their operations at a time of competing global crises.

Mass begins in Marondera, Zimbabwe, on Jan. 1, 2024.

In October, Caritas Zimbabwe announced its strategic plan for 2025 through 2030. The Catholic agency outlined a strategy to "foster community-driven development and reduce reliance on external aid."

"The fulcrum of this strategic plan is localization," said Harrington Chuma, Caritas Zimbabwe's national coordinator.

The drive toward local fiscal sustainability includes forming partnerships with local communities and using existing local resources for the benefit of vulnerable groups who have for years relied on foreign donor assistance. According to Caritas Zimbabwe officials, the strategy to wean the agency from a reliance on foreign funders requires courting local businesses in the private sector. It will also encourage fundraising through what the agency calls "social enterprise."

Fiscal adaptations in Zimbabwe are occurring at a time of increasing competition for the attention of international donors who have been asked to respond to one global crisis after another, often leaving other urgent humanitarian crises unaddressed because of a lack of funding.

Meanwhile, the United States-based African Sisters Education Collaborative says it is expanding its footprint in the continent to help religious congregations support themselves through skills training. In August, the group signed a memorandum of understanding with the Conference of Major Religious Superiors in Zimbabwe.

Its aim is to enhance educational opportunities for the sisters and support their communities. According to the A.S.E.C., some of the skills gained by Catholic nuns have helped equip them with entrepreneurial skills and helped create jobs for rural African communities.

Marko Phiri *reports from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.*

CNS photo/Jose Cabezas, Reuters

Salvadoran church finds its voice as Bukele restores mining industry

Speaking at Mass two days before Christmas, Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas of San Salvador turned to a sensitive subject: politics. The archbishop did not mention any politicians by name—much less El Salvador's popular president, Nayib Bukele. But he voiced deep opposition to a proposal being pushed through the National Assembly that day to roll back a ban on mining in the Central American country.

"We are not interested in politics," Archbishop Escobar said. "We are interested in people's lives, people's health. That is why we ask the honorable deputies not to repeal the law that prohibits mining."

El Salvador's assembly ultimately ignored the archbishop—along with pleas from El Salvador's bishops' conference, environmental groups and populations in areas previously affected by mining activities—by reversing its ban on extractive activities on Dec. 23. The new law overturns a seven-year prohibition on mining.

Mr. Bukele promoted the mining law as an opportunity to produce a bonanza of riches for El Salvador, where poverty and the emigration it encourages remain common realities.

"We are the ONLY country in the world with a total ban on metal mining.... Absurd!" he wrote on Nov. 27. "This wealth, given by God, can be harnessed responsibly to bring unprecedented economic and social development to our people."

Civil society groups expressed skepticism about the president's claims of mineral and metal riches in El Salvador, along with Mr. Bukele's insistence that mining could be conducted without causing environmental damage. "The studies that Bukele is talking about...that say there is gold in El Salvador, nobody knows anything about them," said Juan Meléndez, country director for the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy.

The assembly's haste to approve the new mining law also provoked disquiet among El Salvador's bishops and many in civil society. The new law lacks widespread support, although Mr. Bukele himself enjoys an approval rating of more than 90 percent.

A poll in December from the University Institute of Public Opinion at the Jesuit-run Central American University José Simeón Cañas found lingering misgivings over mining in El Salvador. It found 59 percent of the population agreeing with the statement "El Salvador is not a suitable country for mining." Some 67 percent of respondents said there was a water crisis in the country.

"In the country's current situation, implementing the mining of metals would be a death blow to our environment," said U.C.A. vice chancellor Omar Serrano. "Mining requires enormous amounts of water that El Salvador doesn't have, even for its own people," he added in a commentary for Radio YSUCA, U.C.A.'s radio station.

Public misgivings over mining, regional political analysts say, stem from worries over water resources in an arid

A church-sponsored march in San Salvador in March 2017 called for a ban on mining.

country of 6.3 million people the size of Massachusetts—the highest population density in the hemisphere, outside of the Caribbean. Ninety percent of El Salvador's lakes and rivers are already contaminated to varying degrees, often by sewage, according to Andrés McKinley, a scholar at U.C.A., who wrote in an editorial published by the university in October: "It is widely recognized that El Salvador suffers from a water crisis of enormous proportions in terms of quantity, quality and access."

Mr. Bukele's popularity and penchant for persecuting political opponents and members of the press has made it hard for Catholic leaders to raise concerns about human rights abuses and the diminishment of democratic norms. Local analysts report that the country's bishops have struggled for a strategy to respond to the president, while some church figures, like many in the population, generally support his ideas and initiatives.

"They almost never speak out," Mr. Meléndez said of church leaders. But they appear to have found their voice on at least the mining issues since the local church has long supported the ban.

Church officials have scoffed at the suggestion that mining will bring riches to El Salvador. Archbishop Escobar said at a press conference in December that multinational mining companies in Central America "take everything."

"What they have left to these countries [where they have extracted resources] is 1 percent of what they declare. How is that possible? It's plunder."

David Agren *contributes from Mexico City.*

OSV News photo/Paul Ratje, Reuters

Ruben Garcia, director of Annunciation House, attends a march in El Paso, Texas, in January 2023 to support migrant rights.

Bishops say religious liberty under threat when government clamps down on church assistance to migrants

Attacks by members of Congress on Catholic ministries that are providing humanitarian assistance to migrants at the U.S. border were among the challenges to religious freedom listed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in its annual report on the state of religious liberty in the United States.

According to the report, released on Jan. 16, "Some Republicans in Congress have made clear that they think the mere provision to migrants of basic humanitarian aid like food, water, and shelter constitutes facilitation of unlawful entry, and that the religious charities' assistance to migrants encourages them to cross the border illegally in the first place."

The bishops identified five areas of "critical concern" for religious liberty: Attacks on faith-based immigration services, a rise in antisemitic incidents, in vitro fertilization mandates, "gender ideology in law" and threats to parental choice in education.

The report warned that xenophobic rhetoric could threaten the safety of people working in Catholic ministries that serve migrants: "Beyond legal threats to religious liberty, the physical safety of staff, volunteers, and clients of Catholic ministries and institutions that serve newcomers may be jeopardized by extremists motivated by false and misleading claims made against the Church's ministries."

The U.S.C.C.B. also raised concerns about several actions taken by the outgoing Biden administration, particularly its interpretation of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act of 2023. While the report praised the act's "commendable goal of advancing the well-being of pregnant women and their preborn children," it criticized the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's August 2024 regulations for the P.W.F.A.

According to the report, federal guidelines issued for the P.W.F.A. "construe it to require accommodations for abortion, in vitro fertilization, and contraception, and possibly other procedures or arrangements that go against the beliefs of Catholics and other faith groups, such as sterilization and surrogacy."

The bishops' report also called attention to a rise in incidents of religiously motivated harassment on U.S. college campuses, particularly antisemitic incidents that accompanied widespread student protests during the spring of 2024 against the Israel Defense Forces' campaign in Gaza.

Connor Hartigan, *O'Hare Media fellow.*

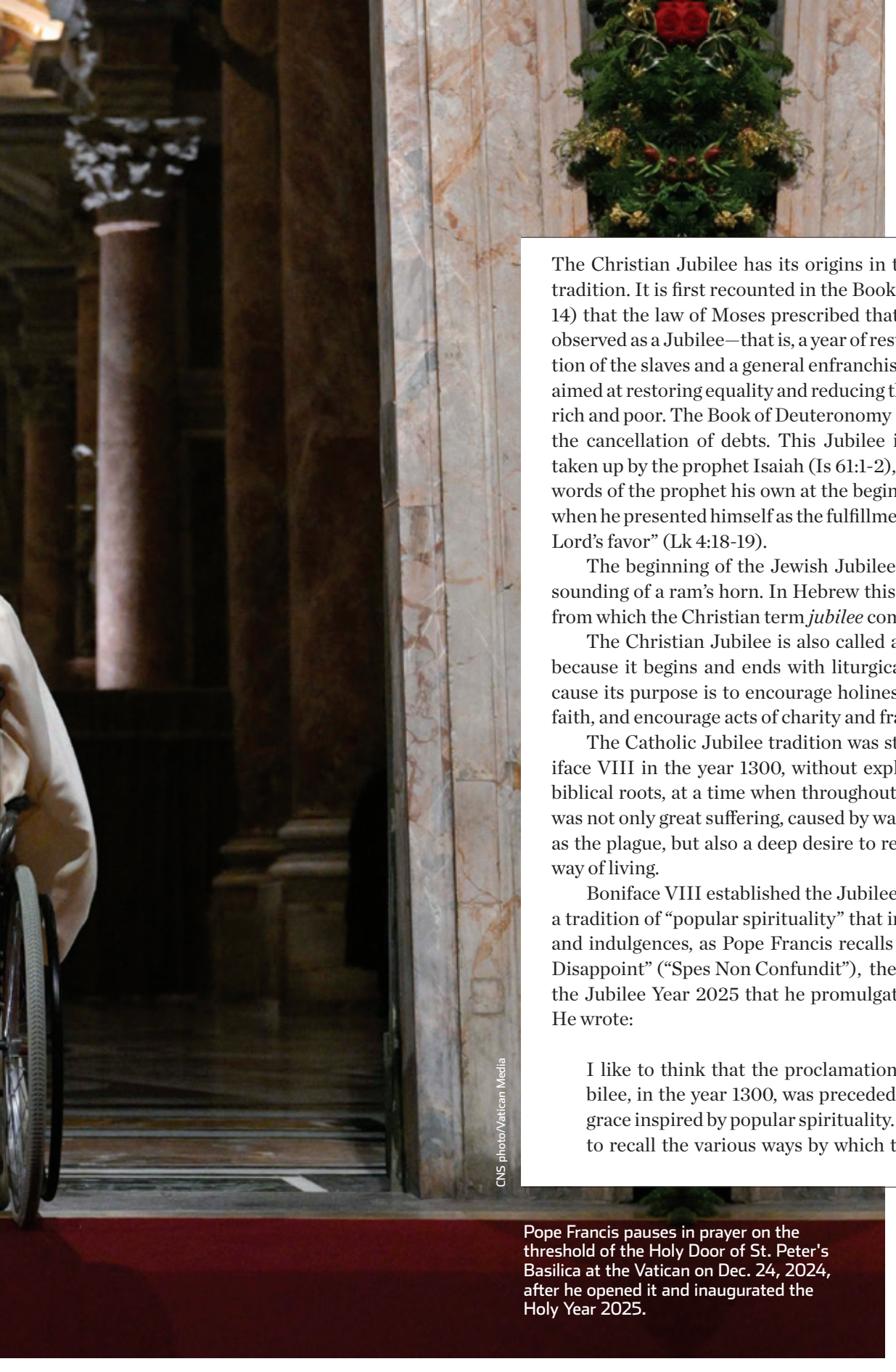
YEARS OF HOPE

The history and meaning of the Christian Jubilee

By Gerard O'Connell

When Pope Francis opened the Holy Door in St. Peter's Basilica on the night of Dec. 24, 2024, he inaugurated the Jubilee Year of 2025. Centered on the theme of hope, this is the 27th ordinary Jubilee in the history of the Catholic Church since Boniface VIII celebrated the first one in the earlier St. Peter's Basilica in the year 1300.

To understand the significance of the Jubilee and its seven-centuries-old tradition in the Catholic Church, it is necessary first to recall its biblical origins and then to briefly revisit the historical events that have shaped the Jubilee we are now celebrating.



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis pauses in prayer on the threshold of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Dec. 24, 2024, after he opened it and inaugurated the Holy Year 2025.

The Christian Jubilee has its origins in the Jewish religious tradition. It is first recounted in the Book of Leviticus (25:10-14) that the law of Moses prescribed that every 50th year be observed as a Jubilee—that is, a year of rest for the land, liberation of the slaves and a general enfranchisement of the people aimed at restoring equality and reducing the distance between rich and poor. The Book of Deuteronomy (15:1-11) adds to this the cancellation of debts. This Jubilee institution was also taken up by the prophet Isaiah (Is 61:1-2), and Jesus made the words of the prophet his own at the beginning of his ministry when he presented himself as the fulfillment of "the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19).

The beginning of the Jewish Jubilee was marked by the sounding of a ram's horn. In Hebrew this horn is called *jobel*, from which the Christian term *jubilee* comes.

The Christian Jubilee is also called a *holy year*, not only because it begins and ends with liturgical holy acts, but because its purpose is to encourage holiness of life, strengthen faith, and encourage acts of charity and fraternal love.

The Catholic Jubilee tradition was started by Pope Boniface VIII in the year 1300, without explicit reference to its biblical roots, at a time when throughout Christendom there was not only great suffering, caused by wars and diseases such as the plague, but also a deep desire to return to a more holy way of living.

Boniface VIII established the Jubilee Year by drawing on a tradition of "popular spirituality" that included pilgrimages and indulgences, as Pope Francis recalls in "Hope Does Not Disappoint" ("Spes Non Confundit"), the bull of indiction for the Jubilee Year 2025 that he promulgated on May 9, 2024. He wrote:

> I like to think that the proclamation of the first Jubilee, in the year 1300, was preceded by a journey of grace inspired by popular spirituality. How can we fail to recall the various ways by which the grace of for-

From the mid-1200s onward, popes granted indulgences for visits to some Roman churches.

giveness had been poured out upon God's holy and faithful People? We are reminded, for example, of the great "Pardon" that Saint Celestine V granted to all those who visited the Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio in Aquila on the 28th and 29th days of August 1294, six years before Pope Boniface VIII instituted the Holy Year. The church was already experiencing the grace of the Jubilee as an outpouring of divine mercy. Even earlier, in 1216, Pope Honorius III granted the plea of Saint Francis [of Assisi] for an indulgence for all those visiting the Porziuncola on the first two days of August. The same can be said of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela: in 1222, Pope Callistus II allowed the Jubilee to be celebrated there whenever the Feast of the Apostle James fell on a Sunday.

"Pilgrimage is of course a fundamental element of every Jubilee event," the pope remarked in the bull. Although it was not an element of the Jewish Jubilee, it is something that dates back to the early centuries of the Christian era, when the faithful tended to go to the holy sites linked to their faith. Since it soon became almost impossible for them to go to the Holy Land because of travel difficulties and political realities, Rome quickly became "the new Jerusalem," a primary place of pilgrimage because of the martyrdom there of Sts. Peter and Paul and other early Christian saints.

Throughout the Middle Ages, pilgrims came to Rome from Gaul (what is today much of France, Belgium, Luxembourg, parts of the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland), the Slavic countries and northern Italy. The pilgrims were called *Romei* (from the Greek word *Romaios*, meaning foreigners/pilgrims to Rome). From the sixth century onward, St. Peter's tomb (located then as now under a basilica bearing his name) attracted pilgrims from all over the world.

They came to Rome notwithstanding the hazards of travel, risks to life from brigands or robbers, risks to health from the plague and other illnesses, and difficulty procuring food and lodging. In the 13th century, the journey could take weeks or even months, depending on whether one traveled by foot, by horse or by carriage.

The Romei came on a spiritual journey to renew their faith by drawing physically close to the tombs of the martyrs and confessors of the faith, to do penance for their sins and seek God's mercy and pardon—and, from 1300 onward, to obtain the Jubilee indulgences. Since the ninth century, bishops across Europe had granted indulgences, which according to the Catholic Church are "a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven," to those who contributed to building churches or gave gifts to charitable institutions. The new mendicant orders—the Franciscans (founded by St. Francis of Assisi in 1210) and the Dominicans (founded by St. Dominic in 1216)—promoted pilgrimages, developed the concept of indulgences and greatly influenced the Christian people of that time.

The term *jubilee* came to be used for indulgences granted for participation in the Crusades. Pope Urban II called the First Crusade (1096-99) to regain the Holy Land from the Islamic rule of the Seljuks (Turkish-Persian Sunni Muslims) and granted indulgences to those who participated, confessed and repented of their sins. St. Bernard spoke of the Second Crusade as "a year of pardon, a true jubilee year." (Pope Francis, who has developed a close relationship with the Muslim world, makes no mention of the Crusades and the indulgences linked to them in his Bull of Indiction for this Jubilee Year.)

From the mid-1200s onward popes granted indulgences for visits to some Roman churches. Nicholas IV, the first Franciscan pope (1288-92), granted indulgences to pilgrims who visited St. Peter's Basilica (the earlier basilica, not the current structure) on certain days.

In those days, and up until 1870, the pope was not only a spiritual ruler, he was also a temporal ruler as head of the papal states. Then, at a time of rising nationalism when people began moving away from the church, Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) managed to rekindle religious sentiments and overcome political contrasts by celebrating the first Jubilee Year.

The First Jubilee

In the bull announcing this Holy Year, Pope Francis recalled that "the proclamation of the first Jubilee, in the year 1300, was preceded by a journey of grace inspired by popular spirituality." The historian Paolo Brezzi, in his 1975 history of church Jubilees, *Storia degli Anni Santi,* from which I have gathered much of this history, reports that news (from unidentified sources) began circulating in Rome at the end of 1299 claiming that a total plenary indul-

Visitors walk through the Holy Door of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome on Jan. 5, 2025, after its ceremonial opening by U.S. Cardinal James M. Harvey, archpriest of the basilica.

gence would be available to all those who visited the Basilica of St. Peter's from sunrise to sunset on Jan. 1, 1300, while lesser indulgences could be obtained in the following days and perhaps year. This caused crowds to flock to St. Peter's, and they were soon joined by an influx of foreign pilgrims.

When Pope Boniface saw what was happening, he first consulted the archives but found no precedent for it. He then convened the College of Cardinals to discuss the matter and finally took the decision to give his seal of approval to the spontaneous event. Two months later, he issued the bull of indiction for the first Jubilee Year, "Antiquorum Habet Fida Relatio," on Feb. 22, 1300, the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, and announced the granting of the Jubilee indulgence—"the fullest pardon of their sins"—to all who visited the basilicas of the two apostles of Rome "with reverence, true repentance and having confessed [their sins]." He backdated the Jubilee indulgence to Christmas Day 1299 and extended it throughout the Jubilee Year. To obtain the Jubilee indulgence, Romans were required to visit the basilicas on 30 days during the year, while pilgrims needed to do so only 15 times.

In another bull, Pope Boniface excommunicated anyone who attacked pilgrims coming to Rome. He also granted the Jubilee indulgence to those who could not complete the visits or who died on the way to Rome, as many did.

The first Jubilee was surprisingly successful. Pilgrims came to Rome, which then had a population of 20,000, from France, Germany, Spain and even England. "The old came on the shoulders of the young," one report said. Among the many pilgrims were Dante (who in "The Divine Comedy" refers to the Jubilee several times), and artists like Giotto and Cimabue. Pilgrims prostrated themselves before the tomb of St. Peter; and on every Friday and feast day, Veronica's Veil, with an image of Jesus' face, was exposed for their veneration.

Rome has benefited from every Jubilee in terms of infrastructure and works of art. Already in 1300, the church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva was built near the Pantheon and the churches of Aracoeli and the Lateran were restored for the Jubilee. Rome's inns were full then, as now, and Vatican finances gained.

Establishing a Tradition

Although Pope Boniface decreed that a Jubilee should be held every 100 years, the next one was held just 50 years later. During the 1340s, the people of Rome were upset at the exile of the popes to Avignon and sent delegations there to the reigning pope, Clement VI, to plead with him to declare a Jubilee Year in 1350. They argued that Rome was in miserable condition and human life was too short to allow a person to gain the plenary indulgence if it could only be obtained every 100 years. Clement VI agreed to declare 1350

Pope Boniface excommunicated anyone who attacked pilgrims coming to Rome.

a Jubilee Year but published the bull only in August, after the great plague had hit Europe and Italy in 1348. Soon after that a powerful earthquake hit Rome on Sept. 9, 1349, damaging the basilicas of St. John Lateran and St. Paul's Outside the Walls.

