

America

APRIL 2024

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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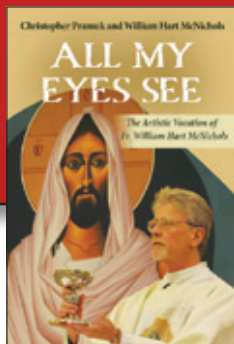
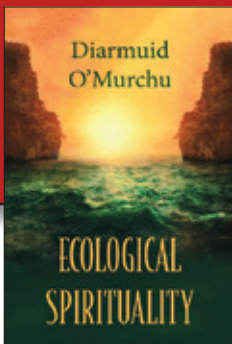
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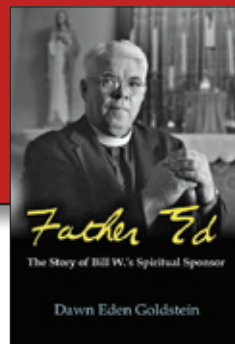
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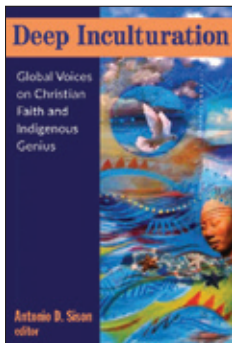
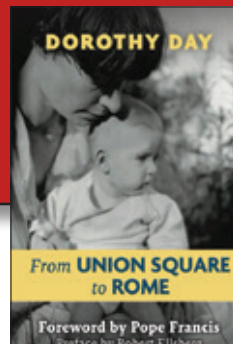
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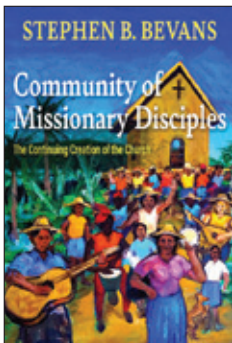
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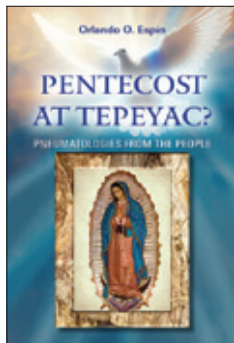
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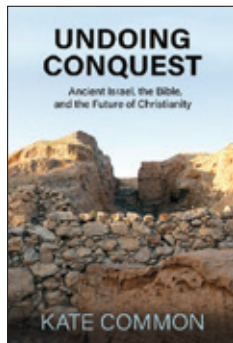
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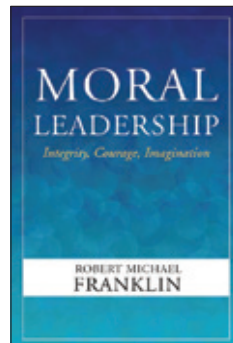


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Hearing the Call to Care for Our Common Home

When I first started working at **America** in July 2015, I dove into our website analytics as part of my work on digital strategy. An article headlined “Top Ten Takeaways from ‘Laudato Si’” was consistently near the top of the results.

Pope Francis had issued “Laudato Si’,” his encyclical on “care for our common home,” on June 18, 2015, and people were definitely paying attention.

One of the novelties of the encyclical was its title, preserving its opening quote from St. Francis’ “Canticle of the Creatures” in medieval Italian, rather than the usual few words from the beginning of the official Latin text. “*Laudato Si’, mi’ Signore*”: “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth,” St. Francis writes in the canticle.

(Nine years later, I still have to squint to make sure the punctuation at the end of the encyclical’s title adds up correctly. Say a prayer for all the proofreaders who have to check apostrophes inside single quotes inside double quotes.)

Of course, more than for its title, people were paying attention because Pope Francis was making climate change a central issue in the church’s social teaching. The encyclical captured the world’s attention during the preparations for 2015’s Paris Agreement, which aimed to hold global warming to a limit of 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial averages.

Are we still paying attention?

Perhaps more than ever we are aware of the threat of climate change. Alongside the other catastrophes in the headlines, “extreme weather” has become a distressingly common phenomenon, to the point where the idea of the “hundred-year storm” is not just a misnomer but a marker of how the climate is changing much more quick-

ly than our behavior or policies are. For the first time, our global average temperature over a year has exceeded 1.5 degrees of warming.

But are we still paying attention to “Laudato Si’,” or to Pope Francis’ most recent intervention on the environment, his apostolic exhortation “Laudate Deum,” issued in October 2023? In that update, eight years after “Laudato Si’,” Francis warned starkly that “our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point.”

This question was taken up at a recent conference of bishops, theologians, environmental leaders and journalists, held in San Diego, that I attended. The third iteration of “The Way Forward” conference, sponsored by a consortium of Catholic universities, focused on the reception of Pope Francis’ teaching on the environment by the church in the United States.

Especially given that “Laudate Deum” had closed by pointing out that American greenhouse gas emissions, measured per capita, are double China’s and seven times the average of the poorest countries, the question was stark. Certainly, no one showed up at the conference saying that the church in the United States has received “Laudato Si’” as well as we need to.

I wish I could say that the conference identified a clear solution. Instead, our discussions recognized that the challenge of ecological conversion—a phrase St. John Paul II used as far back as 2001—was interwoven with many other ecclesial challenges as well.

At the conference, we heard Catholics from Latin America tell us that in the Amazon region, “Laudato Si’” has sparked a restructuring of the way di-

oceses and national churches cooperate together in order to address issues that are not defined by borders. We heard that at the continental phase of synodal meetings in Oceania, climate change was a main issue, because for those living on islands, sea level rise is a present, existential question. And we were reminded frequently that young people see inaction on climate change as a mark of hypocrisy and a source of despair, an environmental and spiritual crisis simultaneously.

Are we paying attention?

In this issue, as we mark the 115th anniversary of **America**, we are reprinting (as the “Last Take”) an essay from Dorothy Day, first published 90 years ago, written as a letter to an agnostic who had objected that Christianity’s attention to conversion from sin and wrestling with “the shadow of death” was morbid. She responded that if our souls are not in a healthy state, then “of course we feel morbid,” and that prayer was precisely the exercise needed for our healing.

I returned from the conference convinced that a prayerful re-engagement with “Laudato Si’,” including an honest appraisal of our own resistance to it, is a spiritual exercise the church in the United States needs. Part of our inability—or refusal—to respond to climate change is the temptation to despair of the inadequacy of anything we can do individually or even nationally in the face of a global crisis. The answer to despair is not just better action and policy, but deeper hope: a recognition that we have been called by God to solidarity with one another and with all of creation. That is a call for the church both to hear and to proclaim.

Sam Sawyer, S.J.



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Letter to an Agnostic

Is the media responding to—or creating—concerns about President Biden’s age?

Robert David Sullivan, **America’s** production editor, argued in a piece published online in February that “it is not the responsibility of the press to tamp down voters’ concerns about President [Joe] Biden’s age,” no matter how pivotal the November election is for the future of this country. “Journalists must strive for accuracy and should convey to readers the high stakes of this election,” Mr. Sullivan wrote. “The political parties must listen to, and make a genuine attempt to respond to, the concerns of voters.” Our readers offered a variety of responses regarding their hopes for media coverage of the 81-year-old Mr. Biden and 77-year-old Donald J. Trump.

I would agree with Mr. Sullivan’s assertion, but at the same time, I have seen little from the media as of late regarding Mr. Trump’s age; he is only a few years younger. His actions and mental mishaps have been just as alarming, if not more so. Given each candidate’s history, I am more concerned about Mr. Trump finishing another presidency than Mr. Biden. Yes, I wish both parties had younger candidates, particularly the Democratic Party, but I tend to rate them both as pretty even with regard to the physical and mental health question. So I feel the article misses that major part of the discussion.

James Puglisi

Mr. Biden’s supporters describe this as an age issue. It’s not about age. If anyone has watched Mr. Biden for the last two years, they have seen a man who hesitates and searches for words when he speaks (not a stuttering issue), who gets names wrong consistently and appears confused on the public stage. He does not successfully handle the very few press conferences that he gives because he does not think clearly on his feet. It’s not an age issue. This is not a push for Mr. Trump to be president. This is simply saying that we need to believe our own eyes and ears.

Walter Witt

I think the concern has more to do with the amount of coverage about Mr. Biden’s age compared with how much less coverage there is about the danger his opponent would bring to the United States and the world. I have worked with seniors much older than Mr. Biden who have remained very sharp. I’m more concerned about the effect of the extreme stress of the presidency on Mr. Biden’s health than his ability to continue to perform well.

Anne Helmrich

And I thought the Gray Panthers and AARP had helped quash ageism. But just like racism, ageism is now again rearing its ugly head, both among Americans and in the media. My husband is Mr. Biden’s age, I’m Mr. Trump’s age, and we are in good mental/intellectual condition and

fairly active. We are a lot wiser and have more knowledge and life experience than when we were middle age. One does not have to be a marathon runner to be president; Roosevelt in a wheelchair carried out the important presidential functions just fine.

Mr. Biden has done a terrific job on many fronts—the economy, infrastructure, climate change, help for the poor and struggling, etc.—during his first four years. I expect him to do the same or more in the next four years. And don’t fault him for having a stuttering problem from youth; it’s no indication of one’s intelligence.

Lynn Vincentnathan

I personally think there should be an age limit to hold national political office, just as the Catholic Church arbitrarily sets the retirement age of a parish pastor at 70. But there’s no limit for who can be the leader of our country? This situation is becoming very dangerous for us, the public.

Bruce Ryman

Mr. Sullivan writes, “It is not democratic, with a small ‘d,’ for major media outlets to simply ignore concerns shared by a wide majority of the electorate.” The problem, which Mr. Sullivan glosses over, is that the concerns of the electorate are in large part fed by media coverage. Every single gaffe or other misstatement is attributed to Mr. Biden’s age, whereas when Mr. Trump says something outrageous or dangerous, it’s treated as merely “Trump being Trump.” So for Mr. Biden, it becomes a negative feedback loop that simply doesn’t exist for Mr. Trump.

Mike Joseph

Mr. Sullivan’s piece is a sound analysis. If Mr. Biden stumbles—literally or otherwise—between now and Nov. 5, the Democrats are sunk. We can point out all of Mr. Trump’s faults, but that really doesn’t matter now. Yes, there are super sharp seniors—many older than the president—but this is the toughest job in the world.

Vince Killoran

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The Empty Exercise of Presidential Primary Season

Is anyone happy with the way the United States chooses presidential nominees? We are ostensibly in the thick of the presidential primary season, when candidates make their pitches to the voters, but the contests have seemed completely irrelevant this year. Most American voters—59 percent, according to an ABC News/Ipsos poll taken in February—believe that *both* President Joseph R. Biden Jr., a Democrat, and former president Donald J. Trump, a Republican, are too old to serve another term, but under our current system, few voters have any real opportunity to consider alternatives.

Despite poor approval ratings and polls showing him in danger of losing to Mr. Trump, Mr. Biden has maintained an iron grip on the Democratic Party, seemingly because party leaders have no idea how to change course even if they wanted to. On Feb. 24, more than eight months before the general election, the political reporter Maggie Astor explained in *The New York Times* that it was too late for a new candidate to get on primary ballots; this means that almost all the delegates to the Democratic National Convention in August will be Biden loyalists.

As for the Republican Party, it has ceased to function as anything other than an appendage of Mr. Trump, whose multiple criminal indictments and increasingly radical statements about what he would do in a second term (including militarized mass deportations and a gutting of the civil service system at the federal level) have been accepted with shrugs rather than vetted through primary-season debate. That the Republicans did not even bother to write or adopt a party platform in 2020 was another

sign that our major parties have been completely subsumed by the personal campaigns of whoever last grabbed the reins of power.

In a year that is supposedly a test of “small-d” democracy, the voice of the voters seems fainter than ever. A one-party state is certainly not a democracy, but neither is a rigid two-party system of trench warfare, where the great majority of voters support either the Democrats or Republicans election after election without the chance to express their values or priorities, and where nominees and platforms (if they exist) are decided years before an actual election.

In a democracy, a political party should seek candidates who can win a general election and can then govern, addressing the concerns and priorities of the electorate. The presidential primary, which dates back to 1912 but became the chief tool for choosing nominees in the 1970s, has been championed as a way to give rank-and-file voters a real voice in their parties and to level the playing field for candidates who would not have thrived in the “smoke-filled rooms” of party bosses that characterized U.S. politics before the 1960s. (Jimmy Carter, who vaulted from one term as governor of the mid-sized state of Georgia to the Democratic nomination in 1976, is the archetypal example of someone who benefited from a long series of primary contests.)

But the primary system is now falling short of both of these goals. The Republicans have not had a complete primary season—that is, one in which more than one plausible candidate was still campaigning by the time the last state got to vote—since 1976. The Democrats had a competitive primary season as recently as 2008, but they,

too, now seem more of a fortress for incumbents or front-runners than a vital political party looking for new ideas. Despite the extraordinary length of primary campaigns, they seem strangely immune to changing events, including the war between Hamas and Israel and the record monthly number of migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, both occurring after the leadership of our only two viable political parties were practically set in stone until at least 2025.

Can we do anything to change our creaky, lumbering process for selecting national leaders? The U.S. Constitution was written before the rise of modern political parties, 21st-century forms of communication and billion-dollar advertising budgets, so it is not surprising that the document does not anticipate our current situation. But the Constitution was also designed to be amended, because its drafters recognized that it would *need* to be amended.