Clement VI's bull granted the fullest pardon to those who visited and prayed at the tombs of Sts. Peter and Paul and extended it to those who did likewise at St. John Lateran. Henceforth the Lateran Basilica would be included in the Jubilee agenda.

The second Jubilee Year was opened in St. Peter's Basilica on Dec. 24, 1349; it was the only time in history that the pope was not present for the opening of a Jubilee Year, as he was in Avignon. More pilgrims came than for the first Holy Year; they came from Spain, England, Sweden, Germany, Hungary and Greece. Lodging again was a major problem, and food prices were high.

St. Bridget of Sweden, a Catholic mystic and founder of the Bridgettines, arrived in Rome for the Jubilee in 1350 and to get approval for her order; during her visit, she spoke out against ignorant and immoral clergy and called for the return of the papacy from Avignon.

It was only much later, however, that St. Catherine of Siena convinced Gregory XI, the last French pope, to return to Rome in 1377. When he died in 1378, the Romans demanded that the cardinals "elect a Roman, or at least an Italian" as next pope. They elected the archbishop of Bari (not yet a cardinal) in 1378. He took the name Urban VI and called a Jubilee for 1390 (a nod to the 33 years of life for Christ on earth, though it was actually 40 years after the previous Jubilee), but he died before it happened.

His successor, Pope Boniface IX, held two Holy Years: the first in 1390 and another 10 years later. He was one of three popes to hold two Jubilees: John Paul II and Francis are the only others.

The Great Western Schism (September 1378 to November 1417) saw three bishops claiming to be pope. It ended with the election of Martin V (1417-31), not yet a priest, as pope. He called a Jubilee for 1423 (33 years after the Jubilee of 1390, again for the 33 years of Christ's life) to

Men carrying a wooden cross process on Jan. 5, 2025, at the beginning of a Mass at Sacred Heart Church in Prescott, Ariz., to mark the start of celebrations for the Jubilee Year.

strengthen Catholic unity, and the Holy Door of St. John Lateran was opened for the first time.

The next Jubilee Year was held in 1450, under Pope Nicholas V (1447-55), the first of the Renaissance popes. Such a vast number of pilgrims came to Rome that he had to limit their stay in Rome to five days because of the lack of food.

During that Jubilee Year, Nicholas V canonized St. Bernardino of Siena, O.F.M., the famous 15th-century Franciscan preacher, just six years after his death. This appears to be the first instance of canonizations during a Jubilee Year, and since then it has become an element of many Jubilees, including the present one.

That Holy Year of 1450, however, was marred by two tragic events: an outbreak of the plague and a panic-crush on the bridge of Castel Sant'Angelo on December 19, in which 172 people died.

Pope Paul II (1464-71) issued the bull "Ineffabilis Providentia" on April 19, 1470, decreeing that a Jubilee be celebrated every 25 years, as has happened ever since with only a few exceptions. He also established that the Jubilee pilgrimage should include visits to the four main basilicas: St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. John Lateran and St. Mary Major. He died a year later, and it fell to his successor, Sixtus IV, to celebrate the Jubilee of 1475.

Sixtus IV (former minister general of the Franciscan

Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, celebrates Mass in the Basilica of the Annunciation at the inauguration of the Jubilee Year in the Holy Land on Dec. 29, 2024, in Nazareth, Israel.

Order of Friars Minor) was elected pope on Aug. 9, 1471. He wished to adorn Rome with works of art for the Jubilee Year and ordered the building of the Sistine Chapel. He also had the Ponte Sisto bridge built over the Tiber to prepare for the arrival of pilgrims and avoid another tragedy like that of December 1450. He opened the Jubilee on Dec. 24, 1474, but because of the flooding of the Tiber and a recurrence of plague, the crowds were small, so he extended the Jubilee to Easter 1476.

The next Jubilee Year was held under Pope Alexander VI in 1500. He issued the bull "Inter Multiplices" on March 28, 1499, and put order into the Jubilee agenda by developing a liturgical ceremony and structure that, for the most part, have survived to this day. He wanted the beginning of the Jubilee Year to be marked by an event with a powerful impact and so established the rite of the opening of the Holy Door, with a ceremony that explicitly refers to Jesus' words, "I am the door. Whoever passes through me will be saved" (Jn 10:7).

Pope Alexander VI opened the Holy Door in St. Peter's on Dec. 24, 1500, by striking the wall (built in front of the Holy Door) with a hammer before workers demolished the wall—a practice that continued until 1975.

Not long afterward, the Protestant Reformation started on Oct. 31, 1517, and Pope Leo X excommunicated Martin Luther on Jan. 3, 1521. Two Jubilee Years followed: in 1525, under Clement VII, and in 1550 under Julius III.

During the 1550 Jubilee, Ignatius Loyola was living in Rome, as was Philip Neri, who came to the help of the remarkable influx of pilgrims with his Holy Trinity Confraternity and set up a hospice. The hospice was enlarged for the 1575 Jubilee Year under Pope Gregory XIII, which was the first Jubilee after the Protestant Reformation and the redrafting of the political map of Europe, and in which the confraternities played an important role. Some 400,000 pilgrims came to Rome, which then had a population of 80,000. Many were Italians, but Arabs, Ethiopians and Armenians also came.

In 1600, Pope Clement VIII set an example by hearing confessions during Holy Week, serving meals to pilgrims and eating with 12 of the city's poor every day during Lent. Some cardinals stopped wearing their red robes as a sign of penitence. But on Feb. 17 of that same year, Giordano Bruno, a Dominican Friar, was burned at the stake in Rome's Campo de' Fiori after being condemned as a heretic by Clement VIII following a trial by the Inquisition.

From 1600 onward, Jubilees were held every 25 years for the next two centuries, but they appeared to lack the spiritual and religious enthusiasm of the first Jubilees and of those that would follow from Leo XIII onward.

At the Jubilee of 1625, Urban VIII extended the Jubilee indulgence to those who were unable to travel to Rome,

> Rome has benefited from every Jubilee in terms of infrastructure and works of art.

to prisoners and to the sick. Pope Innocent X instituted the Way of the Cross at Rome's Colosseum for the 1650 Jubilee Year, a religious event that continues during Holy Week even today and attracts many people.

The Jubilee Year of 1700 was the only one in which the Holy Door of St. Peter's was opened by one pope, Innocent XII, and closed by another, Clement XI.

There was no Jubilee in 1800 because there was no pope. Pius VI had been taken prisoner to France by Napoleon's troops and died in Valence on Aug. 29, 1799, and the conclave to elect his successor took place in Venice. On March 14, 1800, the assembled cardinals elected Pius VII as pope.

After Leo XII held a Jubilee Year in 1825, there was a 75-year gap with no Jubilee Year because of political turmoil.

Modern Jubilees

On the Feast of the Ascension, May 11, 1899, Pope Leo XIII proclaimed the Jubilee Year of 1900. For the first time in the 600-year history of the Christian Jubilee Year, responsibility for welcoming pilgrims fell to the authorities of the new Italian state. During that year, Leo XIII canonized John Baptist de La Salle and Rita of Cascia.

After World War I (1914-19), Pius XI held a Jubilee Year in 1925. His bull identified three goals: peace among peoples, a return of Catholics to the church and "the definitive settlement and organization of Palestine." More than half a million pilgrims came to Rome, including over 110,000 from across the globe, including from the Far East, the United States, Canada, and Latin America.

During that Jubilee Year, Pope Pius XI canonized St. Therese of the Child Jesus, Peter Canisius and the Curé d'Ars and beatified Bernadette Soubirous. He also instituted the feast of Christ the King.

After World War II (1939-45), Pius XII held a Jubilee Year in 1950. His bull spoke about the religious renewal of the modern world and presented the Jubilee as "the year of the great return, the year of the great pardon." During it he proclaimed the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven. He canonized Maria Goretti, a virgin martyr at the age of 11, at a ceremony attended by 200,000 people.

Visitors were given a "pilgrim card" which, for that occasion, was recognized as having the same validity as a passport within Italy. Ever since, pilgrim cards have been available for the Jubilee Years.

Paul VI held the Jubilee Year in 1975, 10 years after the ending of the Second Vatican Council, with the themes of conversion, renewal, reconciliation and social justice. It was the first Jubilee with events broadcast worldwide. (At the opening of the door of St. Peter's, some masonry in front of the door collapsed, nearly injuring the pope.)

John Paul II celebrated two Jubilee Years. The first was an extraordinary jubilee in 1983 to celebrate the 1,950th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The second, the ordinary jubilee observed every 25 years, was known as the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, during which the pope made several pilgrimages, including to Mount Sinai in Egypt and to the Holy Land. He beatified two of the children of Fatima and held a World Youth Day attended by more than two million young people.

Jubilee 2025

Pope Francis' first Jubilee Year was the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2016. For the first time in the history of Jubilees, he opened a Holy Door elsewhere than in Rome: in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Bangui, capital of the war-torn Central African Republic, on Nov. 29, 2015. He opened the Holy Door in St. Peter's on Dec. 8, and decreed that a "Door of Mercy" be opened in cathedrals, sanctuaries, hospitals and prisons throughout the world.

The second is the current Jubilee of Hope, which Francis inaugurated by opening the Holy Door in St. Peter's on the evening of Dec. 24. He explained in the bull that the Holy Door is opened "to invite everyone to an intense experience of the love of God that awakens in hearts the sure hope of salvation in Christ."

He made history on Dec. 26 by opening another Holy Door in the chapel of Rebbibia, Rome's largest prison, as a sign of hope for the inmates there. He is the first pope to open a Holy Door in a prison.

Following tradition, the pope's legates opened the Holy Doors in the three other major basilicas in Rome.

He called on pilgrims during this Jubilee Year "to discover hope in *the signs of the times* that the Lord gives us" and "to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence."

In the bull, he listed at least eight ways in which we can be agents of hope in today's world. He said "the first sign of hope" in this war-torn world should be "the desire for peace." He reminded everyone that "those who are peace-

Approximately 1,000 people attended Mass in St. Joseph Cathedral to mark the beginning of the Jubilee 2025 celebrations in San Diego on Dec. 29, 2024.

makers will be called 'children of God'" and said, "the need for peace challenges us all, and demands that concrete steps be taken."

He called on believers "to be signs of hope" in countries where there is a decline in birth rates by their "openness to life and responsible parenthood," and by working—also through legislative efforts—"for a future filled with the laughter of babies and children."

During the Jubilee Year, he said, "we are called to be tangible signs of hope for those of our brothers and sisters who experience hardships of any kind." He called for efforts at the government level "to restore hope" to prisoners through amnesties, pardons, improving prison conditions and the abolition of the death penalty. Before Christmas, he called for the commutation of the federal sentences of prisoners on death row in the United States.

He also urged believers to be "signs of hope" for the young, the elderly, the sick and those in hospital or affected by illnesses or disabilities, and for migrants.

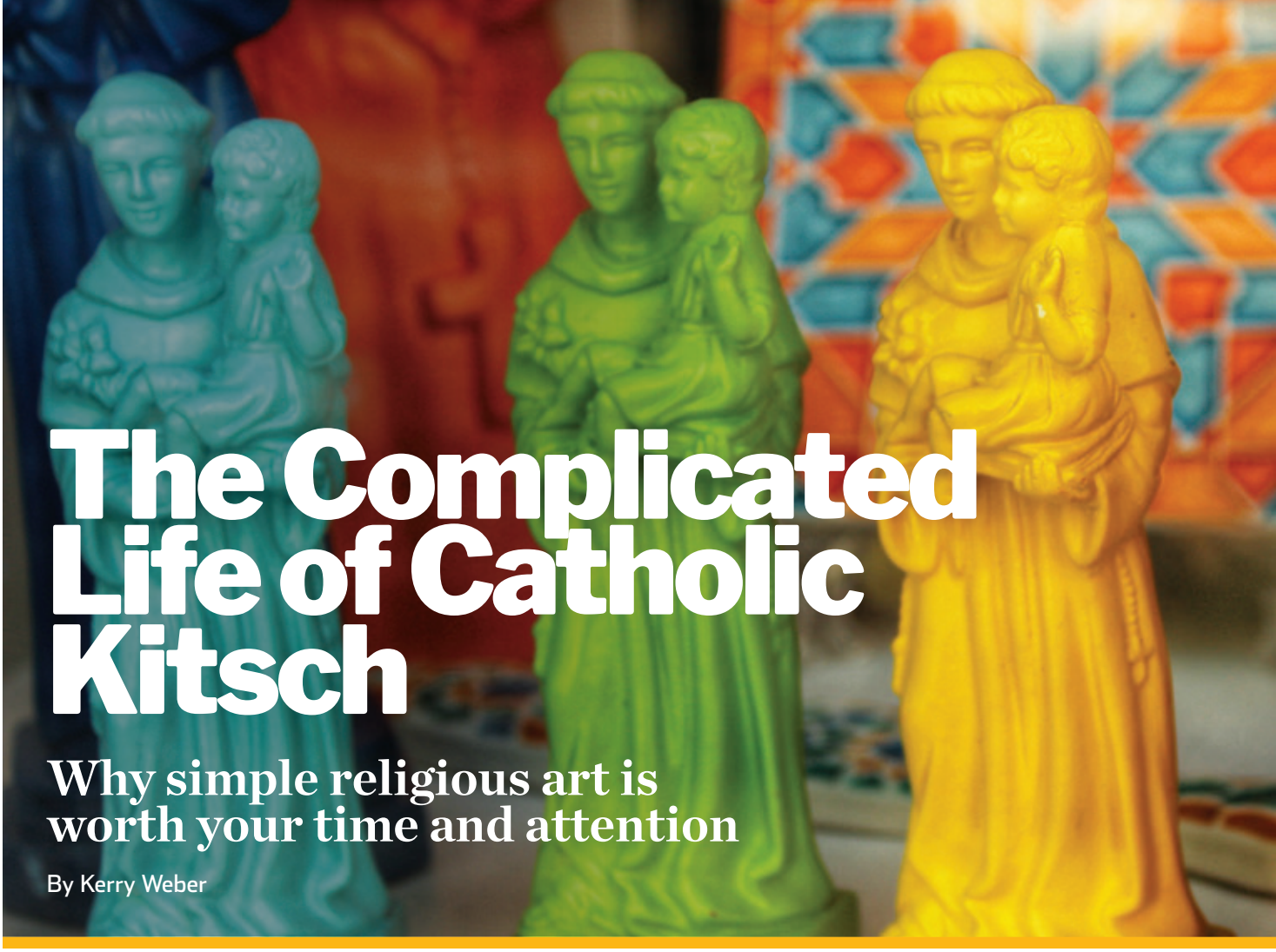
He appealed for "hope [to] be granted to the billions of poor, who often lack the essentials of life," and, like John Paul II in the Year 2000, pleaded with "the most affluent nations" to "forgive the debts of countries that will never be able to pay them" and to address "the ecological debt," describing this as "a matter of justice."

The 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (now Iznik in Turkey) occurs during this Jubilee Year. That council, held from May to July 325, affirmed the full divinity of Jesus Christ and that his being was of one substance (consubstantial) with the Father. Francis said he plans to travel to Nicaea and hopes a major ecumenical event can be held there. He also expressed hope that the Christian churches can finally reach agreement on a common date for Easter.

Pope Francis' agenda for this jubilee year includes encounters with no less than 35 different groups of people who are coming to Rome to celebrate their particular jubilee, starting with "the world of communications" and concluding with "the jubilee of prisoners." He will canonize two young people during the Jubilee Year, Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati.

Gerard O'Connell *is* ***America****'s Vatican correspondent and author of* The Election of Pope Francis: An Inside Story of the Conclave That Changed History. *He has been covering the Vatican since 1985.*

The full calendar of events and all relevant information for pilgrims to Rome can be found on the Vatican's Jubilee website, including how to get a free digital pass that will be needed to take part in the main Jubilee events: www.iubilaeum2025.va/en/contatti.html.



The Complicated Life of Catholic Kitsch

Why simple religious art is worth your time and attention

By Kerry Weber

It started when my mother found the portrait of John Paul II on the floor, propped against the wall, in the hallway of the diocesan offices. In an effort to make way for Benedict XVI, the limited wall space had been ceded to the new pontiff, and JPII's image had been left without a home. Unable to bear the thought of the future saint being buried in the bowels of office storage like the Ark of the Covenant in that Indiana Jones movie, my mother brought his visage home and hung it in the spare bedroom of my childhood home. He has stayed there for nearly two decades. And he is not alone.

Soon there was the decorative JPII plate my brother brought home for my mother from his summer in Poland. Then, not wishing to appear partisan, my parents added a commemorative poster from Benedict's visit to the United States in 2008. Then some celebratory printouts of Pope Francis, and now, on the hallway outside the room, a framed photo of me and Pope Francis sharing a laugh.

Some people would still call the space a spare bedroom. Others might view the decor and use less neutral descriptors. Our family calls it the Pope Room.

The Catholic Church has created and inspired some of the greatest art in the world, famous for its quality and history regardless of its religious significance. Catholics can claim Fra Angelico, Edgar Degas and Andy Warhol, among many other artists. We are also responsible for glow-in-the-dark rosary beads, St. Christopher dashboard statues and Pope Francis bobbleheads.

Items credited to names on the first list can be found mostly in museums or cathedrals. But items on the second list are, in my experience, much more commonly found in Catholic homes. The first qualify as fine art. The second, often, as kitsch. It is a term that for me holds some level of affection but etymologically speaking is inherently derisive, originating from a German word for trash.

The value of kitsch has long been questioned. "The presence of so much visual material that is the commercial reproduction, and trivialization of something meaningful, be it the Eiffel tower or the cross of Christ, is what interests me," the artist and scholar Betty Spackman said in an interview originally published in Verge, a journal hosted by Trinity Western University, about her book *A Profound Weakness: Christians and Kitsch*. "Many artists have used religious kitsch in their work to denigrate not only kitsch but Christianity. They realize the connection is very strong between faith and these seem[ing]ly shallow expressions

St. Anthony statues in living color

iStock/soniabonet

of it." In this light, kitschy art is not simply a poor expression of Christianity but a threat to it.

The scholar Paul Griffiths writes that the standard anti-kitsch argument treats it as simple art for simple people. In his essay "A Defense of Christian Kitsch," he describes, though does not subscribe to, a common objection to commercial religious objects: "Such things lack, above all else, nuance. They leave no doubt about how you should respond to them, and they don't invite varied interpretations."

The connoisseur is often pitched as the kitsch enthusiast's opposite, Dr. Griffiths writes. But while many might aspire to such a title, Dr. Griffiths says that the attitude required to earn it—one of contempt or condescension paired with a "hushed, detached, analytic gaze"—is more likely to take us further from the type of spirituality that religious art of any sort is intended to inspire.

"The connoisseur is at the margins of the sacred page, if there at all; what kitsch-producers and kitsch-lovers do is, by contrast, at the center," he argues. "This is a fallen world. Kitsch-love and connoisseurship both have their deformities. But the former is much closer to Jesus' beating heart than the latter."

In the aforementioned interview, Ms. Spackman argues that understanding any art begins with real curiosity:

> We should be asking questions like: does this artistic expression demonstrate honesty and a real search for truth? How does it reflect the time and place in which it is situated? Who buys it? Why do they buy it? Who makes it? Why do they make it? Does it express both passion and compassion towards others? Does it bring change in people or lifestyles? Does it make us think and see in new ways?

Asking such questions may not make one a fan of every image of the Sacred Heart or hovering guardian angel, but they should prompt a person to consider that even kitsch has something to contribute to the development of the religious imagination. Ms. Spackman states:

> Having approached kitsch in this way I was no less intellectually critical but I found myself being more merciful. I even realized that kitsch has played an important role as a street art that sustains the fragmented faith of generations of Christians who have not been allowed to make art or have it in their Churches. The dashboard of the car which becomes an altar with a bobble head Jesus and a glow in the dark cross is not necessarily to be laughed at. The reason it is there is just too complex.

Stories to Tell

When I was in my 20s, I had a small print of "Light of the World," a painting of a glowing Christ Child by Charles Bosseron Chambers, hanging in my apartment. Looking at it made me feel safe and warm, not because of its historical accuracy (Jesus appears as a small, blond, white child) or theological significance, but because it brought back memories of being in my grandmother's house, where a version of that painting once hung, and which I always noted with affection when I was a child.

I hung the painting as a tribute to my grandmother, who looked at us with the love and awe with which one might look at the child Jesus. She let us know we were important. And she walked across the street to Holy Name Church to go to Mass each day, which let us know that Jesus was important. I considered myself and Jesus lucky to be loved by such a woman. Like any good Catholic grandmother's house, hers echoed the warmth of the child Jesus, and I saw that warmth in the Chambers image, too.

"Light of The World,"
by Charles Bosseron Chambers

St. John Paul II, the Infant of Prague, St. Jude and an Irish blessing adorn a shelf in the author's childhood home.

David Morgan is a professor of religious studies with a secondary appointment in the Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies at Duke University. He told me that prints of that Child Jesus "Light of the World" also once hung in the homes of his mother and of his aunt. I was delighted by the coincidence but should not have been surprised. The prevalence of kitsch is, in part, the point. It is art that can be accessed by millions of people, regardless of class or circumstance.

Dr. Morgan recalled attending an academic conference at which someone noted that the venue was home to the original "Head of Christ," the famous painting by Warner Sallman. Dr. Morgan realized that, due to the image's ubiquity—it has been reproduced an estimated 500 million times—it hadn't occurred to him that there was an original at all. He recalls that a colleague launched into a critique of the image as "bad art for bad faith." But Dr. Morgan thought that such a view ignored the impact of, and reasons behind, its wide appeal.

"Millions of people put that picture in their home and have memories attached to it, and just calling them tasteless doesn't tell us much, especially about lived religion, what people do in everyday life," he said.

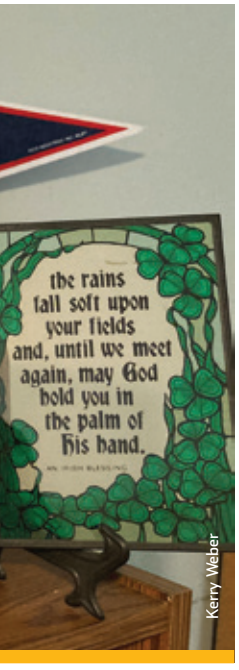
Dr. Morgan's research focuses on the reception of popular religious imagery. He has written on Protestant images of Jesus, as well as images of Our Lady of Fatima and the Sacred Heart. While he has a doctorate in art history, he often approaches religious images from a more anthropological angle. "I want to dig into the local circumstances and see what images do to construct life worlds in that place without arguing for some overarching universal scale of integrity and goodness," he said.

Dr. Morgan said that the home is often where we get "religion by osmosis." And the way we reflect our faith in our homes is influenced by multiple factors: "The images and the texts and poetry we embrace are a reflection of our social position, our formation, education, bonds of affection," he said. "They're also the versions of what we have come to believe religion or faith ought to aspire to."

But that does not mean that some homes are holier than others, based on their artistic expression of the faith. "I don't think it's a single axis of progress," Dr. Morgan said. "There are just so many different versions of Catholicism, and it has so much to do with the nation you're in and your history. Korean Catholics may not embrace the images that Irish Catholics will. But it's not on a single graduated scale."

Still, one might argue: If religion is learned by osmosis, doesn't it follow that the "best" art helps produce the best outcomes if you're trying to raise Catholic children? The picture book artist and author Tomie dePaola once told me, "Only the very best is good enough for children." Does it matter if my children have more questions about a statue of the Blessed Mother that changes color with the weather than they do about the Sistine Chapel?

"I don't think blank exposure to great art does anything; there has to be an engaging pedagogical apparatus," Dr. Morgan said. Which means actually talking about the meaning and history or emotional response to a religious image. "In that context, anything the child is looking at can



Kerry Weber


Courtesy of Monica Mercado

This light-up Infant of Prague was a popular door prize at the American Catholic Historical Association conference in 2020.

become significant, whether it's Sallman or a devotional statute or medal," he suggested. "Any statue or popular image has stories to tell, but you have to understand how it fits into worlds that may not be your own."

From Commercial to Devotional

The Catholic Church in which Monica Mercado grew up was sparse. The church building was a gymnasium, and her father often brought her to a Mass celebrated without music. It was at her grandmother's home in Puerto Rico that she first encountered a Catholicism that included a picture of the pope by the door and religious statues on the shelves.

Now an assistant professor of history at Colgate University and a member of the university's interdisciplinary museum studies faculty, she described her fascination with Catholic kitsch as "nostalgic and also foreign" to her experience of the faith.

Dr. Mercado's interest in religious imagery became more personal when she encountered a collection of photos from her "Nuyorican" family, several of whom had First Communion portraits taken in front of studio backdrops with paintings of Jesus gazing down at them. When she read an NPR slideshow on the life of Sonia Sotomayor that included a similar photo of the future Supreme Court justice, she was surprised by their ubiquity.

"These photo studio backdrops were all over New York, so you could get a kid in their fanciest clothing and take these portraits where they are depicted in the loving halo of this very popular visual trope," Dr. Mercado said.

There is something to be said for art that can be held and touched, even broken and replaced.

"My dad, Sonia Sotomayor, and other kids are going to these studios because this stuff is cheap enough that you can have a bunch of these backgrounds," she said. "There's something uncomfortable about it being commercial and having a price tag on it, but it's also something that can connect you to the sacred outside of the church or the shrine."

These photos, she said, eventually joined the ranks of other devotional items. "My aunt at 8 kneeling in the halo of this benevolent Jesus is put in a frame on my grandmother's shelf with statues or rosaries, and all of a sudden the kid's photo becomes something more," she said.

Dr. Mercado said that she and her fellow historians are intrigued by the fact that kitsch's "accessibility, which distinguishes it from fine art, also makes it more disposable." Which means that the Catholic kitsch that dominated much of the 20th century is often found in donation piles, not museums. "If you're interested in the materiality of Catholicism in the 20th century, it's found in people disposing of their parents' and grandparents' stuff, where some ends up in the trash and some ends up in the garage sales and estate sales and antique stores," she said.

And some of it ends up on eBay, which is where Dr. Mercado has found herself shopping for door prizes that might be appreciated by her colleagues in the American Catholic Historical Association at their annual conference. It started when someone brought a mid-20th-century, light-up Infant of Prague to the 2020 conference, where it was a hit.

"We started to think about: What does it mean to have this stuff in our houses, to be collectors and scholars, and also to rely on eBay?" she said. In the post-pandemic world, they began to bring more of these items to the conferences, thinking, "Here's a table with stuff that we bought when we couldn't be together. Let's touch it and talk about it."

"It makes me think again about what is seen as having value," Dr. Mercado said. "Catholics have all this stuff, and some of it is different from what Protestant stuff has looked like over time, and some of it is intertwined with scholarship or nostalgia or a memory of something our grandparents or parents have. *Stuff* is very powerful, and seeing all of it through new eyes has been fascinating to me."

A Mary doll and Jesus bandages (above), as well as paper party supplies (opposite page) are among the many Catholic products found at the online shop Be A Heart.

Cultivating Catholic Kids

The Infant of Prague statue on my grandmother's shelf owned a variety of capes. The silky wraps could be changed according to the liturgical season or feast day. As a child, I loved how the statue seemed both tactile and outside of time. There is something to be said for art that can be held and touched, even broken and replaced, things that do not need to stay on a shelf to maintain their value, that are meant to be held and worn or worn out.

And while the Infant of Prague statue may once have been the closest thing you could get to a Jesus doll, families today have nearly endless options for outfitting their homes and filling their toy boxes with faith-based options intended to inspire a deeper relationship with Jesus. My own home includes a collection of old-timey kitsch, along with a number of items from more modern Catholic companies. I am a proud owner of two pope bottle openers (one with Francis, and one with Benedict XVI on one side and John Paul II on the other); two pope mugs (John Paul II wearing sunglasses and Francis waving from the balcony on the day of his election); a small, plush My First Rosary with a teething-friendly cross; Tiny Saints keychains; socks depicting St. Ignatius; a plethora of squat plastic saints shaped like bowling pins; a memory game in which you match the saints; Holy Spirit hair ties; D.I.Y. rosaries; and a magnetic church scene in which priests, laypeople and church decor can be arranged by children (quietly) during Mass.

I've been fascinated by the growth of a number of small Catholic companies that approach Catholic goods with an eye for both aesthetics and quality—items that are accessible and affordable but not cheap. Many are run by Catholic women seeking to offer products with a more modern, Instagram-friendly aesthetic. Some offer a new take on classic devotions, others cater to Catholic children, and some are intended to evoke a laugh.

In 2018, Erica Campbell was a calligrapher in Los Angeles when she noticed the gap between the Catholics she knew and the aesthetics of the Catholic products being offered in religious spaces. "The Catholic products available had not been updated in some time," she told me by email. "I saw all of these beautiful things around me in the shops [in L.A.], and I wondered why we didn't have anything like that that reflected our faith."

So Ms. Campbell got to work. "I handpainted different Marian images that told a story of my own life, designed them into a pattern and then had them printed," she wrote. When she sold 500 of them in the first week, she was shocked. Then she sold 600 of her Our Lady of Guadalupe

swaddle blankets. Her online shop, Be a Heart, was born.

Inspired by both the L.A. event scene and the number of celebrations on the Catholic Church calendar, she began applying her approach to home decor, baby products and the liturgical year, including redesigning First Communion paper party goods for the Instagram era. "I wanted to sell things that look like something you would buy in a boutique in L.A., but had reminders of God in the everyday," Ms. Campbell said. "I wanted to make things that grandparents could gift to their grandchildren that maybe their non-practicing parents wouldn't mind having around."

Ms. Campbell recalled that so many of the special items she received to commemorate sacraments in her own life ended up stored away. So she aims to offer hands-on gifts that kids can create and use, like D.I.Y. rosaries with wooden beads inspired by Mary and St. Francis. One of her bestselling products is a plush doll of the Blessed Mother with various outfits that match her apparitions.

In creating products, Ms. Campbell often considers "things that parents can use with their new baby and be reminded in the exhausting hours of the early morning that they are not alone." And perhaps this is where shops like Ms. Campbell's differentiate themselves from the commercially available Catholic products of the past. She views her work as a sort of ministry and a chance to build community.

Even the humorous products—like the bandages that read "Jesus heals"—are meant to also offer moments of real consolation. "For me, it's little tiny reminders," she wrote. "When the girls get a tiny booboo, we get our bandages, and now Jesus is associated with healing comfort. Passing on the faith doesn't have to be sit-down lessons in church, but in the tiny quiet moments of our lives. I want to assist families in doing that." That Ms. Campbell has sold 50,000 tins of Jesus bandages seems to indicate that others agree.

Courtesy of Be a Heart/Erica Campbell

Of Statues and Saints

In recent years, in an understandable effort to tidy up, much of the papal-inspired decor has come down from the walls of the Pope Room in my parents' home. The original portrait of John Paul II remains, however, smiling over my children and their cousins as they use the room as a base for arts and crafts projects during visits. On a nearby bookshelf, the papal decorative plate still sits beside my grandmother's ancient Infant of Prague, dressed in his cape; a green statue of St. Jude and a stained glass Irish blessing complete the tableau. (And, as in any good New England Catholic home, a Red Sox World Series championship pennant is propped up behind them.)

This may not be to everyone's taste. It may not be Instagram-friendly. But it has become part of the backdrop against which my children's faith will be formed because of the stories these items tell. These statues and images evoke vibrant memories of individuals whose lived faith is rich and complicated and nuanced, whose lives were themselves works of art.

Kerry Weber *is an executive editor for* ***America.***

Next Steps on A.I.

Can Pope Francis help chart a way forward?

By John P. Slattery and Joseph Vukov

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Pope Francis pushed for a political response to A.I. that helps to create an "economy for the common good."

On Jan. 28, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education published "Antiqua et Nova," a thorough theological treatment of artificial intelligence. The document contributes to a series of recent Vatican statements on A.I., including some issued directly by the Holy Father. Of these, one recent and particularly important one was a speech delivered at the G7 summit on June 14, 2024. Here, Pope Francis argued in front of the gathered politicians on the need to "create the conditions" for a "positive and fruitful" use of artificial intelligence in the future. He warned that A.I. is a tool that can shape human culture, and that how we choose to use A.I. will determine the way it will shape culture going forward. Will it solve diseases or drop bombs? Help stop climate change or increase global inequities?

The benefits of A.I. can outstrip its risks only if we are careful to create conditions for use that welcome a culture of encounter. Otherwise, we run the risk of further promoting a culture of death and technocracy, which Francis has termed the "technocratic paradigm."

For Francis, this is the biggest risk of A.I.: It contributes to the technocratic paradigm, in which human beings over the past few centuries have increasingly become seen as cogs in a global machine of profit and war. Modern technology has exacerbated the rise of the technocratic paradigm, with climate change, increasing rates of depression and rising global inequity as symptoms. We need political action, the pope argued to the G7, in order to create the conditions of possibility to promote the common good in the future of A.I.

Ethics and Action

From both the Vatican and the pope, we have heard a consistent message: A.I. is a tool that is created by and shapes human culture. And we have seen specific calls to action: In his G7 address, for example, Francis argued for a ban against lethal autonomous weapons, and pushed for a political response to A.I. that could help create an "economy for the common good."

Thus far, however, we have not seen much in the way of specific recommendations. We believe that this is an important next step for Francis as he emerges as a leading global voice in conversations about A.I.

It has, after all, become common to greet the rise of A.I. with a kind of doom-and-gloom pessimism. This pessimism, however, regularly resists concrete calls to action. For example, the Vatican-sponsored "Rome Call for A.I. Ethics," which Francis positively quoted at the G7, is a shared document with positive, generic language with which most will be able to agree. And yet it offers little in the way of enforcement or accountability.

Microsoft, for example, is one of the original signers of the "Rome Call for A.I. Ethics," and yet seemed to follow in Elon Musk's footsteps by firing its entire A.I. ethics

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VIMS

Impact Report

2024

Feed
Teach
Clothe
Heal
House
Love.

Inspired by the life and works of St. Vincent dePaul we envision a faith-filled world where basic human needs are met, people are united in generous service, and humanity flourishes.

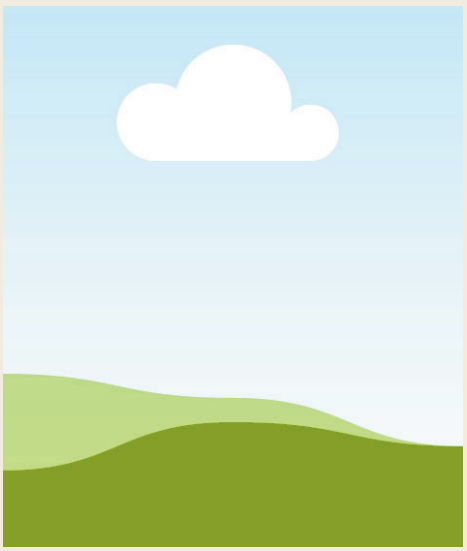
We were able to....

Strengthen the economic resilience among women survivors of violence in Bolivia. We were able to help the San Vicente de Paul Farm located in Bolivia. The farm is making significant strides in supporting women who have experienced domestic violence and extreme poverty. The project has seen significant success, with 60 women working on the farm, 129 receiving job training and 341 benefiting from outpatient care for violence.

Fill up goat pens in Rwanda Burundi.

·Goat milk is far more beneficial than cow's milk for malnutrition in children. Malnutrition is extremely high in Rwanda Burundi, and the milk of goats helps combat this.

Goats give more than material things. Goats give the people in the community a purpose and something to do since these people are jobless and stressed. They raise and care for the goats. Raising goats raises a person's realization that they have self-worth, can contribute to society, and keep moving forward.



Help the lives of children and adults in Madagascar. Most Malagasy children will never set foot in a classroom. 37% of girls in Madagascar marry before their 18th birthday, and a staggering 12% marry before they turn 15. Together, we helped improve a small corner of Madagascar with sustainable resources including classrooms and job training programs. We were able to help bring improved infrastructure with Internet for Marillac College.

We were able to....

Feed children in Manipur, India. We were able to see funds given to a school in Manipur, India. This growing school is a source of hope for these children and their families. Education will make it possible for them to move beyond a future of subsistence farming. Girls and boys learn together at this school–something revolutionary in this part of India!

Fund beekeepers in Ethiopia. We were able to help empower the elderly and widows to become backyard beekeepers and honey producers. Ethiopia is one of Africa's leading honey producers, thanks to its diverse flora and favorable climate. Ethiopian beekeepers often use traditional methods that supports rural livelihoods and also plays a crucial role in environmental conservation and biodiversity. Progress with some of the traditional hives has already produced honey and educational opportunities for young farmers.

Expand Tanzania Maize Production We were able to see funds given to help the Vincentians in Tanzania expand food production so that more people will have more food to eat? This expanded production will employ workers and improve the standard of living for these folks too. And that, in turn, means more children will be able to go to school instead of staying home to work on the land.

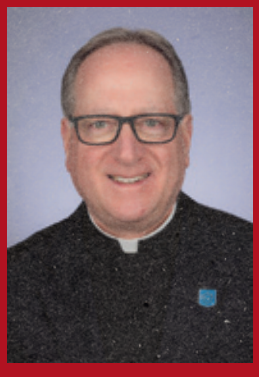
...and these sustainable projects continue today.

Thank you
for your 2024 gifts.

You helped:
Families journey out of poverty,
Children eat more healthy food,
Increase self worth,
Change lives.

In all their names,
we say thank you!

Blessings to you in the New Year.



Fr. Mark Pranaitis
Executive Director

Lindsey Adams
Director of Digital Marketing

Bill Ebbesmeyer
Director of Finance

Learn more: VIMS1617.org

Continued from Page 32

and society team in March 2023, right before launching its massive Copilot A.I. system. Microsoft still claims to hold "responsible A.I. principles," but again, it has no one to hold it accountable but itself.

In May 2023, the Center for A.I. Safety released a statement warning that an unfettered artificial intelligence industry could literally bring about the end of humanity: "Mitigating the risk of extinction from A.I. should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war." Signatories included Sam Altman, Bill Gates, Demis Hassabis and Ray Kurzweil. At a meeting of the bipartisan Senate Judiciary Committee, Mr. Altman also urged U.S. lawmakers to regulate A.I., calling it a culture-altering technology that must be developed with transparency and an eye to the good. Again, doom and gloom. Also again, precious little in terms of concrete recommendations.

Reckoning With the Future of A.I.

We should emphasize: Vatican documents such as "Antiqua et Nova" and Francis' address at the G7 have not merely echoed these previous statements. Francis has added to the international conversation by framing concerns about A.I. in the language of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Addresses such as those to the G7 have provided the world with a tradition and language for our collective concerns, and in this way went beyond other, similar calls of alarm.