Yet instead of engaging in the amendment process, we have increasingly adopted the fatalistic attitude that we’re stuck with our election system—that it is simultaneously an unmovable mountain and a house of cards that will collapse if we so much as touch it. It is time to seriously consider alternatives.

Our presidential elections, and our primary elections in most states, follow a “first past the post” model in which the candidate getting the most votes, even if far short of a majority, wins it all—even the extraordinary power of the executive branch. Alternatives include run-off elections and ranked-choice systems that encourage candidates to form diverse coalitions and broaden their appeal to voters, as opposed to seeking wins by the

narrowest possible margins. Other electoral systems worth studying, at least at the legislative level, include multimember districts and proportional representation, which could give a voice to voters who are now always in the minority, such as Democrats in Oklahoma or Republicans in Massachusetts.

A major change would be to eliminate the Electoral College or reform it so that third parties are not relegated to spoiler status. Dissatisfaction with the two-party system is deep and enduring, and Catholic voters in particular are often forced to choose between two candidates who each violate Catholic social teaching in major ways. Our current duopoly is certainly not called for in the Constitution, but it is baked so thoroughly into our norms and laws that one might think the Democrats and Republicans have divine status.

As expected, in March 5's "Super Tuesday" elections the leading candidates secured most of the delegates necessary to guarantee their nominations at the party conventions this summer. Since the advent of the modern primary system in the 1970s, those conventions have increasingly become pro forma exercises—and this year, the same can be said for the primary elections themselves. Another possibility, however, is that one or both conventions will be epochal, as the last possibility for a party to respond to a candidate who no longer seems viable due to advanced age, overwhelming unpopularity or possible felony convictions.

The dysfunction of the 2024 primaries should not be diagnosed as simply another tragic example of partisan polarization, as if such division were a virus from outside our political system. Rather, it is a predictable result of the parties and candidates leveraging the design of our elections to hold on to power as long as possible. Instead of presenting voters with a quadrennial opportunity to vote against whomever they dislike the most, we need a discussion of how to change our nominating and election systems so that they offer a choice more worth making.

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Who has been missing from the Synod on Synodality? Parents.

Over the past two years, many questions have been asked regarding the participants of the ongoing Synod on Synodality. The degree of inclusivity—so much greater than in past church deliberations—has excited many Catholics, myself among them, who finally see some recognition of the Holy Spirit’s work through laypeople, especially women.

One question I do not hear being asked, however, is this: How many of the delegates have ever had to change a diaper, wait in the carpool line or deal with a moody teen?

The make-up of October’s synod gathering in Rome demonstrated that there are still essential voices not included in many delegations: parents. The current structure of the synod, meant to be representative of the universal church, is, to a large degree, silencing the domestic church.

This is not an application to join the synod in Rome next October. There are holier parents and wiser theologians who should be considered instead of me. But the voices of parents, especially those raising children now in a challenging world, ought to be heard.

As we learn of the issues being addressed at the synod, I have found myself reflecting, not as a theologian but as a parent who is (trying to) raise three Catholic children, on a number of issues facing the church.

The first is the role of women in ordained ministry. But concerns around Jesus’ choice of men for apostles or Paul’s mention of Phoebe as a deacon do not address the marginalization my daughters have felt in our church. How do we, as church, address the role of women so that my daughters and my son, who loves them, can continue to belong to the church as they age?

A second issue: My kids are bless-

ed to have friends who are Catholic, non-Catholic Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Mormon, Hindu and nonbelieving. They have learned what and when we can feed their friends, which holidays are important to them and the ways in which they celebrate joy and tragedy with their families. Their hospitality cannot be influenced by fear that they are watering down the Gospel or denying the necessity of the Incarnation for salvation.

The companionship of these friends is essential as my kids traverse the growing complexities of their world—and as my wife and I find companions on our journey with their parents. How do we, as church, address issues of religious diversity and respect for other faiths?

A third question: While I am trained to reflect on homosexuality and gender dysphoria through the use of natural law and the intended ends of human sexuality, that is not how I encounter these issues most of the time. I encounter the L.G.B.T. community through my children and their friends. My questions as a parent are not driven by doctrinal concerns or the canonical definitions of licit sexual relations or gender identities. My questions center more on what pronouns or names to use when my kids’ friends come over and how to ask about whom they’re dating. These issues are not (only) academic and ecclesial. They are personal.

In my life as a parent and professor, the people I encounter are not youth concerned about Thomistic moral theology. They are youth who are hurting, marginalized and searching—often for love and acceptance from a Christian community. How do we, as church, offer a home to them, too?

Parents ask these questions—and can offer the church some helpful in-

put toward answering them. But the parents, too, need to be asked.

I understand that the structure of the synod makes it nearly impossible for most parents to attend the session in Rome. I do not work for the church (directly), so my employer would not give me a month off work. More importantly, parents have familial obligations. My wife is awesome, and the kids would be good without me—but that is not how I intend to be a partner or a father.

Catholic children (and many adults) are hurting. They are lost. The church has an amazing opportunity and responsibility to address them beyond World Youth Day. I believe that the greatest gift the church can give to our youth, however, is to better serve their parents. This would begin with listening to us.

I remain hopeful for the success of the synod. I pray for my archbishop, Cardinal Wilton Gregory, for James Martin, S.J., and other delegates I know in their attempts to witness for me and so many other Catholic parents. Nevertheless, it would be better if a few of us parents were there to speak for ourselves.

So maybe I *am* submitting an application to be invited next October. Pope Francis: Sabbatical applications are due soon and child care takes time to arrange, so if you want to hear more of my voice or the voices of other parents, please don’t delay.

Brian Doyle is a professor of theology at Marymount University in Arlington, Va.

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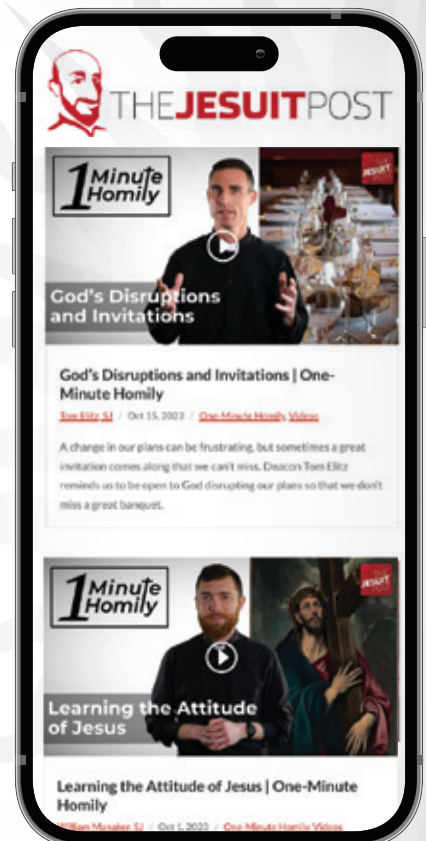
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‘Eco-violence’ or jihad? In Nigeria, Fulani raids are devastating Christian farming villages

By Kevin Clarke

Two Nigerian clergymen have run out of patience with Western assessments of the violence being experienced by Christians in Nigeria, after being informed one time too many that the conflict is an outcome of herder-farmer tensions or “eco-violence” driven by climate change. These are statements from Africa-area specialists that leave Bishop Wilfred Chikpa Anagbe, C.M.F., of the embattled Diocese of Makurdi in Nigeria’s Benue State, and the Rev. Remigius Ihyula sputtering in exasperation.

“Tell me,” Father Ihyula said, “how does climate change drive someone to hack a person to death with a machete?” How does it explain, he asked, someone blasting unarmed villagers in the back with an AK-47 as they seek to escape a terrorist raid?

“How do you say because you have issues of climate change or economic inequalities that you go killing people

in this manner? Butchering people and destroying everything. Does that make sense?”

The two churchmen have a more direct and worrisome explanation for the violence that has plagued Benue and other Nigerian states, claiming the lives of more than 52,000 Christians since 2009: It is the result of a calculated campaign of territorial conquest, displacement and forced conversion, sponsored by Islamist terrorist groups and continuing with the complicity of officials at the highest levels of the Nigerian government and military.

“It is Islamic jihad,” Father Ihyula said, noting that this is frequently how the perpetrators of the violence themselves characterize their aggression on Nigerian social media and radio. None of this is subtle, the two clergymen insisted. Islamist extremists in the region speak openly of the strategy. “We live side by side with them; we hear them,”

A funeral Mass at St. Francis Xavier Church in Owo, Nigeria, was celebrated on June 17, 2022, for 50 people killed in an attack at the church earlier that month.

Father Ihyula said.

Speaking from Holy Family Catholic Church, in the shadow of the United Nations on the East Side of New York City on Feb. 12, Bishop Anagbe asked why Nigerian leaders “sit and watch others killing us, and they’re not doing anything? All these years, over a decade now, nobody has been arrested, nobody has been prosecuted.” It is jihad and genocide, he charged. The kidnapping and murder of Christians around the country, both clergymen said, continue with near impunity.

Though sporadic attacks are an almost daily reality, the last large-scale atrocity against Christians occurred over Christmas, when scores of villages were raided by members of the Fulani community, a predominantly Muslim group that traditionally engages in cattle raising. Hundreds of villagers were murdered; thousands fled. Bishop Anagbe worries that more attacks may come during the next major Christian celebration, at Easter.

Father Ihyula and Bishop Anagbe were also in the United States to issue an appeal for humanitarian assistance in Benue State. They report that more than 2.2 million internally displaced people have fled attacks, establishing primitive camps in Makurdi that are bereft of adequate sanitation and reliable supplies of food and clean water. Worse, many camps are unprotected by the Nigerian military and remain vulnerable to more attacks.

In analyses of the ongoing crisis in the Western media, the attackers have been variously described as marauding bandits or Fulani pastoralists, driven to violence in disputes over land and cattle watering rights. Father Ihyula, who leads the Makurdi Diocese’s Foundation for Justice, Development and Peace, wishes it were as simple as that.

If it were only about resources, he said, leaders of the competing communities could meet and hash out sharing arrangements. Instead, Fulani raiders, many entering Nigeria from Chad, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, have razed villages, burned churches, killed priests and slaughtered villagers who are unable to defend themselves.

Government military and security forces may arrive in the wake of the violence, but they have been unable to neutralize the threat. Abandoned villages are being resettled by Fulani, he said. The names of the villages have been altered and the lands entrusted to the authority of Muslim emirs.

Father Ihyula believes the displacement has accelerated in anticipation of an upcoming national census that may result in an undercount of Christians in disputed territory and, because of that undercount, the eventual establishment of Sharia law in regions once solidly Christian. Sharia law, applying to all residents regardless of faith, has already been instituted in 12 northern Nigerian states.

During the first months of the Biden administration, in a widely criticized move, Nigeria was dropped from the U.S. State Department’s annual list of “countries of particular concern,” nations that warrant special diplomatic scrutiny because of systemic human rights and religious freedom abuses. Now Bishop Anagbe hopes to persuade the Biden administration to restore Nigeria to that list, noting how one Washington official recently seemed to dismiss the attacks on Christians as an “internal crisis.”

In Rwanda in 1994, he points out, “in the beginning it was a very quiet ‘internal crisis.’ Within a month, over 800,000 people were slaughtered.”

On Feb. 6 the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee endorsed House Resolution 82, instructing the U.S. State Department to restore Nigeria’s “particular concern” designation. But despite what seems to be irrefutable evidence of the continuing violence against Christians, the State Department has so far declined to do so.

Business interests, security concerns and great-power politics may be playing a role, said the two clergymen. They noted that the “particular interest” designation complicates trade, aid and military cooperation and weapons deals with Nigeria. According to the State Department, Nigeria is the United States’ second-largest trading partner in Africa, and the U.S. Agency for International Development regularly delivers more than \$1 billion in annual assistance.

During a visit to Nigeria in January, Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with senior government and military officials in Abuja, Nigeria’s capital, but did not visit Benue or other states most affected by the violence. After meeting with Nigeria’s new president, Bola Tinubu, on Jan. 23, Mr. Blinken told reporters that the United States is determined to remain a strong security partner for Nigeria.

In an email to **America**, a spokesperson for the U.S. State Department said it “regularly engages the government of Nigeria, at all levels, to address religious freedom issues and to ensure that all human rights and fundamental freedoms are protected, including the freedom of religion or belief.”

The spokesperson said that after the State Department’s most recent review, Mr. Blinken determined that the status of religious freedom in Nigeria did not meet



CNS photo/Terrillade Adelaja, Reuters

the threshold for designation as a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act, but had designated Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa as “Entities of Particular Concern” under the act.

The spokesperson said that the State Department continues to monitor “religious freedom dynamics” in Nigeria and remains concerned about “intercommunal conflicts” that target individuals or communities “based on religious identity, and about the effect of broader criminality and violence against members of religious communities.”

On Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14, Bishop Anagbe addressed a House of Representatives subcommittee on African affairs. “Every day the population of widows and orphans grows, creating a new generation of traumatized and uneducated Nigerians, who will have few options for their future,” he said.