Yet it is a sign that one has played it relatively safe if one has not drawn some lines in the sand that some are not willing to cross. Everyone nods along and takes comfort in being on the same page, but they are ultimately not challenged to act. For example, while Francis has pushed for a ban on fully autonomous weapons systems, a ban on such weapons is relatively uncontroversial. The more dangerous usage of A.I. is in the realm of partially autonomous systems, which are already deployed around the world and in deep need of political restraint.

One of the hardest things to do in conversations about A.I. is to say something that everyone else isn't already thinking. Over the past few years, the set of algorithms, applications and programs widely termed "artificial intelligence" has transitioned from a largely invisible part of modern computing infrastructure to the primary way in which people see the future of computer use.

This move has occurred not only because of the explosion of generative A.I. in the last two years but also because of a concentrated global marketing effort to convince the public that A.I. is the future, that "strong" or "general" A.I. is coming soon and that humans should hope for or fear the future. It doesn't matter which, as long as they feel strongly about it. The political response to A.I. has been caution and concern, even in places like the United States, where the federal government seems incapable of action on the issue.

The Dangers of A.I.

Yet the current harms and threats of A.I. are numerous, including the increasing appearance of deepfakes, ongoing weapons development, violations of personal privacy in terms of body and facial images, replacements of human creativity, and a rise in plagiarism, censorship and disinformation. In response to these challenges, we need to move beyond the recognition of the obvious—that we want to avoid the bad aspects of A.I. even while fostering the good. We need concrete recommendations about how to move toward these goals.

The best known governance response has been from the European Union, whose A.I. Act will go into effect later this year, requiring transparency, watermarking and accountability for uses of A.I. that might harm the public. While the end result of this act is unknown, it is a remarkable and helpful step in governance, since history has proven time and again that capitalistic projects cannot be trusted to regulate themselves.

But, again, more concrete steps in line with the A.I. Act must be taken. For example, the energy usage required for A.I. is only increasing. Google recently reported that despite its stated goal to be carbon neutral by 2030, its energy usage has actually increased by 48 percent compared with 2019, making the goal "challenging." Because carbon neutrality is only a self-imposed goal meant to endear Google to the public, there is no accountability for this increase in energy usage and no regulatory repercussions.

All evidence points to similar energy increases from all major A.I. producers, thanks to the vast amounts of energy required to train and query A.I. systems, although the recent emergence of DeepSeek as a powerful model with less training requirements has begun to complicate this narrative. Given the emphasis on climate change throughout Francis' pontificate, this could be a natural place for him to intervene with specific requests for action from world leaders.

Likewise, consider the challenge of A.I.-generated deepfakes, which are generated images and videos that show people doing things they did not do and can strip away human dignity. In the same vein, facial recognition systems currently used by police at airports and at many borders have the effect of transforming people into digital identities, leading to false arrests and false identifications. Further, hallucinations—false information that A.I. systems present as true—continue to persist in all generative

A.I. solutions.

How can world leaders begin to mitigate the risks of deepfakes and hallucinations? How can governing bodies pass legislation requiring the kind of watermarking and transparency needed to resist them?

It is also important to note that the risks of A.I. disproportionately affect those who are already on the outskirts of society: the poor, the unhoused, the immigrant. The countries that Francis addressed are *already utilizing A.I. solutions* that censor, that track identities and criminalize, and they are already producing weapons that incorporate A.I.

Concrete Action

In Pope Francis' address to the G7, he offered a philosophical background of technological development, pleaded for A.I. development focused on the common good and urged members of the G7 to use politics to create the conditions of possibility for A.I. systems that create a culture of encounter. All things that we—and we assume, all people of good will—should readily agree with.

Likewise, "Antiqua et Nova," while not an encyclical, continues to signal that A.I. is a key focus for this, perhaps the final stretch of Francis' pontificate. "Antiqua et Nova" cites previous Vatican publications on A.I., including the G7 speech and the book *Encountering A.I.*, published by the Dicastery for Culture and Education last year. This document represents the clearest picture of a Catholic theology of A.I. to date, and as such is a decisive step forward in Francis' focus on A.I.

But as significant a step as this theological document represents, there remains so much more to do. In laying this groundwork, Pope Francis also set himself up for what we believe is the important next step for him: to address the specific and imminent harms of A.I. with specific recommendations to world leaders.

The pope's comments at the G7 were met with the nodding of heads in agreement by world leaders, saying, "Yes, that's what I mean to do—create a better world." That is a good start, and it is encouraging that world leaders have found in Francis someone worth listening to. The next step for him is to draw some lines in the sand and to make recommendations that may cause more stirring in seats than nodding of heads. To the pope's credit, Vatican City published its first "Guidelines on Artificial Intelligence" law in late December, attempting to control the way artificial intelligence is used within the state. The law echoes aspects of the European Union law and represents—at least on the policy side—a small but significant step forward.

But there remains so much more to do. A.I. is not a distant, lingering menace, like the threat of nuclear weapons. It is already actively transforming society, community by community, person by person. It can offer real and wonderful possibilities for medical and scientific advancements and has the potential to alleviate many human stresses. Without immediate changes to the global capitalist structure of A.I. deployment and wealth procurement, even the noblest efforts will serve only to increase inequity and cause the deterioration of our already challenging environmental future.

Pope Francis meets with Brad Smith, president of Microsoft, at the Vatican on Nov. 11, 2024.

Pope Francis' voice on this issue has become a clarion call of hope for billions of people across the world, no matter their religious persuasion. While he cannot regulate multinational corporations, he can offer examples of responsible technology use and lift up specific instances of failure. He can be prophetic in his tangible hopes for a technological future while pushing for swift and decisive action.

As Catholic scholars engaged in A.I., we are grateful to see the pope consciously and actively engage in A.I. discussions. It is our hope that, having laid crucial theological groundwork over the past year, Francis will now engage these issues in the future with calls to concrete actions by governments and corporations. The role of the church should be prophetic in its hopeful visions of the future, but also in calling attention to the ills of the present.

John P. Slattery *is the executive director of the Carl G. Grefenstette Center for Ethics in Science, Technology, and Law at Duquesne University.* Joseph Vukov *is an associate professor of philosophy at Loyola University Chicago, where he is also associate director of the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage. He is the author of* Staying Human in an Era of Artificial Intelligence.

CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis meets with members of the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education at the Vatican on May 24, 2024.

Becoming God's Instruments

A look at a neglected aspect of Ignatian spirituality

By Aaron Pidel

In the early 1990s, my soccer teammates and I had several terse but evocative labels for those we considered to fall short of our adolescent standards of virile independence. One of the mildest was *tool*. If you let your girlfriend persuade you to watch the big game at her house (instead of with the guys), for instance, or respected your parents' curfew (instead of staying to close down the party), you might meet a swift rebuke: "Don't be such a tool." One implication was, of course, that you were weak, letting yourself be used or controlled by others.

But such a derogatory use of *tool* is hardly unique to the locker rooms of the 1990s. In ancient Greece, Aristotle described slaves as living tools or animate instruments. I doubt he meant it as a compliment. And ever since the Enlightenment raised autonomy to a supreme human value, it has perhaps become ever more villainous to instrumentalize others than to be instrumentalized. The whole semantic field of *tool* and *instrument* is fraught with negative moral connotations. I suspect few are disappointed, therefore, not to find it in most contemporary accounts of Ignatian spirituality, alongside terms like *spiritual freedom*, *discernment* and *mindfulness*.

Ignatius' writings themselves, however, show a different tendency. There, *instrument* both serves as a central spiritual category and bears a positive connotation. In the *Constitutions*, the governing document of the Jesuits, Ignatius describes good candidates for his order as "apt instruments" (No. 30), Jesuits already incorporated as "weak instruments" (No. 638) and the whole Jesuit order as a "human instrument" that must dispose itself to be "wielded by the divine hand" (No. 812). The term also appears dozens of times in Ignatius' letters, both before and after the arrival of his indispensable secretary, Juan de Polanco, in 1547.

The disappearance of the notion of *instrument* from contemporary Ignatian vocabulary, I would like to suggest, is a loss. When given a proper interpretation, it captures a style of Christian discipleship and holiness much needed today. It has the potential to recenter the Christian life on something more stable than feelings, giving importance to the arduous apostolic preparation that sometimes interferes with sentiments of peace and union. By the same token, it has the potential to reconnect private spirituality to the Christian religion, encouraging Christians to imbue

Even a sharp pencil remains useless unless it offers a grip to the divine hand.

their feelings and efforts alike with the supernatural energies flowing from the church and the sacraments.

A Theological Basis

Ignatius' use of the term *instrument*, despite preceding Polanco's arrival, does not predate Ignatius' time at the University of Paris (1528-35). This suggests that he first encountered the term in his academic studies. How could such an ostensibly abstract scholastic category catch the attention of a mystic like Ignatius? Some light can be gained by considering the way it was used by St. Thomas Aquinas, whom Ignatius designated the theologian of reference for his fledgling order.

Aquinas often invokes the notion of *instrument* in relation to Christ's humanity. All theologians of his day agreed that the Word assumed a human nature. But debates persisted about the role this human nature plays in our salvation. Does it serve merely to render the divine Word audible and visible, making doctrinal instruction and inspiring example possible? Or does it also transmit the very power by which we are saved?

Several passages in Scripture seem to favor the second opinion. The Gospel of Luke describes Christ's body almost as if it were a live wire from which energy "arcs" when the crowds press in: "Power went forth from him" (Lk 6:19). Paul speaks of Christ as the "last Adam," as if his activity somehow impinged upon the whole human race ("Adam"), even those distant in time and space.

It was precisely to account for such prodigious effects that Aquinas opted to describe Christ's human nature as an instrument of his divinity. For an instrument is, by definition, a cause that works in tandem with a higher cause to produce nobler effects than it could produce by itself.

Take the homely example of a pencil. By itself, it is inert. But wielded by the hand of an author, it produces intelligible script, becoming jointly responsible for effects of a higher (human and intellectual) order. According to Aquinas, something analogous holds for Christ's humanity. By itself, Christ's human nature can do no more than any other. Wielded by the divine Word, however, it generates effects of a supernatural order, transmitting grace and miraculous healing. Christ's human nature is "disposed" to serve as such a perfect instrument, of course, because the Spirit imbues it with all virtues and gifts.

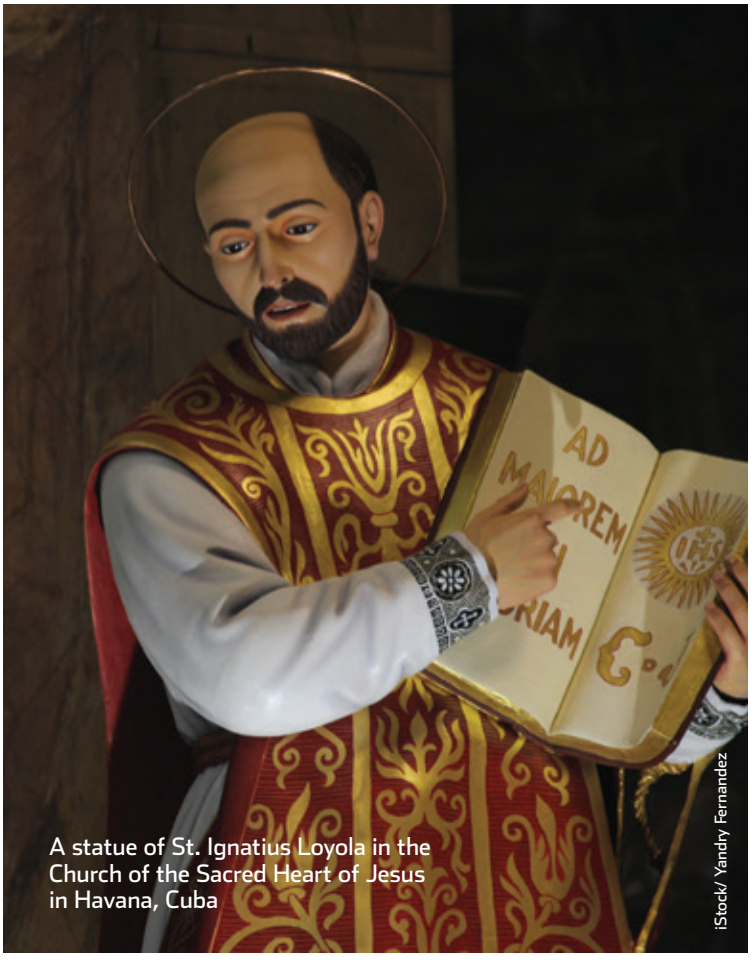
This theological backdrop perhaps permits us to see how Ignatius resonated with the language of *instrument*. For a divine instrument is the sort of cause that, when wielded by the divine hand, conducts divine strength to others. The better disposed the instrument, the closer it approaches the condition of a superconductor, dissipating none of its divine current through internal resistance. As the founder of an order dedicated to "helping souls," especially by the ministry of the word, Ignatius intuited that success would involve drawing on both human and more-than-human energies.

Instrumental Discipleship

This brings us to the earlier mentioned benefit of decentering feelings in the spiritual life––something necessary if we are ever to serve God beyond our comfort zone and for his own sake. As Cardinal John Henry Newman once remarked in "Self-Contemplation," a sermon addressed to an Anglican congregation: "They who make self instead of their Maker the great object of their contemplation will naturally exalt themselves." Reconceiving Christian maturity as perfect instrumentality begins to address this danger. For through this model, the pursuits of consolation or peace, without being simply written off, take a back seat to the demands of honing the instrument with a view to some objective service.

These demands exert pressure from two directions, inasmuch as every classic tool has two ends. One end fits the tool to its task, like the tip of a pencil fits it to mark paper. The other end adapts the tool to the artisan, like the length of the pencil offers a grip to the hand. Similarly for Ignatius, Christians become better instruments in two ways that need not involve spiritual exhilaration: by fitting themselves to deal with their fellow human beings and by adapting themselves to the divine hand.

Ignatius drives home the importance of honing the human end of the instrument in his so-called "Letter on Perfection" of 1547, addressed to the 80 young Jesuits who were then studying in Coimbra. Given to fits of fervor, the Jesuit students had begun flogging themselves in the streets and displaying a fresh corpse indoors as a *memento mori*. When these exuberances—which no doubt made the scholastics feel very fervent—divided the community, Ignatius intervened to explain the implications of the "instrumental" style of holiness to which they were called. He



A statue of St. Ignatius Loyola in the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Havana, Cuba

iStock/ Yandry Fernandez

identified two principal ways they could become "perfect instruments of God's grace" during their time of studies: learning and virtue.

Each requires discretion. Studies require the whole person, he observed, and virtue grows more from steady application than from erratic bursts. The goal of preparing the instrument for future ministries of the word should regulate fervor, even time spent in prayer, not vice versa. You must sharpen the pencil, in short, if you want the divine hand to write clearly with it.

At the same, of course, even a sharp pencil remains useless unless it offers a grip to the divine hand. Jesuits, accordingly, should make room in their prayer for a variety of exercises, not only those that foster devotion and mold affectivity, but also those that charge the instrument with the spiritual power to touch hearts. With this latter end in view, Ignatius habitually sought to involve intercessors of a higher order, approaching them at sacred times, in sacred places and through sacred objects. In his Spiritual Exercises, for instance, Ignatius suggests that retreatants beg the graces they seek by a triple colloquy—that is, by presenting their petition first to Mary, then to Christ and finally to the Father.

To help struggling Jesuits in Goa, he sent the skull of one of St. Ursula's 11,000 virgin companions, which was later said to work miracles. To Jesuits in vocational crisis, he was known to prescribe a pilgrimage to the Holy House of Loreto, explaining that "God usually helps more in a place where he is venerated than in another." It behooves the instrument to pray not only so as to cultivate the right inner dispositions, in short, but also so as to place itself in the right "hands"—that is, under the influence of the angels, saints and sacraments who can wield it to greater effect.

For a classic example of this instrumental discipleship in action, one can look to Ignatius' way of securing ecclesiastical approval for his fledgling order. The *Chronicon*, Polanco's chronicle of early Jesuit history, recounts how Pope Paul III was unwilling to approve the Jesuits against the judgment of a certain Cardinal Guidiccioni. The latter, citing the laxity of religious life as he knew it, had repeatedly declared himself opposed to all new foundations. Ignatius, sensing that only an extraordinary influence could change his heart, organized a counteroffensive on two fronts.

On the one hand, he solicited testimonial letters from all the nobles and theologians he knew, flooding Rome with weighty pleas for the creation of this new order. In this way, he primed the instrument at the human end. On the other hand, Ignatius asked his fellow companions collectively to offer 3,000 Masses for Guidiccioni's change of heart. A letter of Francis Xavier from India survives that begs Ignatius to let him know what "fruit in the church" his hundreds of Mass intentions produced.

Though no answer ever managed to reach Xavier, Polanco's *Chronicon* preserves one for our benefit:

> And he [Guidiccioni], though he had written against the multiplication of religious orders, and would not assent to this new one, was now being assailed by many sacrifices and prayers. After he had dragged the affair out for a full year, he, overcoming his own reasons through internal impulses and motions, thought his way to a solution: that the Society would be approved as a religious order, but could admit only sixty persons until time itself should teach what is expedient for the church.

Polanco (and no doubt the other early Jesuits) was convinced that Guidiccioni's inner transformation owed something not only to human diplomacy but to the power of the Mass.

> **The instrument achieves its full potential only by being inserted into what Ignatius calls the 'hierarchical church.'**

A Tool for Christ

The first Jesuits found the soundness of this instrumental style confirmed time and again in their apostolic work. Human learning, talent and rank contributed greatly to winning others for Christ. These should be carefully cultivated. But care should also be taken to charge these human efforts with a divine energy, doing so with a view to bringing about even richer effects. Drawing from the field reports of early Jesuit missionaries, the Jesuit historian André Ravier generalizes: "They had a very strong feeling of disproportion between acts and effects, especially the spiritual effects of their acts." Significantly, this feeling was more than an inner experience, more than consolation or peace. It was an observation of dynamics in the world and in history, of a fruitfulness unexplainable by natural gifts alone.

In this lies the potential of Ignatius' instrumental model of union for reconnecting spirituality and religion. Though inner attitudes and movements do help dispose the instrument, they do not suffice. The instrument achieves its full potential only by being inserted into what Ignatius calls the "hierarchical church"—that is, into the ensemble of angels, saints, superiors, sacraments and sacramentals that conduct this divine energy to us. To flee from the all-too-human church into a non-sacramental spirituality of philanthropy and mindfulness would be to remove the instrument's "handle." "Apart from me," Jesus reminds us, "you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

Though this disproportion between natural gifts and spiritual impact is seldom expressed today in the idiom of *instrument*, many Christians today will still recognize it. In the Baptist South where I grew up, they used to speak of "anointed preachers" much as Ignatius spoke of "apt instruments."

When I think of apt instruments closer to my own experience, I often think of a Jesuit with whom I lived at Jesuit High School in New Orleans. Bespectacled, soft-spoken, never an athlete, he was hardly the typical magnet for high school boys. And yet he became so. With methodical effort he communicated his interest in the students, watching their games, chaperoning their dances, teaching them the games Diplomacy and Settlers of Catan during lunch breaks. And he crowned these efforts with the church's public prayer, joining to the petitions of the Liturgy of the Hours every day all those whom he had encountered and all those to whom he had promised prayer.

Not a few Jesuits of my generation would consider him the human instrument of their vocations. And a much broader circle of his former students still trace their spiritual awakening back to the peace and joy with which he succumbed to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (A.L.S.).

If you had called him a tool, I suspect he would have taken it as a compliment. Nowadays, I would too.