“As I visit the camps where people are suffering such inhumane conditions, causing further desolation and health problems, I am at a loss,” Bishop Anagbe said. “I do not know what to preach or how to console them. It is difficult to offer hope, but I will not abandon them.”

According to Father Ihyula, the diocese has had to cobble together aid as best it can from a number of sources, including Aid to the Church in Need, Doctors Without Borders and other relief groups. But the government response to the great need in the camps has been “a drop in the ocean.” In addition to the problems of hunger and sanitation, he said, many of the displaced are deeply traumatized by what they have experienced—“to see people butchered like animals, killed in that manner.”

“This is the modus operandi of the Fulani,” he explains. “They come to a village; they encircle the village, bring down everything that is living, from human beings to animals, destroy even the crop that is saved for the food.... And then the people have to run away—those who are able to survive—run away and find these [internally displaced people camps].”

Later, “you can’t get back to your farmland or to your ancestral home to rebuild because they are now occupying those places, and they have guns.”

Those villagers who do attempt to return are often hacked to death with machetes, Father Ihyula said. Videos of those gruesome scenes are quickly shared on social media—terrifying images, he said, meant to instill fear among surviving Christians so that they never return home.

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent.*

Christian persecution in Nigeria by the numbers

There are almost **103 million Christians** in Nigeria, 47% of the country’s population of 222 million. Most Christians can be found in Nigeria’s south, with the north mostly populated by Muslims. Nigeria’s Middle Belt states, running across the middle of the nation and dividing the Muslim north from the Christian south, have been among the states the most afflicted by Islamist violence from Fulani militants and bandits and from Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province terrorists.

More than **52,000 Nigerian Christians have been murdered** by Islamist militants since 2009. More than 30,000 were killed during the eight-year presidency of Muhammadu Buhari, who was often criticized for not doing more to combat growing insecurity in the country; 34,000 moderate Muslims have also died in Islamist attacks since 2009.

Over the same time period, **18,000 churches and 2,200 Christian schools** in Nigeria were destroyed or damaged in Islamist attacks. According to Open Doors, a U.K.-based advocacy group for persecuted Christians, “more believers are killed for their faith in Nigeria each year than everywhere else in the world combined.” It reports that **82% of Christians** killed for faith reasons across the globe were in Nigeria.

Nigeria ranks 6th on Open Door’s World Watch List of states where Christians are most persecuted, behind North Korea, Somalia, Libya, Eritrea and Yemen. Nigeria accounted for **9 out of every 10 of religiously motivated killings** in the World Watch List’s assessment of African nations in 2023.

The United Nations estimated that because of ongoing civil insecurity, protracted conflicts and their impact on food prices, more than **25 million people in Nigeria** endured food insecurity in 2023—a **47% increase** from the 17 million people at risk of going hungry in 2022.

Sources: Open Door, UNICEF, Intersociety

GOODNEWS: A Chicago chef has a recipe for rehabilitation at Cook County jail

Pope Francis gave a warm welcome on Feb. 9 to Bruno Abate, a Chicago-based chef who has taught the art of cooking to some 4,000 inmates at Cook County Jail, the largest single-site jail in the United States. The pope encouraged him to continue “giving hope to prisoners” through his Recipe for Change program.

The tall, bespectacled Italian-born chef was accompanied to the papal audience by the archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Blase Cupich, who first got to know Mr. Abate during his Christmas and Easter visits to Cook County Jail to celebrate Mass and have lunch with the program’s participants. The two became friends, and the cardinal wrote to the pope about the chef’s work with prisoners, knowing that Francis has always taken a great interest in the welfare of the incarcerated.

The pope responded that he would like to meet the chef, and the cardinal gave Mr. Abate the good news. “I couldn’t believe it at first,” he said, “but I know cardinals don’t tell lies, so I came to Rome.”

Mr. Abate recounted his meeting with a sense of wonder: “When I saw [Pope Francis], it was just like seeing a light. It was an immense joy, something so very, very special, so unique that I cannot find words to convey what I felt.”

Mr. Abate gave the pope a painting of Mary and the child Jesus, done by a 20-year-old inmate who is awaiting trial. The pope recorded a short video message for the prisoners, which Mr. Abate will take with him on his next visit to Cook County Jail.

“We talked about the prison and how much people are suffering in prison, and how much money we spend for nothing, to kill people by taking away their dignity.”

Mr. Abate told the pope about the program he has run for the past 14 years. “I explained that in addition to teaching the inmates cooking, we also now teach them music and painting.”

“When I wake up in the morning, I ask God to give me the energy to carry on helping other persons,” he said. “In the future, I want to try and enter other prisons, to show that this is the solution, to give hope to the detainees. The solution is not punishment; the solution is education, rehabilitation.” According to the latest report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the U.S. prison population was 1,230,100 at the end of 2022.



Chef Bruno Abate (center), founder of Recipe for Change, meets with Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago and Pope Francis in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican on Feb. 9.

Born in Naples 70 years ago, Mr. Abate said, “My mother taught me [culinary skills], so I became ‘bravo’ in Italian cooking.” When he moved as a young man from Naples to Milan to work, he got involved in the food industry and set up his own company.

In 1998, he sold the business and emigrated to the United States. He began his work in prisons in 2010, working with juvenile detainees in St. Charles, Ill. Sometime later “through a whole convergence of things that I see was not just coincidence, because only God can bring about such things,” a judge in the Illinois Supreme Court granted him access to Cook County Jail. Later, through a friend, he got to know Sheriff Tom Dart, “a wonderful person,” and when he told the county sheriff that he owned a restaurant and wanted to give cooking lessons to the inmates, the sheriff made it possible for him to begin.

Today, Recipe for Change has a waiting list of 200 people, Mr. Abate said. “In the current program, we have 48 men in the cooking section, between six and 10 in the art section and more than 10 in music.”

“The solution is not just getting them work; it’s to restore what’s broken inside of these people, giving them back their dignity, their self-esteem, their self-confidence and hope,” he said.

Gerard O’Connell, *Vatican correspondent.*



Why is the United Kingdom trying to deport migrants to Rwanda?

Most people in Great Britain may remember Rwanda because of a terrible genocide there in 1994. But this landlocked, east-central African republic has been in the news again in recent months as a Conservative government in London struggles to implement a new and, to many, bizarre deportation policy.

The plan, first proposed under former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, would remove asylum seekers deemed to have arrived in the United Kingdom along illegal routes and deliver them by chartered aircraft to Rwanda, where their claims would be processed. They would then be expected to settle in Rwanda, not the United Kingdom, if their claims to refugee status were successful.

The policy thus outsources both the people and the asylum process to a distant third country. The controversial plan has been stymied repeatedly in European and U.K. courts and most recently by Parliament's House of Lords.

Liam Allmark, a senior spokesperson for Jesuit Refugee Service-UK, told **America** that his organization "resolutely opposes the cruel plan to forcibly transfer people seeking sanctuary here to Rwanda. It violates human dignity and abrogates our responsibility to provide safety for those who have been forced from their homes by war, poverty or persecution."

Mr. Allmark added, "We must take responsibility for examining the claims of people seeking asylum here and give people a chance to rebuild their lives in the U.K. Like other policies rooted in performative cruelty toward refugees, this plan is hugely expensive and impractical. Were it ever to be enacted, it would destroy lives."

Even though the plan has yet to be deployed, he said, "The damage is already being done."

"The very threat of removal is causing profound trauma for many refugees, while attacks on the right to claim asylum are becoming normalized in political discourse. As a society we can and must do better."

In 2023, almost 30,000 unauthorized migrants came to the United Kingdom in boats crossing the English Channel, a significant drop from the 2022 total of 45,755, the highest number recorded since figures began to be collected in 2018. A government immigration official told BBC News that the 36 percent decline in 2023 was likely an aberration, explaining that the government expects numbers to increase substantially in 2024.

Britain is by no means the only Western state experiencing political and social storms over immigration, but the issue has dominated political discourse and electoral strategies here. A growing number of migrants have been

A child migrant cries after being rescued while crossing the English Channel with her family in Dover, England, on May 1, 2022.

reaching the United Kingdom by crossing the channel in small boats, their risky passage facilitated by unscrupulous “people smugglers.”

But contrary to the rhetoric of much of the media and populist bombast, which has to an extent seeped into popular consciousness, Britain is not the primary destination for most people seeking asylum in Europe. Germany has accepted far more immigrants, including providing shelter for over one million refugees from Ukraine. Syrian and Afghan refugees have similarly received a heartier welcome in Germany, although opposition to migrants has become increasingly vocal there.

The attraction of Britain to some migrants is often the hope of reuniting with family members already settled legally in the United Kingdom. Many contemporary refugee-producing countries were part of the former British Empire. As a result, many of the unauthorized migrants have a familiarity with the English language that, they hope, will make it easier for them to rebuild broken lives in a new land.

The United Kingdom’s highest court ruled in November 2023 that the Rwanda plan failed the test of “non-refoulement.” A core principle of international human rights and refugee protection law, non-refoulement ensures that asylum seekers not be returned to a country where they would be in danger. The judges held that Rwanda could not guarantee observance of the non-refoulement principle or prevent violation of deported people’s human rights.

Struggling to salvage the Rwanda plan, U.K. lawmakers from the Conservative Party have since attempted to accomplish by law what was not accepted by British courts, legislation that will simply declare that Rwanda is a safe country.

David Stewart, S.J., *contributes from Scotland.*



Bishop Mark J. Seitz, at the U.S.-Mexico border in February 2019, holds photos of two migrant children who died in U.S. custody.

‘We will not be intimidated’: Bishop Seitz responds to Texas attempt to shut down Catholic migrant service

Catholic leaders condemned an attempt by Attorney General Ken Paxton of Texas to shut down a Catholic nonprofit organization that serves migrants and asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border, calling it an abuse of power and a violation of religious liberty.

Mr. Paxton’s office accused Annunciation House in El Paso, Tex., of “facilitating illegal entry to the United States” and “human smuggling” and filed a lawsuit in an attempt to shut it down.

On Feb. 22, Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso issued a strong statement supporting Annunciation House. “Let me be clear. For the church’s part, we will endeavor to work with all in pursuit of the common good of our city and nation,” Bishop Seitz wrote. “We will not be intimidated in our work to serve Jesus Christ in our sisters and brothers fleeing danger and seeking to keep their families together.”

Ruben Garcia, director of Annunciation House, told reporters during a press conference on Feb. 23 that the nonprofit has been providing basic resources like food, shelter and water to migrants and refugees who arrive at the border for nearly 50 years in consultation with the U.S. Border Patrol.

“There are individuals who have decided that that should be illegal,” he said.

In a statement on Feb. 20 announcing his lawsuit against Annunciation House, the attorney general’s office alleged the group was a “stash house” facilitating illegal entry to the United States.

“I personally am taken aback by the use of words like ‘smuggling,’ to call our houses of hospitality ‘stash houses,’” Mr. Garcia said. “Is there no shame?”

In comments at the press conference, Bishop Seitz reiterated his pledge that the El Paso Diocese and the Catholic Church would stand by Annunciation House.

“This is not about politics,” Bishop Seitz said. “It’s about the Gospel.”

OSV News/America staff.



A BITTER

The tragic story of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic

HARVEST

By J.D. Long García

Sugarcane is a tall crop. In some regions, it can grow as high as 20 feet. Stalks of cane have long leaves with sharp edges that will cut your skin. I learned these facts last year, when I saw the harvest of sugarcane in the Dominican Republic while on a trip with Cross Catholic Outreach.

A group of men swung their machetes, chopping the stalks down one by one at the base. The men trimmed the cut stalks efficiently before flinging them onto a large trailer. Three oxen stood by waiting to haul the harvest to a train. It was midday and, judging by the pile of sugarcane, these workers had been at it for hours. *“Eske ou pale èspayòl?”* I asked a group of three, using one of the few phrases I’d memorized in Haitian creole. In the Dominican Republic, those who work in the field are nearly all migrants from Haiti. They typically live on the sugarcane plantations they harvest. These workers did not speak Spanish, but they seemed amused by the attention our group gave them.

They took a break from their work and we walked over to them. The ground was soft, covered with severed stalks

and debris. It was hot and humid—a typical day in the province of La Romana. Sugarcane, a perennial crop, needs a lot of sun to grow. The men wore caps, rubber boots, long sleeves and long pants to protect themselves from the elements.

“No one who was born in the Dominican Republic would do this work,” one said, through the interpreter. All three workers had come to the Dominican Republic from the same part of Haiti two years ago. Undocumented Haitian workers fear leaving the plantations because they risk deportation. Sugarcane cutters in the area grapple with low pay, poor living conditions and inadequate health care. Even the local grocery stores—often owned by sugar companies—set high prices because they know workers cannot shop around for better deals.

Even worse practices are not uncommon. For example, government agencies and civil rights advocates have accused Central Romana Corporation, a leading sugar producer in the Dominican Republic, of using forced labor. In



The Dominican sugar industry relies heavily on Haitian migrants for harvesting. Oxen haul trailers to trains for transport to sugar distilleries.

2022, the Biden administration blocked shipments of sugar from the company to the United States.

Sugar is not the only industry that exploits Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic, but it offers a unique lens through which to understand racism and xenophobia. During my trip, I got a chance to hear about the lived experience of many Haitian families, much of which resonates with the conversations about immigration in the United States.

One Island, Two Nations

Quisqueya is one of the names the native peoples gave centuries ago to the island now shared by the nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. At least that's what it sounded like to Christopher Columbus and his crew when they arrived half a millennium ago, as the word is a Western rendition of an Indigenous word. Columbus is said to have renamed the island Hispaniola, claiming it for Spain. Not long after, colonists introduced sugarcane.

The native inhabitants, typically referred to collectively as the Taíno, had been on the island for centuries before Columbus. In the decades after his arrival, disease introduced by the colonists claimed the lives of countless Taínos. Many also died fighting the Spanish colonists.

“The relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and the French and Spanish colonies before their independence, is complex and often contradictory,” according to José Guerrero, a professor at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo. “It was a necessary economic relationship, but they also fought.”

At one point in its history, the French colony of Saint-Dominigue produced 40 percent of the world's sugar. Meanwhile, the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo maintained livestock. Both the French and the Spaniards brought enslaved Africans to the island.

The Haitian Revolution, which began in 1793 and led to Haiti's independence in 1804, destroyed the sugar industry, Mr. Guerrero said. The Dominican Republic did



J.D. Long Garcia

José Luis (far right) has been cutting sugarcane for decades. He wears metal shin guards to protect himself during the harvest. There is no workers' compensation program for Haitian workers in the field.

not declare its independence until 1821, after Spain had lost interest in the colony. But shortly after its initial independence, the country was subsumed into Haiti. This complex moment in history is particularly contentious, as some Dominicans to this day refer to the 22-year span under the Haitian government as an “invasion.”

“That was not an invasion,” Mr. Guerrero told me, explaining how Dominican history has been distorted over time. “The Haitian government was accepted.... They were two poor countries that were colonized, enslaved.”

Jean-Pierre Boyer was the president of Haiti when the island was united under the Haitian flag. Born of a French father and an African mother, Boyer was educated in France and fought in the French Revolution. He brought many of those ideals to his leadership, and the island united under Haiti embraced them, Mr. Guerrero said.


“They ended slavery, they distributed land, they allowed civil marriage [outside the church] and gave rights to women,” Mr. Guerrero said of the founders of Haiti. He described the Dominican Republic’s declaration of independence from Haiti in 1844 as a relatively peaceful event, having to do mostly with economic interests. People with Haitian roots who had migrated eastward under Boyer stayed there and became Dominicans.

As the production of sugar on the island diminished, it

began to flourish in Cuba and in the American South. “It was still bigger in Cuba because they still had slavery,” Mr. Guerrero said. Slavery was not abolished in Cuba until 1886.

In 1861, the American Civil War limited production of sugar in the South, while the Ten Years’ War in Cuba, which began in 1868, led planters there to flee to the Dominican Republic. In 1879, Cuban entrepreneurs established the first steam-powered sugar mill in the Dominican Republic. The sugar industry began to thrive, but it always had some connection with Cuba, Mr. Guerrero said. For example, after the war and then the abolition of slavery in Cuba, Haitian workers traveled to that island to harvest sugarcane. But then, once Cuban owners began favoring local workers in the 20th century, Haitian workers returned to their home country.

In a sense, the Dominican Republic was a late arrival to the production of sugar in the Caribbean. After a couple of decades of relying on local labor, sugar plantation owners in the Dominican Republic grew tired of harvesters who organized for higher wages. The industry began turning to



SUGARCANE CUTTERS GRAPPLE WITH LOW PAY, POOR LIVING CONDITIONS AND INADEQUATE HEALTH CARE.



Daniel Tiot lives in a community for sugarcane workers but makes a living in masonry. He first came to the Dominican Republic 20 years ago and returns to Haiti sporadically to bring money to his family.

immigrants from other islands in the Caribbean to fill their labor needs. After the immigrants from other islands also began organizing, the sugar companies turned to immigrants from Haiti.

That trend continued and expanded after the United States began occupying Haiti in 1914 and the Dominican Republic in 1915. It established a program that sent Haitian workers to sugar plantations in the Dominican Republic that were owned by North American interests.

Anti-Haitianism

Our group visited a number of small communities in the Dominican Republic built by sugarcane companies for workers and their families. One of these communities, known as *bateyes*, consisted of rows of cinder-block dwellings that reminded me of single-story army barracks. Cross Catholic Outreach funds a medical clinic there and helps provide eyeglasses to those who need them. Outside the clinic, schoolchildren kicked a soccer ball around during recess. Similar communities in the country now have running water and electricity, but certainly not all of them.

I met a woman who gave her name simply as Gesenia. She was born in the Dominican Republic, so she grew up speaking Spanish. Six of her children—four boys and two girls—attend the school. She said her husband wasn't working because cutting sugarcane doesn't pay enough, but she recently lost her own job. Her parents came from Haiti to the Dominican Republic years ago to cut sugar cane.

A spokesperson from one of the three major sugar companies I interviewed estimated that 70 percent of its sugar is now harvested with machines. He expects that share to grow, but for now various topographical factors require the rest to be cut by hand, he said. Increasing mechanization could also result in increased unemployment.

"Everything is expensive," she told me. "I have faith that the Lord will help us. It's God who opens the hearts of men."

But many Dominicans, she said, don't have their hearts open to Haitians. Her sentiments have deep historical roots.

By 1930, when Raphael Trujillo came into power in the Dominican Republic, Haitian immigrants made up the majority of sugarcane cutters. In 1937, Trujillo ordered the Dominican National Guard to execute as many as 25,000 Haitians living in the country, though the exact number is difficult to estimate. Trujillo's soldiers would hold up a piece of parsley and ask a person suspected of being Haitian to name it. *Perejil*, the Spanish word for parsley, was difficult for non-native speakers to pronounce. If those being questioned could not pronounce the word correctly, they were killed.

The state-controlled press at the time claimed it was rural Dominicans who, in an uprising, killed Haitians who were stealing cattle in the border region. After Trujillo's assassination in 1961, researchers discovered that Trujillo had ordered the massacre. During Trujillo's reign, Dominican historians wrote inaccurate accounts painting the Haitians in a negative light, according to Mr. Guerrero. That included blaming Haitians not only for a poor economy during the Depression, but also as a threat to a Dominican identity that Trujillo defined as white. As historians have

‘PEOPLE WHO DON’T HAVE ANY OTHER OPTIONS COME HERE.’

noted, the 1937 massacre targeted Haitians living near the border, not on sugar plantations.

The government-controlled Dominican press named Trujillo the defender of Dominican national identity. Haitians, according to Trujillo’s narrative, threatened that identity.

Trujillo institutionalized anti-Haitian sentiments. One clear example, according to an essay by Loria García Peña in *The New York Times* in October 2023, was *La Sentencia* (“The Sentence”), by which the Dominican Constitutional Court retroactively stripped Dominican nationality from anyone born after 1929 who did not have at least one parent of Dominican ancestry. The 2013 ruling affected as many as 200,000 Dominicans of Haitian ancestry.

“There’s racism here, a xenophobia,” Jhak Valcourt, a Haitian author and artist who lives in the Dominican Republic, told me. “It could be called a hatred from the Dominican government toward the Haitian people.”

According to Mr. Valcourt, political candidates in the Dominican Republic continue to rely on the narrative Trujillo instituted. He claimed that deportations go up in election years and that the Dominican government has begun construction of a border wall.

“The president knows full well that the nationalists like that,” he said. “They see him as the president who is saving the Dominican Republic from the Haitian people. That’s strategic. It gets votes.”

In some families in the Dominican Republic, parents and caregivers tell children that if they misbehave, they’ll be taken away by *el Kuko*, which is a sort of boogeyman. The custom is over 100 years old, and some depict *el Kuko* as Haitian.

“When you have a child that grows up with the mentality that if they do something wrong then a Haitian is going to take him away, the child grows up with a hatred of the Haitian person,” Mr. Valcourt said. “How do you take that hatred away?”



Wilhem Pier, now retired, worked in the sugarcane fields for decades after migrating from Haiti. He is retired and the proud grandfather of 22.

J.D. Long García

Yet the ongoing political and economic crises in Haiti have led to a steady flow of migration out of the country, Mr. Valcourt said. Political pundits describe migration from Haiti as an invasion, he said, and Haitians are described as taking jobs away from Dominicans.

“Those [Haitians] who go to the Dominican Republic tend to be the working poor,” he said, “those who cannot afford a passport or a plane ticket elsewhere. Those people who don’t have any other options come here.”

Families Share the Burden

Our group made a short, unscheduled stop at another *battey*. I saw a man cleaning his harvesting tools in a bucket.

When I approached, I learned he spoke Spanish. Cutting sugarcane is hard work, José Luis told me, but he's been doing it for decades. I asked him about the metal shin guards he was wearing.

"That's in case I swing too hard," he explained, making the gesture with his arm. He's hurt himself more than once over the years, but there's no workers' comp. If he doesn't work, he doesn't get paid.

Three others approached, though not all of them spoke Spanish. One wore a Chicago Bulls jersey and another an Air Jordan knit cap. They were all from Jacmel, which is on the southern coast of Haiti.

"They pay too little," José Luis told me. "Some of us are trapped in this situation."

Another sugar harvesting community we visited boasts a vibrant youth group, which began after the *batey* was wired for electricity 10 years ago. Fundación Nueva Alegría, a Cross Catholic Outreach partner, supports families there. I met a number of young people there, including 7-year-old Joel, who said he wants to "change his life" and help his family. He wants to have his own house when he grows up. Antonio, 12, told me he wants to work in a hotel when he gets older. Tourism is a leading industry in the country.

Ismael, also 12, loves math. He told me he is one of five children. In my reporter's notebook the translator jotted down a problem for him to solve: $48,456 + 75,417$. Ismael carried the one and got it right. The community is hoping to get land to build a high school.

None of the children I spoke with wanted to cut sugarcane.

Daniel Tiot, who is 36, doesn't want to cut sugarcane either. "When I came here, I learned how to work," he said. Mr. Tiot makes his living in masonry.

"It's a business. That's what's happening here," he said of the *batey* and the sugarcane fields. "Day and night, cutting sugar cane. It's only God in heaven who is taking care of us. It's only our heavenly Father who can change our situation, because everything here is backwards."

Dominican sugarcane plantations produce, on average, more than 600,000 metric tons of sugar annually. A number of factors—including the increased use of high fructose corn syrup as a sweetener in the United States—have led to decreasing sugar production in the Dominican Republic, once a global leader in sugar production, since the 1980s.

Mr. Tiot came to the Dominican Republic from Haiti when he was 16. He returns home now and then to bring money to his family. It's a challenge for him to do so, however, given his legal status. "I cannot go out into the street because I'm illegal, even though I have my documents," he said, explaining that he has a passport but no visa. On the

main highways from Haiti into the Dominican Republic, law enforcement sets up checkpoints to discourage illegal immigration.

"What are they going to do?" he said. "Deport all the Haitians?"

An older man wearing a sleeveless undershirt stood outside the community area. The shirt was loose on his muscular frame. His denim cap, with a large number 37 on it, was worn nearly white from use, and the cardboard from the brim stuck out.

I introduced myself and he shook my hand firmly. Wilhelm Pier is 80 years old and came to the Dominican Republic from the border town of Fonds-Verretes during the Duvalier regime in Haiti.

"They drove me here," he said, referring to a 1952 agreement between the Dominican and Haitian governments, during Trujillo's time. In the 1950s, Trujillo acquired the major sugarcane plantations in the country and changed his tune on Haitian workers, bringing them in to work his fields.

Mr. Pier used to cut sugarcane, he said, but he is retired now. He and his wife live with his daughter, who works in the city nearby.

I told Mr. Pier that I was slowly learning Haitian *krèyol*, and tried a little out on him. He laughed and told me that if I lived at the *batey*, he would teach me.

"It's easy," he said in Spanish. "The word for plantain? *Bannann*. Sweet potato? *Patat dos*. Rice? *Diri*. You see? It's easy."

He told me he had 22 grandchildren.

"Wow," I said. "How many children do you have?"

"Two daughters," he said. One has 10 kids, and the other has six. But he also has six great-grandchildren, so he was counting those as part of the 22.

"If you have a lot of people, it makes the burden weigh less. Children are a great blessing, a way to move ahead," Mr. Pier said. "God is good so we trust in him. But life is very hard right now. Before you could live with a little bit of money. But now everything is expensive. Before you can even stop to think about it, everything is gone."

J.D. Long García is a senior editor at *America* and a native of the Dominican Republic.

Where Have All the Volunteers Gone?

Fewer young people are choosing full-time service after college. How will volunteer organizations adapt?

By Christine Lenahan



The Ella Baker House, in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City, can house eight volunteers—nine if two agree to be roommates. A converted rectory connected to Resurrection Catholic Church, the building serves as home to members of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, the largest lay, Catholic, full-time volunteer program in the world. But on the day of my visit, the rectory aches with an eerie quiet, and several unoccupied bedrooms hold little besides mattresses on the floor. Despite the spacious rooms, only four volunteers are living here.