Aaron Pidel, S.J., *is an assistant professor of theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.*

OSV News photo/Orhan Qereman, Reuters

What Happened in Syria

And why did we fail, so often, to help?

By Stephanie Saldaña

A few days after the fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria last December, hundreds of mourners processed behind the casket of the activist Mazen al-Hamada as his funeral took place in Damascus. Mr. al-Hamada had become famous all over the world for speaking out against the horrors of Mr. al-Assad. First arrested in 2011, then tortured and imprisoned, he was eventually released and escaped to Europe, where he found asylum in the Netherlands in 2014. Once there, he worked tirelessly to raise the alarm about the brutality ordinary Syrians were experiencing in prisons. "We are trying to tell people that we are humans: no more, no less," he said in one interview. He returned to Syria in 2020, where he was arrested at the airport. His recently murdered body was discovered in Sednaya shortly after the regime fell, bearing signs, once again, of torture.

As the world wakes up to the almost incomprehensible brutality that Syrians experienced under Bashar al-Assad, it is also a moment in which, if we are wise, we might do an examination of conscience to ask forgiveness for the ways in which we did not listen. Who were we during these last 13 years? What did we know? Why did we fail, so often, to act? The truth is that, at best, we simply did not do enough to help the people of Syria in their hour of need. At worst, the world was deeply cruel to them.

I lived in Syria before the war, so this was never a story about strangers to me. I knew that behind the numbers in the newspapers were faces, including my former neighbors, my friends, my teachers. Beginning in 2016, I spent years traveling the globe, speaking to Syrians and other refugees about what they carried with them when they were forced to escape. In the process, I learned a great deal about the rest of us—about our refusal to help those in need, our capacity for cruelty and our willingness to look the other way in the face of suffering. At the height of the war, as an estimated 600,000 Syrians were killed, more than half of the country's population became displaced. Millions became refugees. They sought asylum in more than 130 countries, so that their story became the story of all of us.

I met them in camps like Zaatari in Jordan, living in white shipping-container homes, a camp so crowded that it became the fourth largest city in that country. I spoke to them in displacement camps in Iraq. In poor neighborhoods in Istanbul. I met parents desperate to get their children back into school, gardeners who told me the names of their lost trees and children named after the cities their parents hoped one day to return to.

I also met Syrians in Paris, in Amsterdam, in the French Alps, in Switzerland, outside London, in Greece. They were young men who had escaped conscription into the army because they did not want to murder their fellow citizens; parents hoping to work again and for their children to heal from trauma; artists and writers and doctors and lawyers, who, if they had stayed, risked death by prison or barrel bombs. They often sold their belongings or bor-

Displaced Syrians who fled from the Aleppo countryside travel with their belongings in Tabqa, Syria, on Dec. 3, 2024.

rowed money to pay smugglers to cross the sea, knowing that it was almost impossible to find passage any other way.

We cannot say that we did not know why Syrians were fleeing. Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons against his own people. A military defector with the codename Caesar smuggled out over 50,000 photos, showing Mr. al-Assad's systematic torture of detainees in Syrian prisons. By 2015, the bombardment of Aleppo, Syria's largest city, made it widely considered the most dangerous place on earth. Those who escaped Syria were fleeing for their lives. To find safety, because the world did not arrange for safe passage, they often had to risk their lives again.

And so, during the war, the Mediterranean became a graveyard, and Syrians who had already lived through bombardment watched as their family, their friends and their neighbors drowned. A photo of a little boy, Alan Kurdi, emerged, his body lying face down on the shores of Turkey. The conscience of the world was briefly stirred.

Yet it did not last. As the European Union sought to limit the flow of refugees, they set up "hotspots" on Greek islands, where refugees and migrants who were lucky enough to make it to shore safely were forced to wait in terrible conditions for their asylum requests to be processed. I visited Moria on the island of Lesbos in 2017, the same year Pope Francis said that many holding centers had become like "concentration camps." It was freezing, overcrowded and dangerous.

A Syrian man confronted me, wanting to know why, if journalists came every day to document their mistreatment in the camp, nothing changed. I could not answer him. Everything I saw challenged what I had always believed as a writer: that if people only knew about the horrors that were happening in the world, then they would do something to help.

Instead, as the years passed, the journey to safety was made even more dangerous. The European Union paid the Libyan Coast Guard to prevent migrants from reaching European shores. Human rights groups accused the Greek Coast Guard of pushing boats back into the water. In 2023, a boat off the coast of Pylos in Greece sank, and 600 people drowned. Many of them were Syrians. In 2017, Syrians were included in the ban on travel to the United States issued by then-President Donald Trump.

Yet during those years, we also witnessed the best of what humanity can offer, especially among the Syrians themselves. Syrian classical musicians in Europe formed the Syrian Expat Philharmonic Orchestra. The Syrian master soap maker Hassan Harastani started making his

> **Why, if journalists came every day to document their mistreatment, did nothing change?**

Aleppo soap outside Paris. The Hadhad family of chocolatiers from Damascus founded Peace by Chocolate in Canada. Yusra Mardini, the Syrian swimmer who survived the sea crossing, joined the refugee Olympic team. The filmmaker Hassan Akkad, formerly tortured under Mr. al-Assad, worked as a hospital cleaner during the height of Covid-19 to raise awareness of health workers.

Ordinary people also offered solidarity. Volunteers on search-and-rescue missions saved people from drowning in the sea. Organizations like Jesuit Refugee Service helped Syrians with food and education, while Doctors Without Borders provided lifesaving medical care. Journalists like James Foley and Marie Colvin—alongside so many Syrians—died while giving voice to victims of war. Catholic organizations like Sant'Egidio worked to give Syrians safe passage. Lawyers volunteered to take asylum cases, and church communities around the globe banded together to sponsor families.

Now, as Syrians begin to come to terms with all that they lived and lost in these last years, I hope the rest of us will not be tempted to turn the page too quickly. There is so much that we need to confront about what role we played in Syrians' stories, about how we could have done better, been more responsive to their pleas for help and, most of all, how we might have made the journey safer for refugees.

By June 2024, according to the United Nations refugee agency, one of every 67 people in the world was forcibly displaced. We can no longer pretend that their stories are not intertwined with our own. In a global world, the commandment to love our neighbor can no longer be limited to loving the person standing next to us. Our neighbor, knocking on our door, is from Aleppo and Damascus and Deraa, is the mother seeking safety for her children, is the young man crossing the sea. He is Mazen, tears streaming down his face, asking for our help.

Stephanie Saldaña *is the author of* What We Remember Will Be Saved: A Story of Refugees and the Things They Carry.

A Personal Eucharistic Revival

Fighting for my right to receive Communion as a Catholic with celiac disease

By Rosie La Puma Lebel

"If you are in need of a very, very low percentage gluten host, please see me in my Communion line." I remember (with chagrin now) how I laughed internally the first time I heard those words uttered by a priest at a Catholic Mass. *Wow,* I thought, *even Communion can be gluten-free and trendy now.*

I was a freshman starting college at the time, and had never had any dietary or allergy issues myself. Little did I know that seven years later, I would be diagnosed with celiac disease, and my world—and worship—would be turned upside down.

The diagnosis was as overwhelming as it was unexpected. Attending Mass on Holy Thursday a few weeks after I was diagnosed, I approached the Communion line of the priest who had previously had a low-gluten host ready for me at every Mass. When I got to the front, his face twisted in a mix of concern and annoyance.

I forgot your hosts today, he whispered, *Is it OK if I just give you a very tiny piece?* He plucked off a corner of the host and held it out. I was overwhelmed with a mix of emotions: guilt from not wanting to disappoint or inconvenience the priest, a true desire to receive Communion, fear about what that crumb might mean for my immune system and urgency from the confused shuffling of the communicants behind me in line. I accepted the piece and moved forward.

For the record, a tiny piece was *not* OK, as my doctor made very clear afterward. In fact, for me and the roughly three million other Americans with celiac disease, consuming food containing more than 20 parts per million of gluten triggers an autoimmune reaction in our gut that causes our immune system to begin attacking the lining of the small intestine, over time impairing our bodies' ability to digest and absorb nutrients. (For context, an average slice of whole wheat bread is about 10 percent gluten, or 100,000 parts per million.)

Herein lies the challenge: Church teaching holds that for bread to be valid matter for the Eucharist, it must "contain enough gluten to affect the confection of bread," but there is no strict *minimum* amount. The workaround for American celiacs? The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has approved the use of ultra-low gluten hosts, which contain less than 20 parts per million.

In the years since my diagnosis, I've become much more confident advocating for myself. I've also become painfully aware of the significant gap between the U.S.C.C.B.'s clear guidelines on what parishes *should* provide to congregants

> I shed silent tears watching fellow parishioners receive the Eucharist when I could not.

with celiac disease and the reality on the ground. So what does it look like to be a Catholic with celiac disease?

Patience. I once spent 15 minutes talking with a priest at a parish I was visiting, trying to convince him that I wasn't trying to scam him and that the box of low-gluten hosts I was offering—labeled "U.S.C.C.B. approved"—was, in fact, U.S.C.C.B. approved.

Frustration. I attended Mass after a weeklong backpacking trip and realized I didn't have a low-gluten host with me; I met early with the priest, explained the situation and asked if he could provide a separate chalice for me as an alternative. He refused.

Fatigue. My home parish ran out of hosts just a few weeks after I gave birth and told me that I would need to be responsible for providing my own replacement hosts. Suffice it to say that it was several months before I received Communion again because I didn't have the mental capacity to remember to place an order. (The parish, after many nudges, now purchases and provides low-gluten hosts as an option for their parishioners.)

Gratitude. A priest at the University of Texas at Austin shared with me that they kept a small supply of consecrated, low-gluten hosts in the tabernacle at all times, allowing me to receive Communion in a time of spiritual desolation. (I had just attended Mass but hadn't been able to speak with the priest ahead of time, so I feared I had missed my chance.)

Last year, as I watched the movement of the pilgrims on their way to the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, I reflected on how the experience of having to fight for my right to safely receive Communion since my diagnosis has shaped my understanding of the power of the sacrament. While I would never wish this disease on anyone, it has prompted a personal eucharistic revival of sorts within my own spiritual life. I had never realized how deeply and viscerally my soul could yearn for the true presence of Jesus until I shed silent tears watching fellow parishioners receive when I could not. Similarly, I had never realized how much I took for granted my sense of belonging within

Eric Mok/Unsplash

my parish until I felt excluded from it. Entering the Communion line, surrounded in community by other parishioners, and receiving the body of Christ is now something I feel grateful for each and every time it happens.

As we pray that the National Eucharistic Revival takes root, I pray that more parishes will be as "trendy" as my college was and will begin providing "very, very low percentage gluten" hosts. It is worth striving for all Catholics to share in the real presence.

Rosie La Puma Lebel *is a Bay Area immigration attorney, liturgical musician, wife and mother. After being diagnosed with celiac disease in 2020, she founded catholicceliac.org.*

The Cinderella Story That Wasn't

By Elyse Durham

What happens to Cinderella *after* she marries the prince? As a child, I was obsessed with this question. I watched the Disney cartoon almost daily, haunted by the movie's final image of the newlyweds riding off in their carriage. Where were they going, I wondered, and what would they do when they got there?

"Anora," the new Oscar-nominated film from the writer and director Sean Baker, answers this question—that is, if Cinderella were an exotic dancer and her prince the profligate son of a Russian oligarch. Many reviewers have compared "Anora" to a fairy tale: The handsome, wealthy man whisks the poor girl away to a life of splendor. But as in any fairy tale, things are not what they seem.

With glittering colors, neon lights and pulsing music ("Tonight could be the greatest night of our lives," the soundtrack declares), the film's opening shots suggest a glamorous, even exuberant life, albeit a chilly one. (Let the readers of this Catholic magazine understand that this R-rated film about a sex worker features exactly as much sex and nudity as you would expect.) Anora (Mikey Madison)—or Ani, as she insists on being called—has a working persona that is sweet, friendly and casual, as if what she's being paid to do is not a big deal, as if she even enjoys it. And maybe she does: A former student of mine, once a teenage runaway, told me that working as a stripper gave her great confidence.

A brilliantly directed sequence, moving from the pulse and glow of the private rooms to Ani wandering the floor, trying to drum up customers, to the breakroom, where she eats leftovers out of Tupperware and kvetches with fellow dancers about their working conditions, reveals the drab realities of Ani's life. The sequence ends with Ani taking the train home in the wee hours, wearing an enormous black coat and no makeup, her now-stringy hair escaping from a beanie.

This sudden contrast feels like the transition to Techni-

Neon via AP

Mark Eydelshteyn, left, and Mikey Madison in "Anora"

color in "The Wizard of Oz" played in reverse: All the color and light suddenly drain away. Ani's life may look glamorous, but the truth is that she works nights, makes little money and has a cranky roommate who chastises her for forgetting to pick up milk. Later, she sits in the shadow of an elevated train track, smoking a cigarette alone.

At its heart, "Anora" is a film about loneliness. The men who come to Ani's club are in search of a particular kind of experience, yes, but they're also on the hunt for connection. While Ani dances for them, her customers tell her about their jobs, their anxieties, even their families. There's the loneliness of paying for company, and then there's the loneliness of being paid company. Though she's friends with her coworkers, Ani keeps everyone else at a necessary distance.

Until Ivan (Mark Eydelshteyn). He is also a customer, but their relationship is different from the start. They meet because he requests a dancer who speaks his native Russian (he, too, is looking for connection). At first, Ani refuses to speak Russian, saying she would happily listen to him instead (yet another one-sided relationship), but soon Ivan charms her into conversation. It's clear that the spark between them could blossom into something more.

That spark only grows as the movie progresses. In a series of escalations, Ivan asks Ani for more and more, and she gives it to him willingly: visiting his enormous house, accepting an invitation to his party, agreeing to be exclusive with him for a week. In Ani's eyes, it's all good business, and she negotiates her fees accordingly. But thanks to Madison's career-making performance, we know there is more going on. As they cavort through New York's most glamorous corners (and in bed), it becomes clear that she is letting down her guard: We see it in her cautious looks, in her widening smile. Even when Ivan plays video games on the couch, Ani is content to snuggle peacefully into his chest, possibly falling in love. And who can blame her? Ivan is young and handsome and lives in a house the size of a Costco—and, for the most part, he treats her well.

When their week together ends with a spontaneous trip to Vegas, and an equally spontaneous marriage proposal, we want to believe Ivan's intentions are good. He tells Ani being married would let him stay in the United States—but isn't it possible that he cares for Ani, too?

Disney Dreams

For a moment, it certainly looks that way. Ivan buys Ani an enormous ring, weds her in a neon chapel and proudly declares to everyone on the Vegas strip that she's his wife. Ani, too, glows with pleasure: She says a teary goodbye to her co-workers and talks about planning their honeymoon in Disney World, specifically at—where else?—Cinderella's Castle, as she's dreamed since she was a little girl.

If this were a romantic comedy, or the sort of fairy tale with a happy ending, "Anora" would end here. But it's not. Like Stephen Sondheim's subversive musical "Into the Woods," it's the kind of fairy tale where princes turn out to be ogres and ogres turn out to be, if not exactly princely, certainly more noble.

In this version of the fairy tale, the prince is the one who goes running off, and Cinderella has to find *him*. When Ivan's parents hear about his marriage, they panic and send several employees (thugs? henchmen? it's never quite clear) to bring the boy to his senses, and Ivan flees, leaving Ani to fend for herself. Though the ensuing melée is often comic, even screwball (it's easy to imagine, say, Jimmy Stewart reluctantly chasing Katharine Hepburn around the house instead), it's also deeply unsettling. Ani ends up bound and gagged on the couch, furious and terrified, and we don't know just how far these men will go to do their job.

Mercifully, the henchmen seem more exasperated than evil. It's clear they have had to clean up Ivan's messes before. Though their leader, Toros (Karren Karagulian), makes it clear that he couldn't care less for Ani's welfare, his warnings about Ivan ring true. "You do not know this guy," he says. "He's a spoiled brat who doesn't want to grow up." Ani agrees to help them track down her husband, if only for her own safety, but it's clear she doesn't believe them. This tension is the film's true strength: We want to believe Ani will get her happy ending, but we also suspect Toros might be right. After all, Ivan is the kind of guy who will marry a stripper to get a green card.

With Ani in tow, Toros and his two henchmen set off on a madcap hunt across New York, determined to find Ivan and undo the marriage. They comb through all the nightclubs and bars where Ani and Ivan splashed out the week before, now drab in the winter daylight. Even Coney Island looks gray and dreary with the neon lights off. It's a dire situation, one that threatens to leave Ani considerably worse off than before.

As is often the case in fairy tales, help arrives from the unlikeliest of places: Toros's quietest henchman, Igor (Yura Borisov). Though he and Ani got off to a rough start (she is—understandably—furious at him for tying her up), as the

The movie ends not in a honeymoon-bound carriage, but in a parked car on a snowy street.

chase drags on through the night and Ani gets more exhausted, Igor looks out for her, offering her a drink when she's upset, a scarf when she's cold. He is the unexpected conscience of this film: His bewildered expressions as Ani's lot goes from bad to worse mirror the viewer's feelings. When Ivan's family treats Ani contemptuously, Igor is the only person who stands up for her, insisting she is owed an apology. Ivan may have married her, but Igor seems to be the one who actually cares for her.

Don't expect a tidy ending to this story. Ani's been through too much for that. The movie ends not in a honeymoon-bound carriage, but in a parked car on a snowy street. When Igor does Ani a good deed—one that will change her life for the better—Ani starts to thank him with sex. There is absolutely nothing romantic about this scene. Their coupling initially seems like a transaction, as if Igor's just another customer. But suddenly, Ani stops. She breaks down and sobs on Igor's chest as the screen fades to black. It's a brutal ending, one that resists easy reads—and one that both Madison and Baker have refused to discuss on the press circuit, preferring that viewers draw their own conclusions.

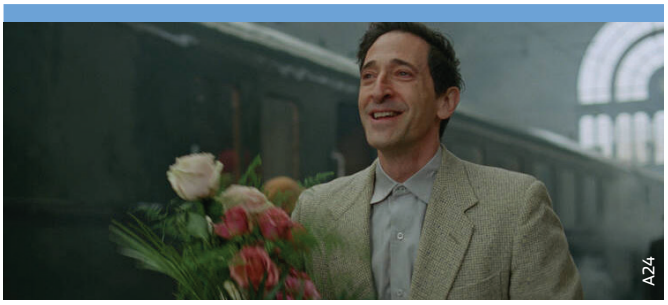
Where does this leave this reviewer? Two possibilities appear. If "Anora" is a movie about loneliness, perhaps Ani is left lonelier than ever, so broken by grief that she is unable to return to the compartmentalized life she had before (and, even worse, perhaps now unable to support herself).

On the other hand, it is possible that the ending of this film isn't as bleak as it appears. Only in the film's last moments does Ani finally get to share her full self. Until now, sex has been her job. Now it is something that leads her to unleash her grief, connecting deeply with another human being. And isn't that what sex is all about?

Elyse Durham's *debut novel* Maya & Nastasha *(Mariner/HarperCollins) was published in February.*

See You at the Movies

America reviewed a range of films over the last year, including many of the awards-show contenders. Full reviews can be found at americamagazine.org/section/film.



THE BRUTALIST. This is a serious, frequently surprising picture that lends itself to multiple interpretations—tackling European history, American industrialism, Jewish identity, the immigrant experience and so on. It is the best film of the year and another crowning moment for the magnificent Adrien Brody more than two decades after his Oscar-winning turn in "The Pianist"....