The rectory's glossy blue front door shines under the street lamps. I've come to the house to visit my friend Jen Lozano, who has committed to a year of service work through J.V.C. after graduating from Boston College in 2023. Jen walks up the narrow oak staircase and I follow close behind as the stairs creak underfoot. Knickknacks clutter entryway tables: a small sculpture of Michael the Archangel and a small replica of St. Peter's Square are veiled in a thin layer of dust. The living room walls are lined with crowded bookshelves. A faded *USED* label appears on the spine of a biography of Dorothy Day sandwiched between tattered MCAT and LSAT study guides. But the volunteers' most sacred texts, *The Cheap Bastard's Guide to New York City* and *New York: Free and Dirt Cheap*, are more dog-eared and highlighted than the test prep books.

This space has housed Jesuit volunteers for decades, with group photos of each cohort of volunteers since 1995

lining the staircase wall. Each group of smiling people, most of whom are adorned in funky cable-knit sweaters and Birkenstocks, likely arrived because they were attracted to J.V.C.'s core values of spirituality, simple living, community and social justice, and wanted to live out those values while serving others through their work placement.

The photos are a testament to communities of the past, but they are also evidence of a problem faced by J.V.C.: The number of faces in each photo gets smaller and smaller each year. Despite its reputation as the pioneer of the Catholic post-graduate service industry, the organization has a volunteer shortage. The Ella Baker House is the only remaining J.V.C. community house in New York City, following the closure of the organization's Bronx and Brooklyn locations in 2023.

This problem is not exclusive to J.V.C. The Catholic Volunteer Network, an umbrella organization through which dozens of Catholic volunteer programs collaborate, post applications and share resources, has seen a significant decrease in the annual number of volunteers who have joined its 77 different service member organizations, especially following the Covid-19 pandemic. Five of their member programs have closed permanently.

In 2016 to 2017 the organization had 48 community sites in 37 U.S. states and six in other countries. In 2020, Jesuit Volunteers International, the organization's global arm that offered international placements, was shuttered.



Just two years ago, a cohort of 186 volunteers served in 30 different community houses across the United States. But in an email to its alumni network last Sept. 21, J.V.C. announced that it “paused its presence” in 12 communities, beginning with its 2023-24 cohort of 89 volunteers. And today, four of the remaining J.V.C. houses currently operating in the United States have only two volunteers living in them.

Civic engagement, racial equality and the environment are often named as top concerns of Gen Z. Last year the child poverty rate in the United States reached 12.4 percent, up from 5.2 percent the previous year. The opioid epidemic and mental health crisis affect millions of Americans. Climate change plagues the lives of our nation’s poorest. Full-time volunteer programs offer many ways to help. So why aren’t these post-grads volunteering?

Ruined for Life

“Ruined for life” is a phrase used by many former members of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps to describe how their lives were forever changed by dedicating themselves to a year of service. The significance of that phrase has not been lost on this community in Harlem. Throughout our visit, the Harlem volunteers talked about the phrase, which was coined by Jack Morris, S.J., the founder of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in 1946. Being ruined for life is “a blessing,” writes Father Morris in his book with the same title. “Once a vol-

unteer, never again in your life could you ignore the plight of people living on the margins.”

The lifestyle of the Harlem volunteers offers a strong foundation for this way of thinking. This community of four postgraduates receives \$456 a month, given to them by J.V.C. toward community expenses, like food, cleaning supplies and utilities. Group grocery lists are made and finances are split up at the community’s Sunday business meetings. “We never feel strapped, but we do shop consciously,” Jen tells me. In addition to the money given to the community, each volunteer receives a personal stipend of \$105 per month, which they consider to be their “salary.” It keeps them bound to their promise of simple living in one of the most expensive cities in the United States.

Father Morris writes, “I envisioned these young volunteers acting as ‘mini-Jesuits’ who needed formation in ministry.” It is in community that volunteers get to “imagine God’s point of view in their work, and do something great beyond themselves,” as Father Morris writes.

In an article in **America** in 2006 commemorating the 50th anniversary of J.V.C., George Anderson, S.J., wrote that “currently, the number of volunteers serving here in the United States has dropped from a high of 500 to approximately 350.” (That number has fallen more drastically since; as noted above, the 2023-24 cohort is down to 89.) This drop in number was not due to lack of interest, wrote Father Anderson, but instead to “the very success of the



Past and present (front row) Jesuit Volunteers gather at the Ella Baker House in New York City.

Jesuit Volunteer Corps model.” By this, he meant that other volunteer organizations, both religiously affiliated and secular (including the Peace Corps and, later, AmeriCorps) began following the J.V.C. model of living simply, dwelling in community with fellow volunteers, and fighting for justice for the poor and marginalized. Young people looking for volunteer work had an increasing number of options.

Today, however, fewer young people are choosing full-time volunteer work after college, and volunteer organizations have been forced to adapt. And the current volunteers have noticed.

“We felt the impact at orientation,” Jen tells me.

New volunteers begin the formation process in August before moving into their community homes. During orientation for the 2023 cohort of volunteers, the staff honored the recent closing of the 12 communities. Jen said that while the orientation program was exciting, there was a feeling of sadness when the community closings were acknowledged.

Conor Burke, one of the volunteers in Harlem, told me he had once hoped to volunteer through Jesuit Volunteers International but was “forced to pivot” after its closure. Conor now volunteers at the Part of the Solution food pantry in the Bronx, helping neighborhood residents fill out forms for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. “I hope they can bring back [the international option] for future volunteers, but at this rate, who knows if J.V.C. will be around at all.”

Before the pandemic, J.V.C. was receiving up to 400 applications per year, said Rob Roa, director of recruitment

for the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. After the pandemic that number dropped to approximately 250. While application numbers have remained steady in post-pandemic years, the number who ultimately choose to embark upon a full year of service and living in the community has decreased significantly.

It is not just Catholic volunteer organizations that are seeing a decline in the number of participants. According to their annual impact reports, the Peace Corps has experienced a significant decrease in the number of volunteers, dropping from 7,240 in 2020 to just 2,530 in 2023.

Marian Uba, the executive director of Mercy Volunteer Corps, a full-time volunteer program associated with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, said she has noticed this trend, too. She said that while the Mercy Volunteer Corps has historically had 30 to 35 volunteers, this year it has only 11 volunteers in six cities. In November, the organization sent an email to its former volunteers asking them to share their volunteer experience with others, in the hope of increasing interest. The email cited significant declines in the number of volunteers in the last two years and mentioned “various factors including a lack of volunteer opportunities during the lockdown, increased student debt, the perception of improved job prospects, and a general malaise following the pandemic” as causes for the change.

Amate House, a yearlong postgraduate service program in Chicago, is facing similar difficulties. Jeanine Balanda, the director of Amate House said that, previously, there were about 11 volunteer fellows in each Amate cohort. This year



The decline in the rate of volunteering in the United States predated the pandemic.

there are six. “You may get a good amount of applications, but then people that will actually commit to a year of service and leadership development is much lower than your actual applicant pool,” she said.

Cecilia Flores, the director of the Catholic Volunteer Network, said, “The pandemic caused a big disruption in the world of faith-based service.” Ms. Flores said hundreds of volunteers were pulled from their service placements at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, and she knew of several programs that chose to close entirely after their numbers became unsustainable. According to the 70 respondents to a survey of C.V.N. programs, 56 programs placed volunteers in 2021, and 33 programs experienced a drop in funds.

However, the decline in the rate of volunteering in the United States predated the pandemic. Last year, The Washington Post reported that volunteerism in the United States has faced a “slow and steady decline for the past thirteen years,” according to data from the Census Bureau and from groups that track volunteerism.

The Generosity Crisis

“The United States is facing a generosity crisis,” writes Dr. Nathan Dietz, the director of the Do Good Research Institute at the University of Maryland, in a study co-authored by Dr. Robert Grimm, “Understanding Generosity: A Look at What Influences Volunteering and Giving in the United States.” In the study, Dr. Dietz and Dr. Grimm note that in 2021, the volunteer rate—defined as “the percentage of adults who do unpaid work through or for an organization”—experienced its largest decline since the U.S. government began collecting data on volunteering in 2001.

Charitable donations dropped in the wake of the February 2020 economic downturn and the all-time-high unemployment rate in April of that year, according to another report, “The Giving Environment: Understanding Pre-Pandemic Trends in Charitable Giving,” published by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Covid restrictions

and caution also caused a downturn in volunteer rates, but according to these reports, the decline cannot be blamed entirely on the pandemic. In fact, the number of volunteers, from post-graduates who do a year of service to weekly soup kitchen volunteers, has been declining steadily since the early 2010s.

Educational attainment “is the single strongest predictor of volunteering,” report Mr. Dietz and Mr. Grimm. The greater one’s educational level, the more likely a person is to volunteer. In an interview with *America*, Mr. Dietz explained that while increased job opportunities or societal pressures are among the reasons people seek out higher education, many have altruistic reasons, too. “People who enter college these days are placing a higher premium on going to college because they want to learn how to help other people [more effectively]—actually more than they have in any time in the past 50 years,” he said, citing surveys of college freshmen.

My friend Jen’s post-grad volunteer work and her career goals are aligned. She works as a paralegal at Make the Road New York, and she plans on attending law school or pursuing social work following her year of service. “I knew my degree was not going to expire,” said Jen, “it would still be there and I could still use it to help others.”

“Seventy-five percent of our fellows go on to graduate school,” said Ms. Balanda, the director of Amate House. They “tend to go into social services as well.” She cited medical school and law school as typical routes for the fellows because of the types of volunteer placements they are stationed in.

Caroline Dahl, an Amate Fellow in the 2023-24 cohort, explained that her undergraduate studies at Centre College in Danville, Ky., prompted her interest in a year of service.

“My education inspired and prepared me through a combination of educational and immersive experiences I engaged in during college,” Ms. Dahl said. “I felt further time in service to, and in solidarity with, those directly affected by poverty, homelessness and other social issues would be good for me. That’s where Amate came in.”

Ultimately, economists have trouble identifying any single reason why people donate time to charitable causes. That is because the “drive to volunteer,” as Mr. Deitz explains it, comes down to three primary factors based on the individual: intrinsic motivation, self-image and social esteem. Individuals volunteer because they feel good about themselves when they volunteer, and social norms and public expectations can encourage prosocial behavior.

But for those post-grads who volunteer within the Catholic Volunteer Network’s programs, there often is



The United States is facing a generosity crisis.

another reason, outside of the realm of economics. Many in the post-graduate volunteer world describe a spiritual draw to a year of service and feel “a call to serve.”

Understanding the Call to Serve

But the call to serve may be tempered for some by the inability to afford it. While there are more young adults with college degrees compared with the mid-2000s, the rates of giving and volunteering among college-educated young adults have declined. In fact, the debt that is incurred to pay for a college education can make a volunteer year a financial impossibility for many who might otherwise be willing.

The cost of education grows more expensive yearly, with a 180 percent increase, after inflation, in the cost of four-year, full-time college tuition over the past 40 years, according to the Student Loan Debt Statistics Report by the Education Data Initiative. The average federal student loan debt balance is \$37,718.

“If people are facing obstacles or being discouraged from service, it’s not because they don’t feel like it’s important or that they do not want to do it,” said Mr. Dietz. “Because college is so expensive, you need to go into debt to earn your degree. And when you’re done, you pretty much have no choice; you need to pay those bills. So you need to look for a high-paying job.”

Sullivan Mielle, a volunteer with Mercy Volunteer Corps in Savannah, Ga., understands that pressure well. A year of service “is not what I was brought up being told about,” she said. “Society says to go to college, get a good-paying job, get married, buy a house and have a family. But that never settled well with me.” Ms. Mielle described her student loans and societal pressure as things that could have deterred her call to serve. Her family was hesitant when she decided to take on a year of service. “They want me to be successful.... They know I have student loans, and that I could be using this year to save money.”

My friend Jen told me she asked similar questions before her year of service: “It became a question of ‘Can I afford to press pause on [earning] money for a year?’” She said to herself before deciding: “In a year, will I be okay

with whatever money I have left? Yes. Then let’s do it.” She now is relying on personal savings as well as scholarships from J.V.C. and Boston College that are designed to assist students whose financial situation may inhibit them from doing a year of service.

Many of the Catholic Volunteer Network’s programs help volunteers understand if they qualify for student loan deferment, forbearance or income-driven repayment plans. But the uncertainty of those deferral plans holds many prospective student volunteers back.

Student debt is not the only factor in decreasing applications. In the application process for the service programs, directors and recruitment officers have seen a common thread in the questions and hesitations from those who ultimately choose not to join their volunteer programs. “Young people are highly anxious about the state of the world, about the economy, about the earth, about Black lives,” said Marian Uba, the director of Mercy Volunteer Corps. “And I think it’s just creating this analysis paralysis. It could be that [potential volunteers say,] ‘Let’s get out and try to fix it.’ But they don’t see volunteerism as an avenue to that.”

Mr. Deitz’s research suggests that because of the strain the pandemic has put on the mental health of millions of individuals, there has been a decline among young volunteers. As he explained, “People feel depleted by all their responsibilities, and they just don’t have anything left in the tank to help other people, and [they feel] that they can’t make a positive difference.”

A lack of awareness of many programs may also be at play. Many of the Catholic Volunteer Network’s member organizations rely heavily on the word-of-mouth testimony of fellow volunteers as a recruitment technique. Because fewer former volunteers have hands-on experience following the pandemic, fewer people are hearing about the volunteer opportunities.