"The Brutalist" is the rare film that balances its shoot-for-the-stars scope with the personal intimacy of a chamber drama. Brody...never shrinks from view even among the towering structures he creates. He fills the screen while the ambitions of the ruling class loom over him. Welcome to America.

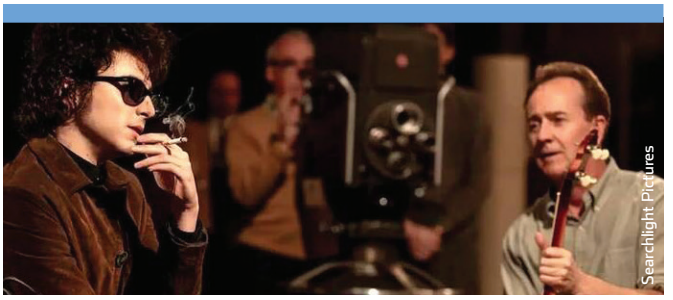
Ryan DiCorpo, Dec. 20

CONCLAVE. By the time the general public has had a chance to see "Conclave"—something many likely will do, given the movie's probable prominence at Oscar time—the conversation will be about the ending. Which is, I am sad to say, clever. It sends a message, as any story about a papal election would be destined to do. It is not an ungenerous conclusion, by any means. But whether it is the kind of zinger worthy of a film that is magisterial when it isn't simply being brilliant is a question. And not the only one....

[Ralph] Fiennes seems destined for nominations this awards season, as does [Stanley] Tucci, [director Edward] Berger and the movie itself. One delightful counteragent

to the overload of testosterone is Isabella Rossellini, who, as Sister Agnes, quietly directs the care of the assembled cardinals. But she does have one moment when she delivers a withering indictment of certain men, before a crowd of other men, and then curtsies before exiting the chamber. The audience I was with laughed out loud. But it was clear from the opening credits that the crowd knew its church.

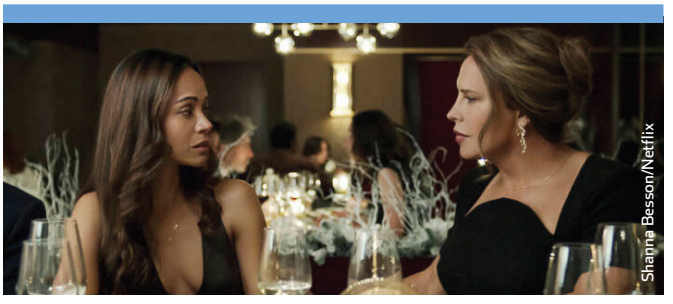
John Anderson, Oct. 28



A COMPLETE UNKNOWN. The murky ambivalence around Bob Dylan's character is present to the very end. When we see Dylan ride off into the sunset on his Triumph motorcycle, literally and figuratively saying goodbye to his folk persona, his lovers and his early mentors, we know (actually, the movie tells us anyway) that a world tour, a best-selling album ("Highway 61 Revisited") and rock stardom are all just around the corner. But we also know that a year later, an accident on that same motorcycle will almost kill Dylan, and cause him to completely vanish from the public eye.

Just like Dylan, of course—to have the instant when his star shines brightest become the moment when he goes completely dark.

James T. Keane, Dec. 29

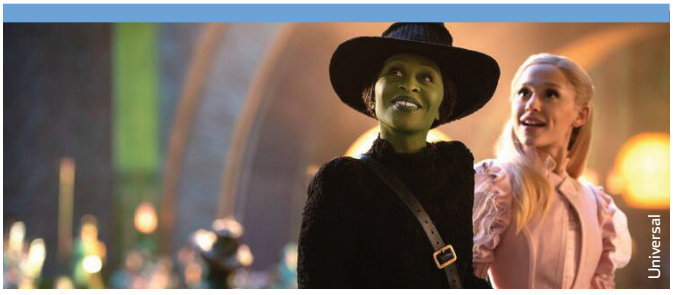


EMILIA PÉREZ. I admit that I enjoyed "Emilia Pérez" more than most people I know. It is a story about sin and redemption; I am, as you might imagine, a sucker for those. The film works best as Emilia tries to make amends for her past crimes. "I want a new soul," she sings to Rita, pre-transition. Gascón plays her regret and vulnerability beautifully, the human counterpoint to the beatific imagery that springs up around her due to her good work.... For Emilia, transitioning is salvation: from the life-crushing agony of gender dysphoria but also from the erosion of her spirit.

John Dougherty, Jan. 17

NICKEL BOYS. Rarely does a film reach the level of artistic fidelity and innovation that "Nickel Boys" achieves. Ross and [cinematographer Jomo] Fray's collaboration has birthed a visual masterpiece that complements Colson Whitehead's narrative genius, giving audiences an immersive look at a story that demands reckoning and reflection. This is not just an adaptation—it's a new chapter in cinematic storytelling and a testament to the enduring strength of stories that demand to be told and remembered.

Grace Lenahan, Jan. 10

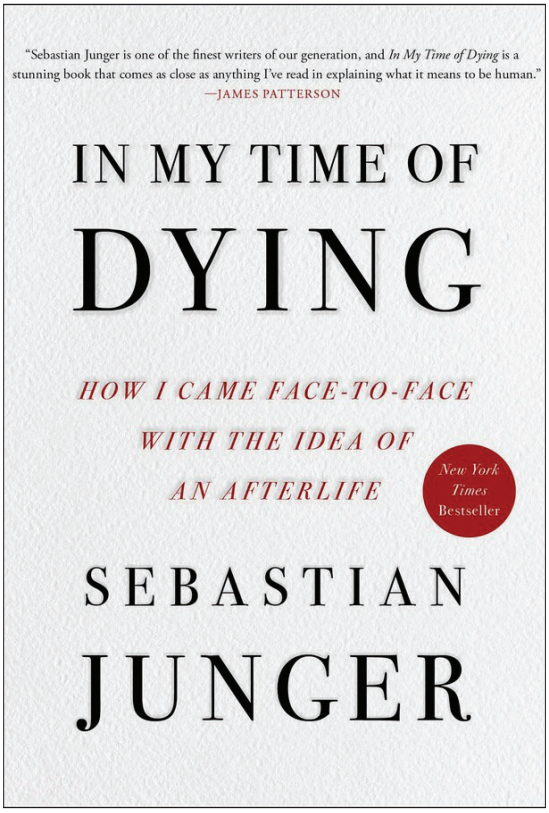


WICKED. "Wicked" the musical is overall a much lighter piece of work than the novel it is based on. Gregory Maguire's novel is deeply political (and deeply Catholic), a meditation on how governments, religions and communities seek out scapegoats to redirect popular anger or issue monstrous threats to compel loyalty. Maguire was initially inspired by coverage of the Gulf War, which compared Saddam Hussein to Hitler. As a gay Catholic, his concerns about the church he loves being unable to fully accept him or his family inform the work as well....

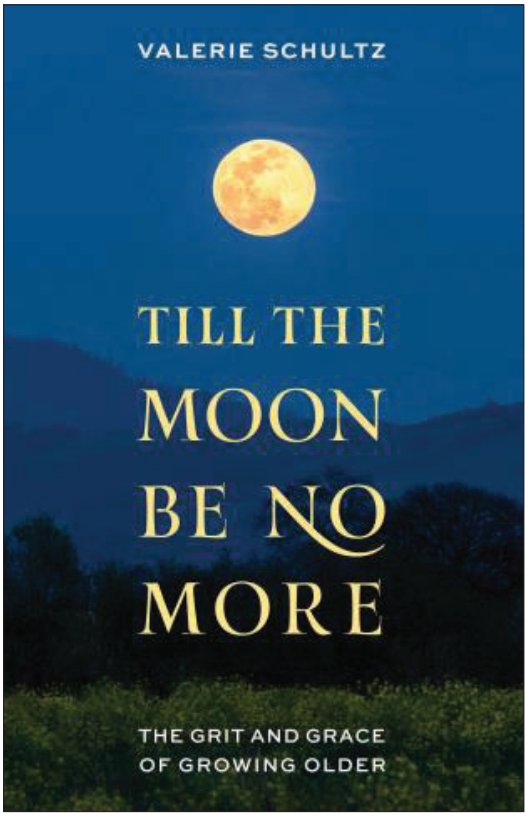
"Wicked" the film succeeds as entertainment but it also might inspire us to ask some important questions. In our society, who is good and who is wicked—and who gets to decide?

John Dougherty, Nov. 22

THREE TAKES ON AGING



Simon & Schuster / 176p $28



Sheed & Ward / 176p $30

I'm getting old. Who isn't? But I will avoid the annoying clichés that Valerie Schultz rails against in her new book, *Till the Moon Be No More*, like "You're as young as you feel!" Schultz understands that this adage is well-intentioned, but clearly, as she says, "You're not." Our bodies begin decaying on the day we're born; and, especially after 40, anyone with an alert brain can tell that they're definitely not as young as they feel. (I would add "anyone with good eyes," but they go as well.)

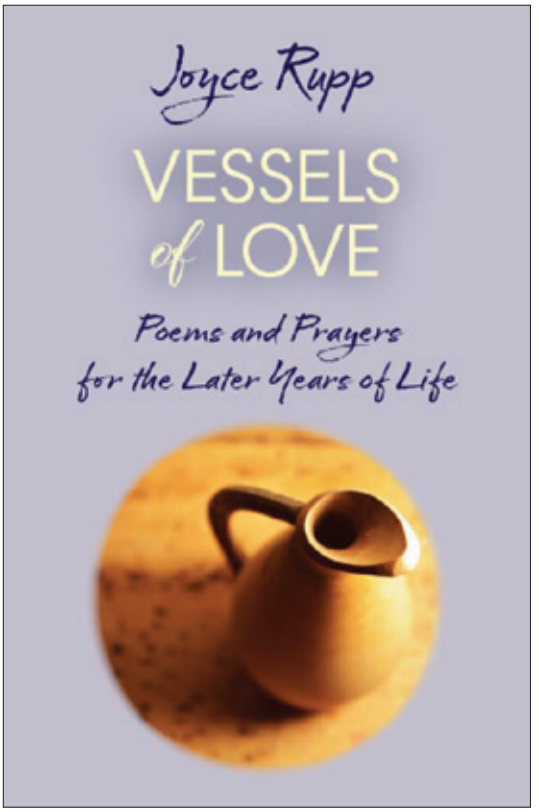
With my increasing age (in December I turned 64, which my nephews refer to as "Beatles' Age," from the McCartney/Lennon song), I am intent on learning as much as I can about how to face the second half of life with grace. So I was delighted to discover that three of my favorite authors, all from extremely different backgrounds and perspectives, have written three extremely different books on aging. Yet even with their differences, they agree on the big points.

Whenever I am at Eastern Point Retreat House in Gloucester, Mass., I find it hard to resist re-reading one of my favorite nonfiction books, *The Perfect Storm*. This fine work of reportage, by the writer and journalist Sebastian Junger, tells the story of a fishing boat that set sail from Gloucester and sank off the Grand Banks near Nova Scotia during a ferocious storm. (It was later made into a popular film starring George Clooney and Mark Wahlberg.)

It is not simply the local flavor (some of the book is set at the Crow's Nest, a bar still extant in downtown Gloucester) that brings me back to the book. It is also Junger's distinctive style: Hemingway-esque sentences, solid reporting and a propulsive narrative. Since first reading his book the year it was published, 1997, I have been on the lookout for books and articles by Junger. And I'm never disappointed.

So when a friend told me that Junger had written a book on aging, I was intrigued. Junger is known for writing about what you might term a "physical" life, celebrating not only the labors of fishermen (mainly men, in the case of *The Perfect Storm)* but also the experiences of military personnel both in the heat of battle and in their subsequent lives as veterans. His books also often reflect on his own physical life, including his job as a pruner for a tree company as well as more recreational pursuits as a long-distance runner and as a surfer.

One day in 2020, as he describes in his riveting new book *In My Time of Dying,* he felt a searing pain in his abdomen and thought, "This is the kind of pain where you later find out you're going to die." The pain ebbs and flows over the next few months until an episode sends him, almost in-



Simon and Schuster / 448p $31

coherent with pain, to a hospital in Cape Cod, near where he was living with his wife and family. The rest of the book is his journey through his treatment for a ruptured aneurysm that, without medical care, could have killed him at age 58.

Junger approaches his topic with all the verve and specificity that have earned him millions of devoted readers: examining the history of the treatment of his particular illness, speaking with the doctors and nurses after his recovery and, perhaps more important for the reader, describing unsparingly his shifting moods and random thoughts. I admit I raced through some of the gorier sections, but I stuck with him because of his fine eye for detail and ear for conversation.

At one point, a doctor asks for permission to insert a transfusion line into the jugular vein in his neck. "You mean in case there is an emergency?" asks Junger. "This *is* the emergency," he's told. A good reporter and writer will remember just those kinds of details.

Yet the heart of the book is telegraphed in the book's subtitle: "How I Came Face to Face With the Idea of an Afterlife." While he is in the hospital, he has a surprisingly clear vision of his late father. "He'd been dead eight years," Junger writes, "but there he was, not so much floating but simply existing above me and slightly to my left." Junger's father seems to have a message for him: "It's okay. There's nothing to be scared of."

It is a vivid moment of the supernatural and the religious that makes a no-nonsense memoir about a medical emergency into something more mysterious and beautiful. Toward the end of the book, Junger grapples with what happened, sifting through the evidence for the existence of near-death experiences like his own as well as possible causes. At one point, he even takes a detour into quantum physics, where things can both be and not be. It is an honest and admirable quest, but when I was reading, I wanted to suggest Occam's razor, that the most elegant solution is the simplest: His father actually appeared to him and there is, indeed, "nothing to be scared of."

Junger's book is a valiant, honest and ultimately moving look at one man's experience of near death and what life now means to him.

Coming from an entirely different perspective is Valerie Schultz, a frequent **America** contributor and the author of a wonderful book on married life called *Closer*, who has written a breezy but profound book on the joys and challenges of aging called *Till the Moon Be No More*. As much as I enjoyed Junger's book, it was somewhat of a relief with Schultz not to have to wade too deeply into a person's abdomen or aorta. But Schultz does not quail from the physical, describing the travails visited on women's bodies, including wrinkly necks, sagging breasts and a bladder that prompts frequent nighttime visits to the bathroom. There is also a detailed description of precisely what a hot flash feels like that made me grateful I would never have to live through one.

This is by no means a book focused purely on the physical, nor is it a sad or depressing book in any way. Rather, it's like a conversation with a wise (dare I say "old"?) friend who helps you to navigate with a healthy dose of reality and grace the move into middle, late-middle and old age. She writes feelingly about her successes and disappointments as a wife, mother, grandmother, writer and Catholic. I was especially impressed by her courageous honesty over some failed relationships with her siblings and, now, among her own children.

A chapter called "Outrages and Acceptance" notes that Schultz now enjoys what she has long wanted as a writer: time. (She recently retired from a position working at a local prison library.) But now she wonders, "Do I have anything to say?"

Yes, she does, on topics as disparate as marriage, motherhood, family life, facing a slowed-down body (and a husband who is also slowing down), empty nesting, clear-

Schultz does not quail from the physical, describing the travails visited on women's bodies.

ing out a parent's belongings after their death, keeping fit, learning something new and finding hope in her faith. And laughing. Her humor always shines through. After sharing a poem in one chapter, she writes dryly, "One can see why my career as a poet never took off."

In an echo of Junger's book, Schultz's father provides a surprising moment as he nears his own death. Her father had an on-again, off-again relationship with his faith and the church. Yet at the end of his life, as he is dying, he looks toward the window and says, "It's incredible. It's unbelievable." And then, "They're all around me." As Junger writes in his book, an experience like this is a common feature of both near-death and death experiences, recorded in almost every culture and not only by family members but medical professionals as well. As for me, I believe it. So does Schultz, who believes in an "actual, if ineffable, God."

Joyce Rupp believes it too. She is a rare combination of a Catholic woman religious (a member of the Servite Order), spiritual writer and poet. Her 1988 book *Praying Our Goodbyes* is by now a classic in the genre of "leaving behind and moving on," as she puts it; and her 2011 book *Fragments of Your Ancient Name*, which offers 365 poetic perspectives on God, is one of my favorite spirituality books, one I recommend frequently while directing retreats and offering spiritual direction.

Rupp is in some ways the opposite of Sebastian Junger, at least in her new book *Vessels of Love*—less concerned with the occasionally bloody physicality of growing older and more concerned with encountering God as one ages. She is also more focused on old age than middle age. "During the times I doubt my significance," she writes in "Prayer of an Older Person," "show me how I truly matter to you."

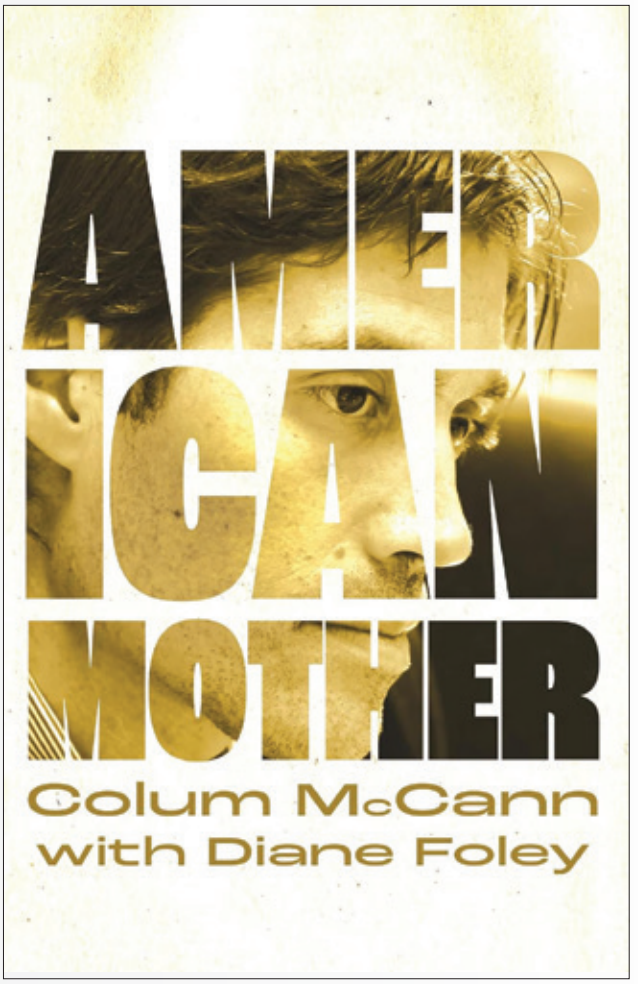
"You," of course, is God, the unseen recipient of this book of prayers and poems. *Vessels of Love* is a book not meant to be rushed through, but "savored," as St. Ignatius Loyola would say. I've found it helpful to read one prayer or poem a day, as a jumpstart to prayer.

Rupp's book offers a treasury of wisdom on some of the same topics as those covered by Junger and Schultz: gratitude, physical change, loss, laughter, regrets, fulfillment, children and so on. Perhaps my favorite prayer is one called "Litany of the Heart," which includes the following lines: "May my heart be free of disgruntlements/ that reach deeply and taunt inner peace." Amen.

Over the course of a long weekend (after some minor surgery, a fruit of aging), I read these three books in sequence, Junger's first, then Schultz's, then Rupp's, and was amazed that while they had such different experiences and perspectives, all seem to agree on the same things: Be grateful for what (and who) has come and gone. Learn from those who have gone before you (both what to do and what not to do). Love those around you. Enjoy the world that is "too precious to be ordinary," as Junger says. Be brave in facing "with grit and grace," to quote Schultz's subtitle, the challenges of aging, with as little complaining as possible—always preparing yourself for the moment we will all face, what Rupp calls "the gate of letting go."