In addition, during the pandemic, many college students were not exposed to the typical career fairs and service opportunities that might have sparked an interest in these long-term volunteer programs.

Many students “were more withdrawn [during the pandemic] and they didn’t have the extracurricular programs that normally would lead a student to us,” said Ms. Uba of the Mercy Volunteer Corps. In addition, because students could not fully engage with leadership opportunities on campuses through clubs and organizations, the students who would traditionally apply may have lacked the confidence to apply, said Ms. Uba. “They’re the characteristics we’re looking for when we recruit for our programs: leadership ability, and taking advantage of opportunities to grow within the college or university that they’re serving.”



Jen Lozano, a 2023-24 Jesuit Volunteer, stands outside her service placement at Make the Road in New York City.

Although many students feel a spiritual call to serve, the institutional connection of many Catholic service programs may also serve as a deterrent to some young people. “Gen Z seems to be more distrustful of institutions, so participating in something that’s affiliated with the Catholic Church might be something that they are reluctant to do,” said Jeannie Balanda, director of Amate House. According to the report “The State of Religion and Young People 2023,” by the Springtide Research Institute, a survey of over 4,000 young people ages 13 to 25 found that 72 percent of young people were wary of organized religion, with 45 percent of young people trusting organized religion only somewhat, and 27 percent saying they had no trust in it at all.

Mr. Roa also speculated that Gen Z has a tendency to focus on results. They want to see change in real time, he said, something that can be difficult in volunteer organizations working to battle structural injustices. “I do think this generation of young adults are deeply committed to impact,” said Mr. Roa. “They need to see the change they deserve while they are living through a world that can adjust quickly and can produce impact quickly, which is awesome. However, J.V.C. requires the slow work of formation.”

This “slow work of formation” is at the heart of the service organizations involved in the Catholic Volunteer Network and is one major factor that separates these programs

from secular ones. This formation is what Father Morris’s mission of being “ruined for life” was working toward, Mr. Roa said. “We are inviting [volunteers] to say, ‘Hey, don’t worry about impact, worry about investment, worry about committing to your community, and the investment and the rewards will be reaped down the line.’”

Reimagining Recruitment and Program Structure

The vast majority of applicants to full-time volunteer programs are recent college graduates. But reaching an audience at a sufficient number of colleges and universities around the country can be costly—with no guaranteed return. Traveling to college fairs, printing pamphlets and hosting information sessions can be expensive, and the cost may be prohibitive, especially for smaller, lesser-known service organizations with fewer institutional connections.

Ms. Flores takes all of these factors into consideration when advising the C.V.N.’s 77 member programs on recruitment strategies. “How do we make it so that the volunteer landscape and missionary landscape doesn’t feel like we’re all recruiting and ‘fighting’ (some people use that language at our conferences) over volunteers?”

For the smaller organizations, the Catholic Volunteer Network partners with their administrators to sponsor a single booth at some of the larger college recruitment fairs. “That way we had a bunch of different programs there and



The 2023-24 cohort of Amate House fellows in Chicago

programs that could send a rep,” said Ms. Flores.

“Programs depend on volunteers, so there is a level of competition,” she said, adding that they are continuing to try “to find creative ways to go about getting more people.”

Ms. Flores cited the Loretto Justice Fellowship, formerly the Loretto Volunteer Program, as an organization that has reimagined its mission. It moved from offering a nationwide, yearlong service program for post-graduate volunteers to offering a part-time program for social work and pre-law students at the University of Texas El Paso. The former volunteer program had 14 volunteers in five cities in their 2019-20 cohort, but in March 2020, each of those community houses closed and the Loretto Volunteer Program underwent a structural and financial transformation.

“Instead of providing housing, a stipend and health insurance,” said Annie Rosenkranz, the director of the Loretto Justice Fellowship, “we pay our volunteers the living wage in El Paso”—\$14 per hour in the program’s pilot year. The Loretto Justice Fellowship had 25 students apply to fill five spots in the inaugural cohort of the 2023-24 pilot year, and the program hopes to fill seven spots in the next.

Others are offering new forms of service. Mercy Volunteer Corps initiated a new, short-term volunteer option,

with the hopes of drawing more volunteers who cannot commit to a full year of service. “It might be attractive for people who are trying to figure out what they want to do with their life for a couple of months,” said Ms. Uba. M.V.C. has launched programs that offer six- to eight-week service opportunities that focus on ecojustice in Vermont and immigration in Texas.

It is too early to say how effective these new recruitment strategies and volunteer opportunities will be, but Ms. Flores retains a positive outlook: “It’s so sad that [our programs] are closing, there is a piece of grief that comes with that. But it’s also necessary, I think, for the growth and expansion of this narrative, telling a new story of who the church will become in the years to come.”

Christine Lenahan is a Joseph A. O’Hare, S.J., fellow at America.

AMERICA'S RETREAT DIRECTORY

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

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

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

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

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



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The Jesuit Spiritual Center at Milford, located outside Cincinnati, Ohio sits on 37 beautiful park-like acres along a scenic river, providing a tranquil place for prayer and renewal. In the Ignatian tradition, weekend retreats and 8-day personally directed retreats are offered year-round. Visit www.jesuitspiritualcenter.com for our complete retreat listing.



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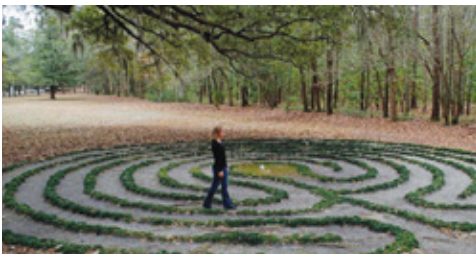
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The Eucharist
is not just the
summit of
Christian life, but
its source as well.

THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

How to avoid reducing the
Eucharist to mere spectacle

By Michael F. Olson

OSV News photo/Bob Roller

The call for Eucharistic revival we have heard in the church is particularly important to priests. Why? Because we are responsible for presiding and offering the Mass, which priests do *in persona Christi*. This configuration to Christ as head and shepherd of the church that takes place at our ordination as priests comes to its full expression gradually through our devoted pastoral ministry and care for God's people. This expression is centered upon Christ present in the sacrifice and offering of the Eucharist that then is extended through the other sacraments and apostolic works that we celebrate and administer to the faithful.

The development and fruition of this configuration is entirely owed to grace. We read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that "the Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life.' All sacraments, ministries, and works of the apostolate are bound up and oriented to the Eucharist" (No. 1324).

I would offer, however, that we currently might be placing a disproportionate emphasis upon the Eucharist as the *summit* of Christian life through our intense focus on the form of liturgical celebration and its accompanying emotional consolation—one strictly identified with interior healing—while overlooking or even ignoring the Eucharist offered and received in its sacrificial character as the *source* of Christian life.

This disproportionate emphasis soon leads us to value the Mass only as the object of our desires and priorities, to

the point that its celebration becomes something functional that we do for ourselves, to which we invite God. When we approach Mass this way, we begin to subordinate the Eucharist into an instrument for evangelization, instead of the other way around. We confuse ends and means, cause and effect; the Eucharist soon becomes reduced to spectacle, whether at Mass or in procession and adoration.

The contemporary challenge of evangelization for the church should be at the heart of our pastoral ministry and mission as priests, configured to Christ as head and shepherd of the church, entrusted by him to offer the sacred mysteries and preach his Gospel. In praying the Mass, we are reminded that Christ is not the *instrument* of evangelization: We are his instruments. Similarly, we are not the primary *agents* of evangelization: Christ is.

When we priests offer the elements of bread and wine, unworthy as we are to do so, we also place our entire selves upon the altar as an oblation. To place our entire selves upon the altar means that we surrender to the might and love of God the three powers of our soul: memory, understanding and will. Do we remember what Christ has done for us in forgiving us, healing us and teaching us? Do we remember what he has done for us in calling us to follow him as priests? Do we understand the mystery of our vocation: that he must increase and that we must decrease? Are we willing to be conformed to his real example in every aspect of our human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral

formation, so that people might encounter Christ the Good Shepherd when they encounter us?

At Mass, the priest enters the mystery of the incarnate Word through his preaching and presiding by giving his human voice and hands to the divine work of the eternal sacrifice of the Mass for the sanctification and salvation of the people of God. The sacrifice of Christ that we offer as priests is not a type of conditional giving. It requires on our part the entire (albeit imperfect) offering of ourselves in *persona Christi* to be presented and sacrificed to God. While we offer bread and wine, we also offer ourselves in *persona Christi* as one with the offering.

“This is my body; this is my blood.” If we hold back, if we compromise, if we choose to withhold our powers and capacities and keep them to ourselves in a refusal to be converted, then what we do not offer to God does not remain our own but is stolen and corrupted by the evil one. Similarly, when we make worship a personal project—which is the temptation when we disproportionately emphasize the Eucharist as the summit of the Christian life while ignoring the Eucharist as the source of Christian life—we forget the necessary truth that worship is the human and divine response to an exclusively divine initiative.

Worship cannot start with us, because we cannot give God what he deserves without the aid of God’s grace. We need a mediator, who is Jesus Christ the priest, who is at once fully human and divine. God initiates worship. It is this sacred mediation that Christ shares with his priests, which, if it is truly to benefit the priest, requires ongoing conversion by the priest to imitate the mysteries that he celebrates.

Our choice is stark and clear. It is a choice between conversion to Christ or inversion of Christ. Inversion of Christ brands Christ as a mascot for our own agenda instead of offering our entire selves to him for his purposes and priorities at the altar of sacrifice. If we invert Christ, the Eucharist soon becomes mistreated as a spectacle instead of being embraced as a mystery to be received that requires our full and active response and participation.

As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in “Deus Caritas Est”:

We have come to believe in God’s love: in these words, the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction [No. 1].

Perhaps we would be more effective at evangelization if instead of inviting a non-Catholic or an inactive Catholic

friend to Mass, we would instead invite these friends into our lives. From that invitation, flowing from the perfect sacrifice of Christ offered and received at Mass, people might be introduced to the Mass, not as something to be observed, analyzed and criticized but rather as that which is to be encountered as the living fount of true Christian life and virtue.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus instructed his disciples to listen to the scribes and Pharisees but not to do as they do. Why not? Because “they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen” (Mt 23:3-4).

For us as priests and bishops to be spared the same admonition that Jesus gives to his disciples about the scribes and Pharisees, we must speak, act and love as Jesus does, as he shares with us his seat upon the throne of humble greatness, the cross. As the church in the United States answers the call to Eucharistic revival, priests and bishops cannot overlook the necessity for sacramental confession in their own lives. Their own conversion will be impeded if they are not the first penitents to become compassionate and generous confessors.

For the Eucharistic revival to be effective in the life of the church in the United States, it cannot simply be a large event and a spectacle. The revival must be an occasion for conversion, initiated and sustained by God’s grace. This requires that we recognize the Eucharist as both the *source* and *summit* of our lives. We run the risk of underestimating the heights of the summit of Christian life if we underestimate the depths of Christian life; we also need to keep in our thoughts the pierced side of Christ, from which water and blood flowed forth on the cross at Calvary.

One of the forms of dismissal from Mass in the current translation of the Roman Missal requires the deacon or priest to direct the gathered assembly to “go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your lives.” It is this glory—made manifest through ministry, witness and discipleship in the daily lives of faithful Catholics—that serves as a chief conduit for evangelization. These are the most ordinary means by which people are introduced to the Lord Jesus Christ, whose gift of the Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives as Christians.

The Most Reverend Michael F. Olson is the bishop of the Diocese of Fort Worth, Tex.

How I Fell in Love With Ireland

My trip was short but introduced me to faithful people, powerful history and a beautiful land

By James Martin

I'm half Irish—and proud of it. But I have never been what some of my friends call “professionally Irish,” the kind of Irish-American who knows all the verses of “The Fields of Athenry,” knows the best pub in their ancestral village and can recite the names of all the counties by heart. My dad was Irish (his grandfather emigrated from County Wexford), but he wore it lightly, except on St. Patrick's Day, when my Sicilian-heritage mother would make spaghetti and meatballs while he feigned outrage, which my sister and I found hilarious.

The first time I visited Ireland was in 2018 for the Vatican's World Meeting of Families in Dublin, to speak about L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics. I was nervous about the talk (this was the first time that anyone had ever spoken about the topic at the event, and protests were expected), but all went well and my hosts were exceedingly welcoming. I was even able to visit a few Jesuit churches and communities. But it was a brief trip and I didn't get to know Dublin, much less Ireland. Where was Wexford, anyway?

During lunch at a Jesuit community on that trip, an older Jesuit came to my table and asked four short questions. “Are you James Martin?” Yes, I am. “Is it true that you're half Irish?” Yes. “And is it true that you've never been to Ireland before?” Yes, it is. “I have one final question.” He paused and said, “How can that *be*?”

He had a point. So I leapt at the chance to return this January, when the Irish Bishops' Conference invited me to speak with them about ministry to L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics as part of their annual gathering. It was a great honor and a wonderful way to invite reflection on a ministry that has become an important part of my life. Best of all, it was to be in Knock, the site of a Marian shrine.

Only a few months before, I presided at the funer-

al Mass of the Irish-born mother of a friend, and the cantor sang a haunting hymn. “Golden Rose, Queen of Ireland,/ All our cares and troubles cease/ As we lay our hearts before you,/ Lady of Knock, our Queen of Peace,” went the chorus. Afterward I asked a Jesuit friend who was concelebrating, “What was that hymn?” He said, “I'm surprised you don't know it! It's ‘Lady of Knock.’ You hear it at a lot of Irish funerals.” I was eager to explore this devotion on my trip.

St. Brigid's Return

I took an overnight flight from New York to Dublin and was picked up by a pastoral associate of the bishop of Kildare, Denis Nulty, at whose residence I was soon deposited. Still bleary-eyed (I can never sleep on planes), I was joined by Bishop Nulty, the pastoral associate and another priest for a traditional, massive, heart-stopping Irish breakfast of eggs, rashers (bacon), sausage, hash browns, tomatoes, toast, jam, blood pudding and, of course, tea. Owing to my hunger, it was one of the best breakfasts I've ever had.

Bishop Nulty suggested that perhaps I'd like to have a “lie-down,” since he was due to preside at the Sunday Mass to mark 1,500 years since the death of St. Brigid, during which they would be installing her relics at the local church named for her. As an aside, he mentioned that Brigid had lived in Kildare. “Wait,” I said. “It's her 1,500th anniversary and you're celebrating a Mass with her relics at her church in Kildare?”

“That's it!” he said. I couldn't believe my good fortune. Of course I would come.

In her native Ireland, St. Brigid has been enjoying a moment, revered by Catholics as an abbess and a disciple of St. Patrick. Others celebrate a pagan Celtic goddess named Brigid (after whom the saint may have been named) as a symbol of feminine wisdom. Last year Ireland began honoring Brigid with a public holiday (her feast day is Feb. 1). As a sign of her popularity with all sorts of people, the Irish government issued a stamp for her 1,500th anniversary with two designs: one with the St. Brigid's cross made from reeds and one with a flame, marking the pagan winter festival of Imbolc, which is also celebrated on Feb. 1.

If one still had any doubt about her appeal, the crowds at the church, (named, of course, St. Brigid of Kildare) proved otherwise. It was packed—a rarity in a country now secularized and still reeling from the sexual abuse scandal and the story of the Magdalene laundries, and where in some places the percentage of





A statue of St. Patrick is seen on Croagh Patrick, the mountain where, according to tradition, St. Patrick spent 40 days in prayer and fasting.

All photos by James Martin, S.J.

weekly Mass attendance among Catholics hovers in the teens.

In his homily, Bishop Nulty talked about Brigid as a sign of hospitality against the backdrop of resistance to migrants in Ireland these days: “It’s too simple to install a relic and leave it at that; she would call us to do much more!” Afterward, dozens of people stood in line in the chilly church to venerate her relics. I was texting photos from the event to a friend back home whose daughter is named Brigid. She texted back, “I’m showing this to my Brigid right now!”

After a quick return to the bishop’s residence, we set off for Knock. The road there wound through smaller towns, with colorful one-story buildings lining the streets. Honestly, I felt like an idiot for not knowing the names of the towns we were passing through or sometimes even how to pronounce them. But Bishop Nulty was not only an excellent driver (on often narrow streets) but a terrific tour guide and one of the nicest people you could meet. We arrived in Knock about two hours later, around dinnertime, to warm greetings from the bishops, both active and retired.

From the parking lot of the Knock House Hotel (by the way, a lovely, quiet place with excellent food) you could see the large, round Basilica of Our Lady of Knock, Queen of Ireland, lit up, a brilliant white against a pitch-black sky. I instantly started humming the hymn from the funeral, which would not leave my head for the next few days. Early the next morning, before our first meeting with the bishops, I hurried over to pray in the basilica and the Chapel of the Apparitions.

Our Lady of Knock

Do you know the story of the apparitions at Knock? In 1879, in the wake of the Irish famine, Mary, St. Joseph, St. John the Evangelist and a lamb atop an altar before a cross appeared before the back wall of the parish church in the small town of Knock. The apparition, which took place in the pouring rain and pitch dark, was witnessed by at least 15 people. One woman tried to embrace the figure of Mary but said that her hands simply passed through the figure, who was hovering above the ground two feet away from the church wall. Since then, Knock has been an important place of pilgrimage. Rare for such apparitions, the



I'm sure there are some grumpy people in Ireland, but I never met them.

centerpiece was not Mary but the Lamb of God; equally rare, none of the figures said anything.

Today the church wall is enclosed by the sleekly modern Chapel of the Apparitions. Praying there, meditating on the mysterious vision and asking for help, was the spiritual highlight of my time in Ireland. I wondered if any of my Irish ancestors had prayed to her.

On the way back to the hotel that morning, I stopped in at the grand basilica. Sometimes large churches designed for huge crowds (as at some shrines) can feel functional or even industrial. But the basilica in Knock, first opened in 1976 and recently renovated, is warm and inviting and prayerful, even though it can seat 10,000 people.

The sanctuary of the church is circular, and its aisles extend like spokes from the center. In some of the supporting walls are openings made to resemble a window from a medieval abbey or priory in one of the four provinces of Ireland: Connacht, Leinster, Munster and Ulster. Monumental statues of Irish saints are stationed around the nave. Outside, the pillars holding up the low, overhanging porch are constructed from stones from each of the country's Catholic dioceses. Inside, the massive, brilliantly colored "Apparition Mural," which depicts the visions, was installed just a few years ago. Made in Italy, it is one of the largest mosaics of its kind in Europe. That morning I was alone in the church and able to simply enjoy a beautiful place to pray.

Croagh Patrick

The afternoon of the first day, after I had completed the first of two morning talks—one on Jesus' outreach to those on the margins, and the second on ministry to L.G.B.T.Q. people—Bishop Nulty asked if I'd like to see Croagh Patrick. I'm embarrassed to say that the only reason I recognized the name was because, the day before I left, a colleague at America Media asked if I was going to climb it. "Crow what?" I said.

Croagh Patrick (meaning St. Patrick's hill, or stack) is a mountain in County Mayo where, by tradition, St. Pat-



This year, a relic of St. Brigid was installed at the church bearing her name in County Kildare to mark the 1,500th anniversary of her death.

The Apparition Chapel at Knock Shrine encloses the original gable wall of the parish church where the apparition first appeared.



rick spent 40 days in prayer and fasting. Often called the “Reek” (another word for *rick* or *stack*), it is not far from Knock. On the last Sunday of July thousands of pilgrims, many barefoot, climb the 2,507-foot mountain as an act of penance and prayer. At the top of the mountain is an oratory dedicated to the saint (a church has been here since the fifth century). We only had time to go a short way up the mountain to a modest stone statue of St. Patrick, where Bishop Nulty and I stopped to pray and look out over the beautiful bay, which leads to the Atlantic, near the towns of Murrisk and Westport. At the foot of the mountain is the haunting National Famine Memorial, a “coffin ship” pointing to America, by the Irish artist John Bevan. Our trip, on a clear sunny day, was moving and beautiful.

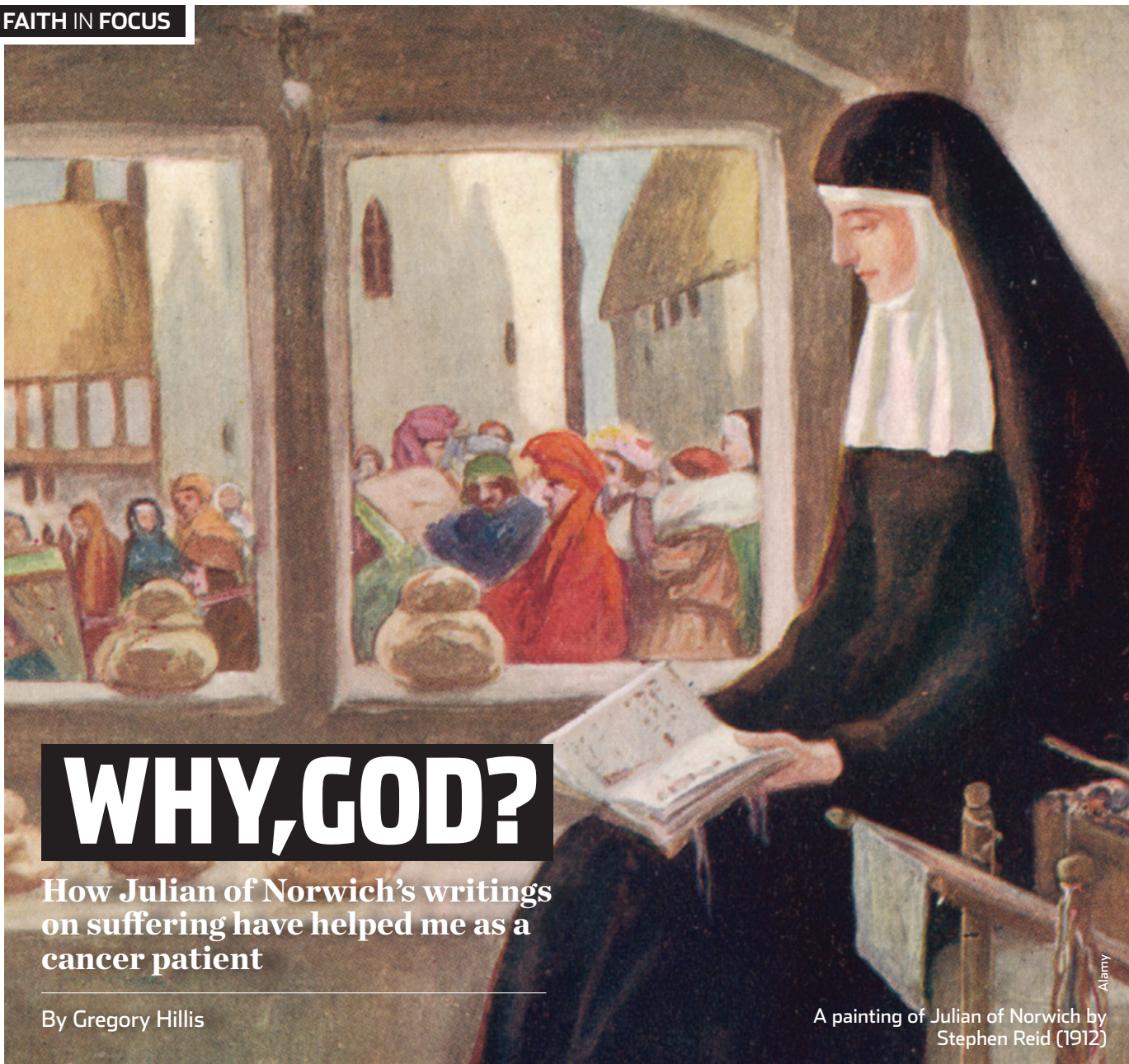
At tea, some of the bishops told me about another penitential spot: Loch Dergh, an island that is also associated with St. Patrick. Legend has it that Christ showed Patrick a vision of purgatory there. Perhaps more historically reliable is the claim that a monastery existed on the island from as early as the fifth century. Today, it is a popular place for some serious penitential practices, including a three-day fast (or near fast) that begins the night before a pilgrimage begins and ends the night pilgrims return home. All the bishops seem to have made this trip and told me that

it is still popular with students about to face exams.

The most memorable feature of my three-day trip, besides the Knock Shrine, was the people. I’m sure there are some grumpy people in Ireland, but I never met them. The bishops could not have been more welcoming or warm, and every single person I met was friendly. Before I left the country on Wednesday morning, driven back to Dublin Airport by a cheerful priest and accompanied by an avuncular archbishop, I realized that I had fallen in love with Ireland.

In the gift shop at the Knock Shrine, I met a woman who encouraged me to try my hand at making some St. Brigid crosses out of “rush,” or reeds, which were laid out on a table. The crosses are, she said, easy to make. But I was in a rush and demurred. Nonetheless, she cheerfully asked if I had been to my great-grandparents’ birthplace, which I had mentioned to her. No, I said, so I guess I’ll have to come back. “Of *course* you will!” she said.

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



WHY, GOD?

How Julian of Norwich's writings on suffering have helped me as a cancer patient

By Gregory Hillis

A painting of Julian of Norwich by Stephen Reid (1912)

Since you have given Greg a share in your own passion, help him to find hope in suffering, for you are Lord forever and ever.

These were words I didn't expect to hear from my priest, certainly not words I expected to hear while lying in a hospital bed. Only two days before, I had felt fine as I gave out candy at Halloween—and ate candy that my kids procured from our neighbors. Now I was in the hospital receiving the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, having been diagnosed with cancer of the bile ducts shortly after I came to the emergency room complaining of sudden pain in my right chest and shoulder.

It is jarring to sit in a fluorescent-lit room and be told you have cancer. I instantly ceased being a healthy middle-aged person who had never really suffered to being someone whose entire existence was now identified and threatened by a disease we all fear. But it was similarly jarring to hear a priest pray that I might “find hope in suffering,” like having cancer was something I could or should acknowledge as a good thing.

As a theology professor, I have gone through the arguments about theodicy in the classroom, the question of how we can reconcile the reality of a God who is love and who is omnipotent with the existence of evil and suffering among God's creation. But I have done so in a necessarily

dispassionate manner, as someone who hasn't actually experienced much in the way of genuine suffering.