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

A PARENT'S COURAGE



Etruscan Press / 256p $26

It took moral courage for her son to report on the war in Syria. It took moral courage for his mother to see his killers face to face.

In *American Mother*, Diane Foley and Colum McCann write the story of Foley's life and that of her son, James Foley, leading up to his imprisonment and death at the hands of ISIS in 2014. The topic is exceedingly difficult, yet the book is surprisingly easy to read, written with a mother's love, her eventual understanding of hostage situations and her desire for others to understand the struggle she faced.

I was 14 when Jim Foley's beheading was announced on TV, and I remember the event only broadly in the context of ISIS posing a threat to the country. Even with my cursory knowledge of the event, I could read *American Mother* with no need to do any research; someone with a better memory of that time, on the other hand, could also pick up the book and not become bored with too much on-page explanation.

The narrative structure of *American Mother*, divided into three "books," sets the reader *in medias res* for the first book, then jumps backward for a retrospective, eventually moving to the present day.

American Mother is Colum McCann's first work of nonfiction. (He won the National Book Award in 2009 for his novel *Let the Great World Spin*.) It has the slightest narrative flair to it, especially in the shaping and ordering of chapters—the "prologue" normally found at the beginning of many a novel occurs later in the book. However, Foley's voice, as a mother and as a defender of the powerless, shines through.

The book follows Diane Foley's story from mother to mourner to activist. But she spends chapters outlining her son's life, too, the one to whom she has dedicated the past 10 years. She spends chapters describing Jim as a boy, as a Marquette University student (a man for others!), a teacher and eventually a conflict journalist. Jim is, naturally, the reason for her activism in the first place; and these long descriptions of her son, his life as she knew it and as his friends later described it to her, reveal the selflessness of this mother.

His altruistic motives to travel to Libya and later Syria to tell the stories of people in war-torn regions are somewhat mirrored in his mother, whose work on behalf of civilian hostages similarly reflects a desire to help others.

Diane Foley's meeting with Alexanda Kotey—one of the "Beatles," the four British converts to Islam who tortured and beheaded Jim Foley and other hostages in Syria—opens the book. Her courage in choosing this encounter, as well as testifying in the trial against El Shafee Elsheikh, another of her son's killers, comes through despite her matter-of-fact tone when recounting the meetings.

Foley mentions her naïveté and the times her emotional state became disturbed, either because she believed the word of someone who could have been trustworthy or because she was, as a mother, bringing her feelings into her decisions too often.

But her humility in that courage, in persevering through these multiple meetings over years about the brutal murder of her eldest son, cannot be overstated—I could see someone bragging from the rooftops about shaking hands with their son's notorious killer, but Diane Foley does not do so. Diane's awareness of the Holy Spirit's work in her entire family's lives is astute, and her description of her son as, again, a person for others can easily be reflected back onto herself.

McCann, an experienced writer, ought perhaps to have taken a heavier editorial hand to the work to prevent some of the repetitiveness, which would be less noticeable if the work were longer than its 250 pages.

As Diane Foley reveals her story and shows how it intertwines with that of her son, she also lays blame at the feet of responsible parties, far too many of whom are members of the U.S. government. From Susan Rice (no relation to the reviewer) and President Obama, who among others made promises to the Foleys that Jim was their highest priority, to F.B.I. officers who provided little assistance to the family searching for their loved one, to the many officials who told the Foleys and other families of hostages that they should not pay the hostage-takers, the U.S. government's behavior throughout this story will only confirm the conviction of those who have a low opinion of how it handles hostage situations. She mentions by name those who were of assistance; they are far fewer in number than those who were unhelpful.

Although Foley fights fiercely for her son's release—and then, after his death, on behalf of civilian hostages around the world—she does not take her anger out on the men who killed her son. These interactions with the ISIS members make possibly the most intense and well-written parts of the book. Foley's unwavering faith and her belief in forgiveness and in humanity add a spiritual aspect to the book that ties in well with her family's and especially her son's faith. Her expressions of compassion and mercy even when the killers seem to show no remorse for playing a part in murdering her son feel themselves like a gift from the Holy Spirit.

In describing her son, she writes, "His courage was moral. His morality had courage." The moral courage of Jim Foley is obvious in view of his journalistic support for civilians trapped in the middle.

In this book, his mother's moral courage becomes evident as well. This mother, who has seen images of her beheaded son, who faced two of the men who pleaded or were found guilty of his death, who went against instructions from all sorts of government officials to remain quiet, shows her fortitude in different yet powerful ways.

American Mother is an eminently approachable work about an impossibly difficult topic, accessible both to those who remember the day of Jim Foley's death like it was yesterday and to those who would like to become better informed. And Diane Foley's own story coming through in these pages is one of immense strength and faith in God's mercy and forgiveness.

Jill Rice *is the digital analytics associate at* ***America.*** *She was an O'Hare fellow in 2022-23.*

BAT

By Lance Le Grys

I, too, was clad in a black robe, but neither a priest nor an ordinary man of the world was I, for I wavered ceaselessly like a bat that passes for a bird at one time and for a mouse at another.

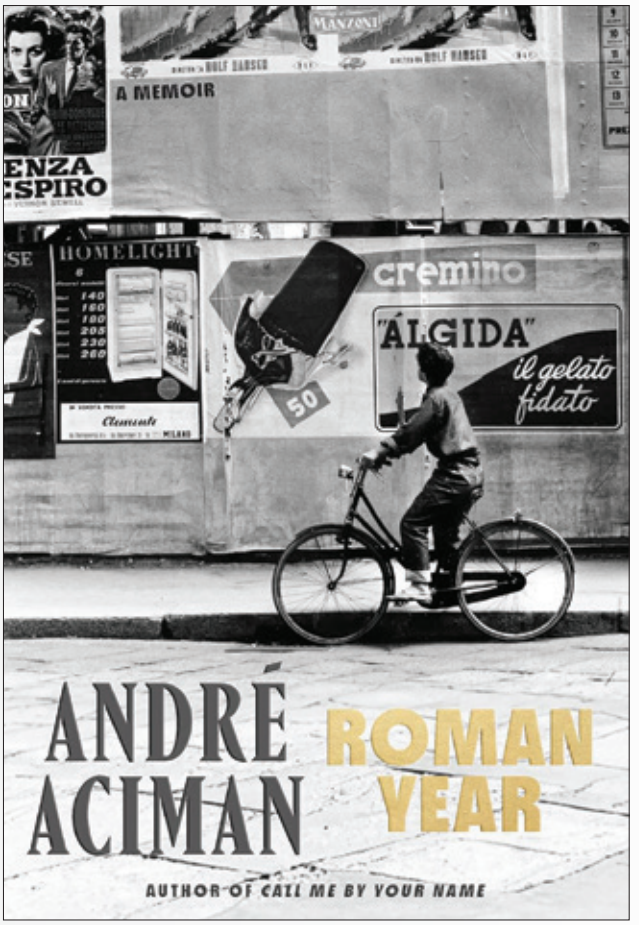
— Basho

I choose for my emblem the bat
and if I had a coat of arms
there would I place it against
a field of twilight gray

for I too take my bearings
in a manner unfamiliar
to solid daylit creatures
and I seem blind to them
my circuits unaccountable
erratic
face to face
I am an ugly creature
hanging in the rafters
of structures not my own

on sufferance
and yet
not wholly ineffectual
I can but tell myself
if not for me what insects
what inexorable buzzing
what pinpricks and disease
beyond Egyptian plagues

Lance Le Grys *is the author of the poetry collection* Views From an Outbuilding *and the chapbooks* Pilate Suite *and* Stray Hunter's Bullet.



Farrar, Straus & Giroux / 354p $30

As of this writing, more than half a million people have already passed through the "Holy Door" at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in honor of this year's Jubilee of Hope. Rome is, as a result, flooded with tourists, and as my colleague Gerard O'Connell reports, the torrent is not expected to end anytime soon.

Jaded travelers might be forgiven for crossing Rome off their destination list this year. Luckily, we have a new book from the novelist and memoirist André Aciman chronicling his formative year in Rome as a teenager. If you don't want to travel to Rome, try *Roman Year* instead.

Aciman is perhaps most well-known for writing the novel *Call Me By Your Name*, which became a popular film directed by Luca Guadagnino and starring Timothée Chalamet. I also had the good fortune to take a class from Professor Aciman in college (though we have not been in touch since). The subject was Proust, and as his new memoir reveals, he remains a Proustian at heart.

Aciman's earlier memoir, *Out of Egypt*, chronicled his family's life in Alexandria over three generations. As Jewish émigrés in Egypt, they were never given full citizenship and were forced to leave when political tensions escalated

For Aciman, reviewing the past serves as a sort of Examen for the soul.

under President Gamal Abdel Nasser. And so, in 1966, they landed in Rome, where they had relatives and where his father, who worked in textiles, hoped to find a job.

His father did not join them at first, so it was left to his mother, who was deaf, to parent two teenage sons alone. The family did have relatives in Rome, notably Uncle Claude, who loved the city and who told them that "one needed more than one lifetime" to enjoy it. "No nostalgia, please," he advised his family. "If you have any regrets, it's that you should have left Egypt sooner."

The family lived in an apartment on Via Clelia, far from the neighborhoods that Aciman hoped to explore. "I wanted the Rome of movies, of grand monuments, of beautiful women turning their heads to smile at young men my age," Aciman writes. "But that Rome was nowhere in sight, maybe never existed. Instead, this was black-and-white Rome, like the films shot in Rome in the mid-fifties and early sixties."

Still, Rome comes alive in these pages: the televisions that played loudly from his neighbors' windows; the street vendors who began setting up before dawn; the two local prostitutes working out of a storefront. This may not be the Rome of Rick Steves, but it is true to one boy's experience at a particular moment in time. And any great city has thousands of stories to tell.

Slowly, Aciman starts to explore his new home. His family enrolls him in a school across town, which requires a long morning bus ride. He hates it at first, but his commute allows him to see a different Rome, and he warms to its charms. After school, before he boards the bus for home, he lets himself wander: "It was during those evenings as I strolled along its streets that Rome came to mean something as uncharted and intangible as desire itself." (The New Yorker has dubbed Aciman a "grammarian of desire"; I'd love to see that on a business card.)

Aciman's favorite part of the city was the *centro storico*, where the city's eras bumped into one another: "I liked the old because the past held deeper sway, spoke to me more, because, just like me, it trusted not things but their long shadow, their passage, not what was living but had once lived and never died." Ah, the Eternal City.

Two themes charmed this reviewer. For a boy of just 15 or 16, Aciman was a ferocious reader. Every week he was

> ‘Much as I hated life on Via Clelia, being taken back there through the senses summons great joy.’

given money to buy a new book, and it is astonishing what he read over the course of a year. Stendhal. Virginia Woolf. James Joyce. In fact, Aciman credits Rome with making him a lifelong lover of literature: He was so unhappy there at first that he spent hours holed up in his room, tearing through novels.

Aciman starts to really explore Rome when he is allowed to borrow his friend’s bicycle. He discovers that he isn’t as far from the center of the city as he had thought. A journey that takes 30 minutes by bus takes only 10 minutes by bicycle. He loves getting lost on side roads, knowing that he would eventually find his way back to a familiar avenue. His joy of discovery is palpable and will resonate with even the casual Citi Bike rider.

Aciman’s parents had a complicated relationship. When his father could not find work in Rome, he moved to Paris, in part to keep some distance from his mother. Aciman visits his father and, unlike with Rome, he falls in love with the city immediately. He is bewitched by the Champs-Élysées, and the city stirs something in him. Sex, like the city itself, becomes a new territory for exploration.

There is also, in Paris, a Rosebud moment. One evening Aciman wanders through a bookstore with his father, who buys him the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*. In *Roman Year*, the influence of Proust can be found on almost every page.

For Aciman, it is not the taste of a madeleine but the smell of fresh almonds that brings him back to the evenings he would share with his family, passing around the nutcracker. “Much as I hated life on Via Clelia,” he writes, “being taken back there through the senses summons great joy, something I still don’t understand but have grown to accept as one of the most pleasurable inlets to memory.”

What do these moments mean, and why do they bring us joy now, even when we hated them then? Aciman, appropriately, quotes a line from Virgil familiar to any Latin student, or Springsteen fan: Perhaps it will please us some day to remember these things.

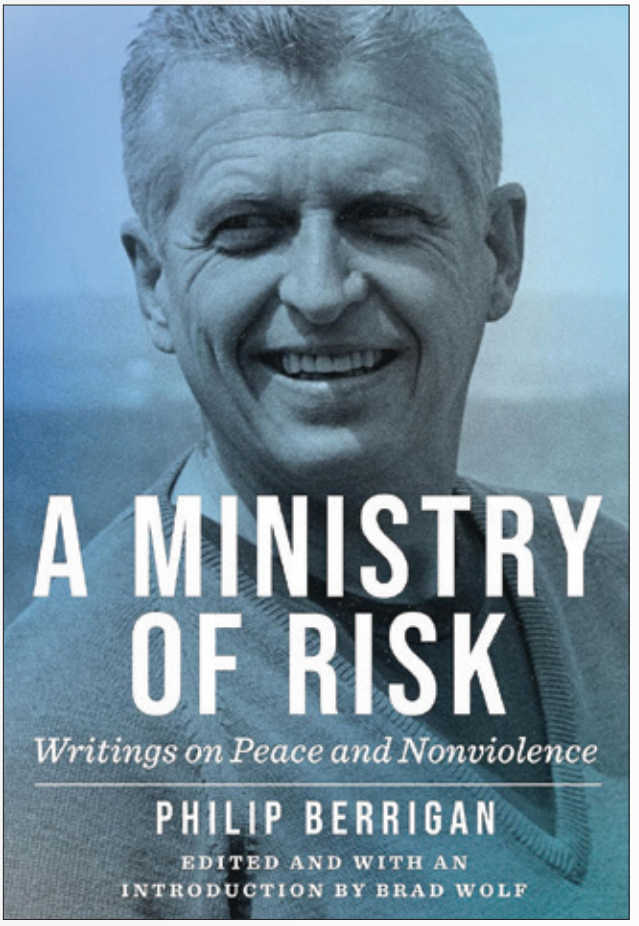
This is the credo of his book, and of any memoir really. Looking back at our past, even those moments that brought us pain or heartache, can be therapeutic and even pleasurable. For Aciman, it is the act of writing that summons this joy. Reviewing the past serves as a sort of Examen for the soul.

Aciman only lived in Rome for a year; new adventures awaited in (where else?) the Bronx. With help from relatives, he applied to several schools in the United States, and when he was accepted at the Bronx campus of Hunter College, his whole family moved across the ocean. His father didn’t want to leave Europe, but he did.

Decades later, Aciman returned to the Via Clelia with his young family in search of the spark of memory. He hoped to find the local grocery store, but it was gone. For a brief moment, he could picture his mother at the stove, his brother returning from basketball practice, but then he lost it. He tried again, years on, when he visited his old apartment. Nothing.

It was only later that night, writing in his diary, that “everything and everyone came back to me.”

Maurice Timothy Reidy *is deputy editor in chief of America.*



Fordham University Press / 272p $25

In its starkest terms, *A Ministry of Risk* is a provocative anthology destined to leave most readers bewildered, challenged and perhaps even a little angry. This collection of the writings and speeches of the late Phil Berrigan (1923-2002), the controversial anti-war gadfly of the 1960s and '70s, forces Christians from all ideological corners to examine their personal commitment to living the Gospel of peace, nonviolence and social justice.

Phil Berrigan, along with his Jesuit brother Daniel, assumed the leadership mantle of the "Catholic New Left" for their wide-scattered and highly publicized anti-war activities beginning in the late 1960s. Phil was a Josephite priest at the time. Both brothers wound up on the cover of Time on Jan. 25, 1971, with the accompanying cover story titled "The Berrigans: Conspiracy and Conscience."

The pair also served prison terms for their public peace actions and suffered rejection and near-abandonment from all but a small minority of their clerical colleagues. Phil Berrigan in particular spent more than 11 years of his ministry behind bars.

Inspired by a desire to keep Phil Berrigan's message alive for contemporary readers, editor Brad Wolf burrowed through voluminous Berrigan papers in putting *A Ministry of Risk* together. A former prosecutor in Pennsylvania and a longtime peace activist, Wolf was drawn to Berrigan's story through contact with a number of his followers.

"I think he was definitely seen as subversive and critical of the church and the government," Wolf told **America** in an interview. "Phil was an unabashed revolutionary. He did not think that the American system could be fixed. It needed to be reconstituted entirely. He loved the Catholic Church. He loved the intellectual history of the Catholic Church, the prophets, the saints, the doctors of the church. But he believed it was not calling its members, the parishioners, to do their duty."

The book follows a chronological path in its presentation of Berrigan's writings, beginning with his work in the early 1960s decrying nuclear annihilation stemming from the Cuban missile crisis, through to his anti-Vietnam War activities, and culminating in the early 1980s, when Berrigan took up the Plowshares movement.

"I was first attracted by Berrigan's personality, and then his life, and then the power and the clarity of his writings," Wolf said. "His writings are absolutely brilliant. I don't know of anybody who writes more clearly about pulling the curtain back on America and exposing what's really going on behind the power [structures]. Who has power, who doesn't, who suffers."

The prophetic cry to Catholics in particular to do more in the service of peace and social justice comes through loud and clear in *A Ministry of Risk*. Berrigan's message of nonviolent resistance to war-making and militarism expanded over the years to an indictment of consumerist materialism and its quiet tolerance of racism—especially toward Black Americans—and even white supremacy.

While some of Berrigan's writing quoted in the book may be strident and self-righteous, it continues to challenge readers—now as it did then—to an authentic examination of conscience.

And what might be infuriating to more traditional Catholics is that Berrigan focused much of his prophetic ire on fellow priests, bishops and religious for "surrendering to Caesar" in their failure to oppose the U.S. presence in Vietnam.

One of Berrigan's letters reads:

> [T]he Catholic priest in America, and in the West generally, is more of a cultural phenomenon than he is a Gospel man. He is nationalistic, white supremacist, and uncritical toward affluence and its source. His training reflects nuances of these cultural fixations, but beyond that, it schools him merely in neutrality toward life. By that I mean, he

The Berrigans did not leave us with a feel-good, happy message.

tends to take a purely institutional view of threats to life, whether they be its abuse or destruction. Indeed, if he is sensitive, he will go through immense pretensions to escape such brutalities. Or if he is hardened, he will advocate them or remain casual in the face of them.

Much of Berrigan's prose can be difficult to swallow. Nonetheless, it succeeds in exhorting his readers to consider seriously the essential Gospel message of peacemaking and overcoming all forms of oppression and social injustice.

As to the relevance of Berrigan's writing for contemporary audiences, Brad Wolf has a ready justification. "We really need it today," he said, adding:

> When you look out at the world today and you see the desperate situations, the war, the suffering that's going on, we need Phil's voice and we need to know and be inspired by his life. I think once people read about that life, they are going to see somebody that they like. Phil comes across as somebody very down to earth, very human, very complicated man. He's assertive, he's impatient, demanding, but he is also funny, kind, compassionate, brilliant, he is prophetic.
>
> When you read all that, you are going to think that this is an amazing individual, who really understood what's going on in the domination systems of the world, and was desperately trying to live out his faith the best way he could.

A key player in the publication of *A Ministry of Risk* is the Rev. John Dear, a diocesan priest and former Jesuit who has taken on a modern-day ministry of nonviolence. A one-time cellmate of Phil Berrigan, Dear composed the afterword in the new Berrigan book.

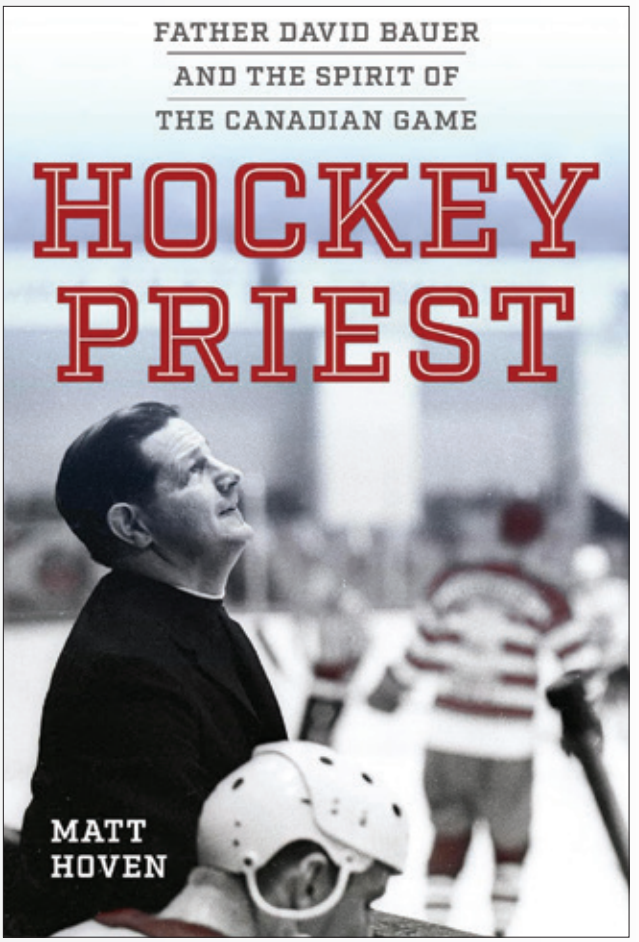
Like Wolf, Dear believes the life and teaching of Phil Berrigan need fresh adherents. Everything Phil and Dan Berrigan did flowed from their faith in the God of peace and love, Dear said. They were not just courageous activists, but "faith-filled disciples of the non-violent Jesus" and keepers and doers of the word of God.

"The Berrigans did not leave us with a feel-good, happy message," Dear said. "They were like prophets of the Gospel, saying 'love your enemies, don't kill them, don't build nuclear weapons to bomb us.' And if you support war and nuclear weapons, you have nothing to do with Jesus or the Gospel. And their messy message continues to be rejected, because who wants to hear that all the time?"

A Ministry of Risk loses some of its steam or urgency in the sections where Berrigan discusses his views on priestly celibacy and the inspiration he drew from his supporter and later wife, Elizabeth McAlister. But it regains strength in its treatment of Berrigan's steadfast commitment to the Gospel of peace. The book quotes Phil Berrigan late in life as saying, "After I was excommunicated in 1973 [for marrying McAlister, a former nun, without seeking dismissal from his religious vows or laicization from the church; the excommunication was later lifted], several other Christian bodies asked me to join them, and to minister under their aegis. I refused, because I have never considered myself anything but a Roman Catholic trying to become a Christian. My roots are in the Church, and in spite of all the prostitutions and betrayals of the institutional Church, these roots are lifegiving."

Mike Mastromatteo *is a writer, editor and book reviewer from Toronto.*

SANCTIFIED SKATES



Catholic University of America Press / 324p $35

For Canadians of a certain age, David Bauer, C.S.B., is a household name.

Father Bauer is the Basilian priest who created Canada's first national hockey team in 1964. Before then, the homeland of hockey had never built a national program and had long struggled in international competitions. Historically, the country's best local adult team represented Canada at the Olympics or the World Championships, depending on the year—with mixed results. Bauer coached the Nats, as they were nicknamed, in international competitions for much of the 1960s and oversaw the national team program for much of the next quarter century. Made up entirely of university students, the Nats competed against the world's best.

Bauer believed that sports should be a source of uplift—a character-building enterprise and a pathway to education. A staunch advocate of amateurism in the Olympics and other international competitions, he clashed with powerful forces in Canada that sought to permanently professionalize international hockey.

Before Bauer, few Canadians questioned the idea that the National Hockey League formed the pinnacle of the sport. This pious priest from Waterloo, Ontario, who as a teenager turned down an N.H.L. contract to get a university education and pursue a religious vocation, offered an alternative vision of the sport's highest aspirations.

Bauer died in 1988 and has slowly but surely fallen out of view in Canada just as amateurism in athletics across North America has come under fire on numerous cultural fronts. In the United States, he is strikingly little known except to a few, historically minded hockey cognoscenti.

Matt Hoven, the author of *Hockey Priest: Father David Bauer and the Spirit of the Canadian Game,* a fantastic new biography of Bauer, will help to remedy this oversight. Hoven, an associate professor of sport and religion at St. Joseph's College at the University of Alberta, shows the interplay of spirituality and sport in the world that Father Bauer helped create.

The language of personal growth now permeates competitive sports, whether amateur or professional. In *Hockey Priest*, Hoven rightly credits Bauer with helping cultivate a contemporary vision of sports that emphasizes the impact of athletic competition on the competitor. For Bauer, the national team would bring Canada together by serving as its athletic ambassadors—these excellent athletes would be good ambassadors and good scholars (players for the national team had to be enrolled at a university).

Canadians took great pride in the talented and tenacious teams he brought to the Olympics—twice in the 1960s—and to several world championships. After years of falling to amateur-in-name-only teams from the Soviet Union and other European countries, the Nats found their way to the medal stand on several occasions.

Hoven also demonstrates the extent to which the N.H.L., particularly its two historic Canadian juggernauts, the Montreal Canadiens and Toronto Maple Leafs, viewed Bauer's team as a threat. During the 1970s, a "Team Canada" of professional hockey players, organized by the heelish Alan Eagleson, a player agent turned players' union representative who was later convicted of embezzling money from his clients, displaced Bauer's team as the country's representative in international hockey for much of the decade. As a result, Canada did not participate in Olympic hockey in either 1972 or 1976, when professional athletes were still barred from participation.

Bauer was displeased with the way these professionals represented Canada. He concerned himself as much as anything with how his players' behavior reflected on their country and themselves, rather than with the final score. Conversely, "the direction of Team Canada was markedly different from Bauer's approach," Hoven writes. "Team Canada took on the personality of Eagleson: scrappy,

Hoven shows the interplay of spirituality and sport in the world that Father Bauer helped create.

crude, emotional, and bitchy."

For readers unfamiliar with the contours of the Canadian hockey system, Hoven clearly and concisely teases out its particulars in the opening chapter, setting the stage for his analysis of Bauer's challenge to the supremacy of the National Hockey League and the country's hypercompetitive minor hockey system.

The author situates Bauer's vision of sports within the tradition of his order, the Congregation of St. Basil, which incorporated athletic competition into its educational and spiritual model, a Catholic variant of the "muscular Christianity" that greatly influenced Protestantism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. St. Michael's College School in Toronto may have been the castle keep of Basilian aspirations to uplift the entire person. Not only is this secondary institution one of Canada's best independent schools, it is also a perennial power in youth sports.

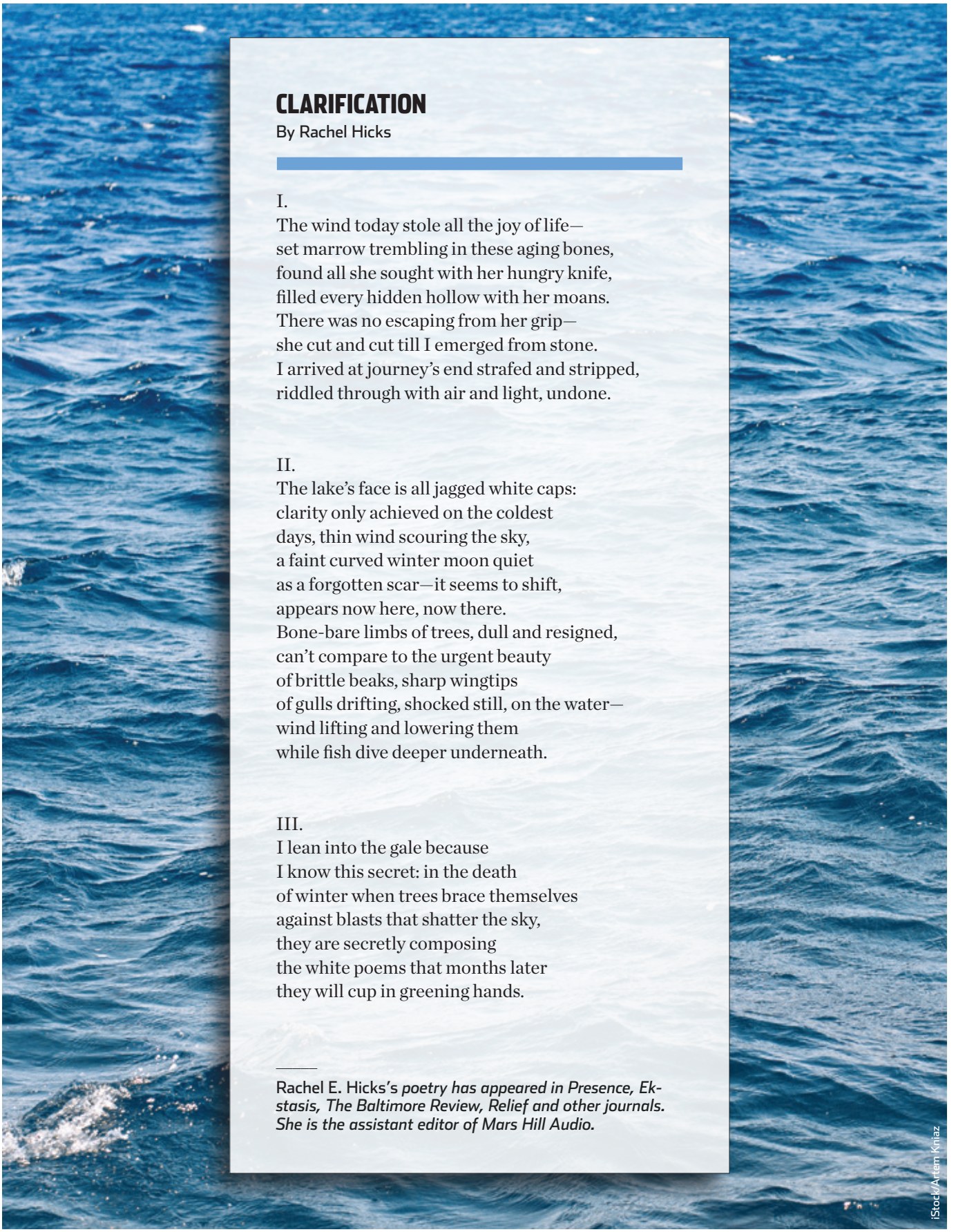
In 1961, Bauer coached St. Mike's to a Memorial Cup championship, the national title of the Canadian Hockey League, the country's system of junior hockey programs. Over time, the near-professionalization of junior hockey in Canada proved too much for St. Mike's, which dropped out of the top level of Ontario junior hockey shortly after its 1961 title, citing the length of the season and amount of travel as detrimental to its players' education. St. Michael's hockey continues, along with its fantastic programs in virtually every sport, but exclusively in interscholastic competition.

Refreshingly, Hoven's portrait of Bauer is that of a man in full. Other renderings of the hockey priest have sometimes presented him as a lifelong Boy Scout. In Hoven's hands, we see a man whose mortality is evident at every turn. Drinking and, particularly, smoking get the best of him physically. He was often concerned about his weight and his family's history of heart problems. He was preoccupied by fears of an early death and global affairs far beyond his control. The stress of his work and travel schedule clearly wreaked havoc on him. Bauer lived to be 63, but deteriorated rapidly after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer early in 1988.

The heart of Matt Hoven's biography of Father Bauer is the dozens of interviews he conducted with veterans of the Canadian national team, primarily from the 1960s and the 1980s, when Bauer took on a primarily managerial role with the organization. Decades after playing for Bauer, these players reflect on the profound influence he had on their lives. Many went on to careers in professional hockey. More significantly in Bauer's mind, the young men he mentored on the ice became a cadre of leaders in Canada's next generation—educators, lawyers, doctors and civil servants.

Hoven notes that at Bauer's funeral Mass, one of the readings came from the Letter to the Colossians, "Set your mind on things that are above, not on things of the earth" (Col 3:2). This verse offers a clear encapsulation of the ethos that Bauer brought to his sporting ministry. Competition on the ice was an extension of a larger and more profound struggle of the spirit. Hoven shows how the men that came under Bauer's charge consistently came out on top in their respective struggle.

Clayton Trutor *holds a doctorate in U.S. history from Boston College and teaches at Norwich University in Northfield, Vt.*



CLARIFICATION

By Rachel Hicks

I.
The wind today stole all the joy of life—
set marrow trembling in these aging bones,
found all she sought with her hungry knife,
filled every hidden hollow with her moans.
There was no escaping from her grip—
she cut and cut till I emerged from stone.
I arrived at journey's end strafed and stripped,
riddled through with air and light, undone.

II.
The lake's face is all jagged white caps:
clarity only achieved on the coldest
days, thin wind scouring the sky,
a faint curved winter moon quiet
as a forgotten scar—it seems to shift,
appears now here, now there.
Bone-bare limbs of trees, dull and resigned,
can't compare to the urgent beauty
of brittle beaks, sharp wingtips
of gulls drifting, shocked still, on the water—
wind lifting and lowering them
while fish dive deeper underneath.

III.
I lean into the gale because
I know this secret: in the death
of winter when trees brace themselves
against blasts that shatter the sky,
they are secretly composing
the white poems that months later
they will cup in greening hands.

Rachel E. Hicks's *poetry has appeared in Presence, Ekstasis, The Baltimore Review, Relief and other journals. She is the assistant editor of Mars Hill Audio.*

God Heard Our Cry

I am currently reading through the set of seven psalms (Ps 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) that have been known as the penitential psalms since the seventh century A.D. These are set apart for their language of lament and ability to express repentance. They were recommended officially by the church at one time in history for personal devotion during Lent. Psalm 38, for example, is mostly one verse after another expressing hopelessness until one reaches a ray of light in the last verse: "Come quickly to help me, my Lord and my salvation!" (Ps 38:23).

March this year guides us through the first four Sundays of Lent. The lectionary's choice of psalms for these Sundays reveals a striking contrast to the penitential psalms. Each Sunday during Lent will highlight some of the most beautiful and hopeful language from the psalms. Sundays in March begins to sound like a top 10 list of the best hits among the psalms, marked by memorable verses: "For to his angels he has given command about you, that they guard you in all your ways," or "Wait for the Lord with courage, be stouthearted, and wait for the Lord" (Ps 91:11; 27:14). These are psalms of consolation meant to help us on our Lenten journey.

The first readings for the first four Sundays of Lent recall the physical and spiritual journey for the people of God and their early pillars of the faith. On the first Sunday, Moses reminds the people of their own story: "When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us," says Moses, "we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction" (Dt 26:6-7). Following this, each Sunday recalls the journey of another key figure such as Abraham, Moses and Joshua. On the fourth Sunday God reminds Joshua that after the Passover during the Exodus out of Egypt the manna from heaven ceased. Now they must eat from the yield of the land of Canaan.

The Lenten journey is hard and meaningful at the same time. May you find courage in the God who hears the cry of our contemporary lament.

EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), MARCH 2, 2025
With God no one labors in vain

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT (C), MARCH 9, 2025
God hears the cry of the oppressed

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT (C), MARCH 16, 2025
God speaks to Jesus

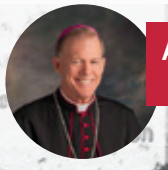
THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT (C), MARCH 23, 2025
God listens to lament within the fire

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT (C), MARCH 30, 2025
The manna runs dry, but the land continues to provide

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

National NOVENA *for* Migrants and Immigrants

Cardinal Blase Cupich
Archdiocese of Chicago



Archbishop John C. Wester
Archdiocese of Santa Fe

Bishop John P. Dolan
Diocese of Phoenix

... and others

9 DAYS *of* PRAYER
LED *by* 9 BISHOPS

MARCH 14 - 22
12pm CT | ONLINE

Migration is the story of humanity: from the many accounts in Scripture - particularly the Holy Family - to the migrants seeking better lives today.

Join us for **9 days of prayer** and reflection in English and Spanish on the dignity of migrants.

Catholic Theological Union

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The Call to Poverty

Can we create a society where it's easier to be poor?

By Nathan Schneider

One way of measuring the health of a society is the quality of life people can have with little wealth. This is a metric that should be of particular interest to Christians. If we are not ourselves poor, it is our job to care about those who are. And since we are called to imitate Jesus, who lived in poverty, we should always be asking the awkward question of how we might become more poor.

The goal for Christians should be not the elimination of poverty—Jesus said that is futile, anyway—but actually to encourage more of it. Through poverty, we become less attached to our own power and pride. We learn to depend more on God and each other. A Christian society should want to ensure that poverty is a viable option.

The trouble is, while American society is especially good among wealthy countries at producing poverty, it is especially bad at making the lives of the poor tolerable. More and more of society's basic functions have come to depend on the accumulation of private wealth, while instilling fear that a good life is otherwise impossible. The wealthy feel they need to amass more than they actually need, just to be sure, and the poor are sent away empty. Just for being poor, people risk exposure to the elements, lack of health care, criminalization and the inability to participate in cultural life.

For my parents' generation, it was possible to attend a public university at almost negligible cost. Graduates could aim for a job with a pension; and if nothing else, they had Social Security to look forward to. Housing was plentiful and comparatively affordable. Luxuries of many kinds were more expensive than they are in today's age of globalized manufacturing, but basics were cheaper. It is common to hear people who grew up in mid-20th-century America say, "We didn't even know that we were poor."

Since then, American society has veered in a different direction. Because of growing reliance on student debt to fund education and private savings to fund retirement, a cultured life is much harder to reach without piling up worldly wealth. Fear of losing out completely compels us to accumulate rapaciously.

I feel this fear every day. It makes being generous harder. Voluntary poverty would mean not just giving up some luxuries, it would mean sacrificing my children's future.

Members of religious orders know a different condition. They inhabit systems designed to support modest living through collective provisioning. Jesuits take a vow of poverty, but they rarely live in fear; their housing, health care and other basic needs are taken care of. They can be freer to live simply and pursue their spiritual callings as a result. The military provides similar systems for health care and education, too, and these make a life of service more possible.

A good society should be concerned not just with getting people out of poverty but enabling them to inhabit it with dignity. And dignity does not mean having to navigate degrading, means-tested programs that demand we prove our deservingness. Dignity begins with sharing wealth in common, as the apostles did after Pentecost. Similarly, medieval societies often ensured that even the poorest people had access to wood from the forest and leftovers in the fields. These were the "commons" that were available to anyone.

Poverty as we know it today is not just a matter of lacking money; it is the consequence of a society where you need money to do anything at all.

When staying at an ashram in India many years ago, I remember seeing the flocks of *sadhus*—older men who had entered the phase of ascetic renunciation before death, begging for their daily rice as a group, in a culture where such a retirement plan was considered normal. Part of me wishes I could look forward to a retirement like that.

But if Jesus and his followers were traveling around the United States today, would anyone tolerate their encampments? How long before they would be thrown into jail for putting their faith in God above dollars?

This is not just a question for the sake of the "less fortunate." For Christians seeking to deepen our discipleship, we should ask for our own sake: Is our society well organized for the poverty to which we are called?

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