The cancer diagnosis changed that. Two days after I had been admitted to the hospital for various tests and scans to determine the extent of the disease, my 12-year-old asked me a question that showed he was trying to wrestle with the reality of suffering himself, the suffering of having a father with a potentially terminal diagnosis: "Is it okay for me to be angry at God about this?" Anger in these circumstances is a normal response, an entirely appropriate response, and I told him so. His dad had cancer and he had a sense that God was somehow to blame.

Asking Why of God

This is a refrain I have heard frequently as a professor of theology. When I taught an introductory theology course at my previous institution, I would have students write spiritual autobiographies that outlined how they came to believe what they did about God and why. Many, probably most, of my students no longer practiced the religion in which they had been raised, and while the reasons for their non-affiliation were complex, how my students portrayed God was consistent. To their minds, and I think this conception of God is widespread, God causes everything—or at least allows bad things to occur. So when bad things happen to us or others, God is to blame.

It's no wonder they were angry and disillusioned.

Divine Love

A friend asked if he could bring anything to me at the hospital from my office, and I asked him to bring my copy of Julian of Norwich's *Showings*. Julian, a 14th-century mystic who lived as an anchoress in solitude in Norwich, England, is one of my favorite figures, and her book—sometimes called *Revelations of Divine Love*—is one I've read repeatedly. Although I couldn't put my finger on it at the time, I knew there was something in her book that I needed to read.

In this book, Julian recounts 16 mystical revelations she received on May 13, 1373, while sick in bed with what others thought was a mortal illness. After contemplating the meaning of these revelations over a 15-year period, Julian recorded in detail the meaning of what she saw.

As she explained in the final pages of *Showings*, the revelations were entirely about divine love. As God responded when asked about the meaning of what she saw, "Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love."

Throughout the book, Julian expounds on the experiences she had of God's tender and all-encompassing love for us. God's love for us is so "high, surpassing, [and] im-

measurable" that we cannot comprehend it. And yet this love for us is so intimate that Julian equates it with the love of a mother for her child, and famously calls God "our Mother in nature, our Mother in grace."

But this experience of the profundity of God's love led Julian to ask God the question that has plagued humanity for centuries: If God is love and loves us so deeply, then why do evil and suffering exist?

Julian received two responses to her question, the first being that God will perform a deed on the last day of the world by which God "will make all things well." At another point, Jesus tells her, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." Precisely what this means is much debated, but Julian appears to understand by this phrase that God will ultimately overcome all evil, all sin and all suffering in such a way that humanity can and will experience the profound love of God.

It is clear that Julian took great comfort in these words. Indeed, she wrote that God uttered them because "God wishes us to be enclosed in rest and in peace."

I will admit there is something comforting about the notion that God will ultimately make all things right, but it was not this that compelled me to ask for Julian of Norwich's book in the hospital. For all the comfort that this idea brings, it doesn't take into account those of us who are suffering *now*. What about those who, like me, have a potentially terminal diagnosis and are undergoing grueling treatment? What about those suffering in mind, body and spirit, whether it be through illness, oppression, poverty, war or the seemingly countless other ways people suffer? What is God doing *now*?

The Power of the Cross

Julian provides another response that I find more compelling, both in terms of what it tells me about God and what it tells me about how God relates to my suffering. Julian's first few revelations, her first few mystical experiences, are of Jesus suffering on the cross. Julian occasionally goes into graphic detail as she watches Jesus die. She describes seeing blood streaming down Jesus' head, "hot and flowing freely and copiously," as well as seeing Jesus receive so many blows from the scourging that "everything seemed to be blood." She recounts watching his skin wilt and change color as it took upon itself "a shriveled image of death," about seeing the nail wounds expand and grow wide because of the weight of Jesus' body, and about the ways in which his skin was scraped and broken into fragments by his wounds.

Julian intends her graphic account of Christ's suffering to underline the depth of God's love for us. She learned through these early revelations that God "is our



I knew there was something in Julian of Norwich's book that I needed to read.

clothing, who wraps and unfolds us for love, embraces us and shelters us, surrounds us for his life, which is so tender that he may never desert us." God's love is so profound that there is simply no way for us to comprehend it. It is so great that God refused to stand aloof from our suffering, watching it dispassionately from a distance. Instead, God became human and suffered, and in so doing, "he saw and he sorrowed for every [person's] sorrow, desolation and anguish."

And here is the kicker: Although he rose again and can no longer suffer, Julian still writes, "he suffers with us" even now when we suffer.

Suffering and Transcendence

There are strands within Catholicism that focus primary attention on the transcendence of God, God's unchangeability and otherness. Even when celebrating the Eucharist, the focus is on the divinity of Jesus, such that the humility of the Incarnation seems sometimes to be forgotten as an inconvenient truth.

Divine transcendence is absolutely central to Christian theology, and it is central to our belief, particularly in light of the Incarnation. For it is when we understand the otherness of God that we can comprehend the depth of love on display in the person of Jesus Christ. Only when we affirm God's impassibility—the idea that God cannot, in God's divinity, experience suffering—can we have some comprehension of what it means to affirm that God experienced suffering in the person of Jesus Christ.

For understandable reasons, theologians have wanted to put all kinds of qualifiers on the idea of God's suffering in Jesus. St. Cyril of Alexandria, for example, stated that in Jesus Christ, God "suffered impassibly"; that is, without really suffering. I have to admit that I'm not all that interested in those qualifiers these days, and neither was Julian of Norwich. As a cancer patient, I'm more interested in a God who sympathizes with my sufferings, not from a distance, but who can accompany me as one who intimately knows what it means to suffer. I take most comfort right now in a

God who suffered profoundly in Jesus Christ and, in some mysterious way, now suffers alongside me and alongside all who suffer.

In his memoir, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer*, the poet Christian Wiman wrote about coming to faith in the wake of a cancer diagnosis. There he wrote:

I am a Christian because of that moment on the cross when Jesus, drinking the very dregs of human bitterness, cries out, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* (I know, I know: he was quoting the Psalms, and who quotes a poem when being tortured. The words aren't the point. The point is that he felt human destitution to its absolute degree; the point is that God is *with us*, not beyond us, in suffering.)

This makes all kinds of sense to me in my current context. I may not have a theologically satisfying answer to why suffering occurs (in fact, I've yet to encounter a truly satisfying answer), but the Incarnation teaches us that God enters into our suffering and accompanies us as a parent accompanies and suffers alongside a suffering child. And it is this message that I communicated to my 12-year-old.

Anger with God in the face of suffering makes sense if we think of God as the cause of that suffering or if we perceive God to look upon our suffering with a kindly, but impotent, benevolence. But if we come to understand that God suffers alongside us as one who truly knows what it means to suffer, our anger morphs into love and our suffering mysteriously becomes a means of transformation.

Gregory Hillis is the executive director of the Aquinas Center of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Ga. He is the author of *Man of Dialogue: Thomas Merton's Catholic Vision*, published by Liturgical Press.

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Revisiting D.E.I.

Catholic social teaching can provide a stronger framework for antiracism programs

By Christopher J. Devron

During my graduate work at Harvard Divinity School, I took a course that transformed my understanding of the U.S. civil rights movement. In his class “The Ethical and Religious Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” the moral theologian Preston N. Williams introduced me to a radically different way of thinking about the religious and intellectual underpinnings of the movement that fought for the full constitutional rights for those who suffered under Jim Crow. We read *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman, Reinhold Niebuhr, King’s speeches and sermons, the Gospels, the Exodus story, and the Old Testament prophets.

A product of public schools and a political science major in college, I came to the class with a secular and legal perspective on King’s agenda, his vision and the history of the civil rights movement. I believed that those involved in the movement were fundamentally motivated by a desire to extend legal rights to those who were denied them. I had not understood the movement’s religious and moral foundation—a foundation fueled by a profound belief in God-given human dignity. I was unaware of its commitment to solidarity, community and love—even love of one’s enemies—and its holistic and theological understanding of social justice. I did not appreciate the depth of hypocrisy King exposed in his “Letter From Birmingham Jail,” in which he condemned his fellow Christian ministers for ignoring racism in their midst. I certainly wasn’t familiar

with the religious rituals of the mass demonstrations, in which protesters gathered in churches to sing, pray and listen to sermons before their nonviolent actions and marches.

Even if working for the movement didn’t require religiously motivated beliefs in the values of community, dignity and justice, they nonetheless provided King, Bayard Rustin and many of their fellow activists with a profound moral and ethical foundation that served as a powerful impetus for their efforts. As Rustin wrote toward the end of his life: “My activism did not spring from being black. Rather, it is rooted fundamentally in my Quaker upbringing and the values instilled in me by the grandparents who reared me. Those values were based on the concept of a single human family and the belief that all members of that family are equal.”

It is impossible to say whether the civil rights movement and its vanguard of true believers would have succeeded in their struggle against Jim Crow without the Christian ethical and moral foundation that undergirded them. But one can imagine that if they had had to rely solely on procedural and legal arguments, the outcome might not have been the same.

Challenges to D.E.I.

My radically transformed understanding of the civil rights movement’s ethical and moral foundations has influenced my thinking about the debates that currently en-

gulf the concept of diversity, equity and inclusion (D.E.I.) in educational circles—especially as I consider my role as a leader at Regis High School, a Jesuit secondary school in New York City.

As I wrote in *America* in June 2021, many Black alumni at Catholic and Jesuit high schools communicated profound disappointment about their student experience in the wake of George Floyd’s murder and the racial reckoning that followed it. Their claims and stories were heartbreaking and led to the unmistakable impression that many of our former students of color did not experience a strong sense of belonging during their high school years. Perhaps influenced by anti-Black racist attitudes in society at large or simply content with the status quo, school leaders often did not move fast enough to recruit qualified students, faculty, staff and board members from underrepresented communities. They also did not listen enough or perhaps at all to students from underrepresented backgrounds so as to create equal opportunities for them. They did not carefully analyze the data about the academic achievement gap and respond with meaningful interventions that could help promote the conditions for student success for those from

historically marginalized groups.

In response to these failures, Catholic and Jesuit schools, like many other nonprofit organizations, mimicked the private sector and moved expeditiously to create new D.E.I. positions, hire staff, and identify and implement D.E.I. goals. Today, just a few years later, the D.E.I. framework itself is under fire across many sectors. It has become a frequent and favorite target of conservative voices in the culture wars. It now stands accused of embodying a double standard because of the failure of some of its strongest proponents to forcefully denounce antisemitic protests, conduct and hate speech on elite university campuses. Increasingly, voices on the left have also questioned the efficacy of D.E.I. Speaking of the workplace and writing from a progressive perspective, the consultant Aida Mariam Davis offers this critique:

Though well-intentioned, D.E.I. has not delivered. This is not by happenstance, but rather by design. The D.E.I. industrial complex came into existence as a preemptive defense to avoid litigation by members of protected classes, particularly



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The core values of ‘belonging, dignity and justice’ can guide our school communities.

under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. For decades, the vast majority of Fortune 500 companies have implemented D.E.I. trainings, or other initiatives for their employees. The fact remains that these efforts have had minimal impact on the reduction of bias and have not yielded much in the way of qualitative behaviour change or other desired changes.

It is ironic that Davis links the creation of D.E.I. to the very legislative battle that King’s movement fought so hard to win. A major difference between the period of the civil rights movement and the decades that followed is the fading influence of a common moral and ethical foundation that could speak persuasively in an increasingly cacophonous and crowded marketplace of ideas and values. The rise of secularization and the diminishing role of religion as a guiding moral force that could galvanize a community toward action are also significant factors—unless, of course, the community already possesses such a foundation from which it can mine strong moral and ethical values and principles.

Which brings me back to the communities that I have served over the past several decades: Jesuit secondary schools. Many school leaders have not intentionally aligned their D.E.I. efforts with a Catholic moral framework or based them on a religious foundation. Rather, these efforts seem curiously siloed, and D.E.I. directors often operate separately from the Christian service directors and campus ministers who are charged with implementing a school’s religious mission.

The rationale school leaders typically use for their D.E.I. programs and policies is devoid of the image of King’s “beloved community”; the principle of the *imago Dei* and its insistence on centering human dignity as a moral imperative; and resources from Scripture and church teaching on the demands of justice. It feels as if we have traded the

“thick” description of our moral tradition and its resources for a “thin” vision of procedural and legal goals that are inherently soulless. This thin vision is increasingly failing as a motivating force to effectively change our practices and actions, much less transform our hearts and minds. In relying solely on a fragile and defensive D.E.I. framework, educators are failing to leverage the most powerful tool we possess to raise awareness about our personal biases, examine our consciences, and oppose structural and social evils such as racism, classism, ableism, misogyny, antisemitism and other injustices that exist within and outside of our communities.

The challenges of D.E.I. raise important questions. If you lead a Catholic Jesuit school community that shares many of the same moral and religious principles as King’s movement—a movement that had enough power to take down Jim Crow—would you embrace a standard D.E.I. framework? Or would you identify a different one that can respond more effectively to the concerns of those who have been historically marginalized while promoting relationships and communities based on mutual love, respect and care?

A Framework of Belonging, Dignity and Justice

Finding its origin in “Rerum Novarum,” Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical on capital and labor, Catholic social teaching gives schools and school leaders all the moral and ethical resources they need in an alternative and improved framework. In an article in **America** in 1998, William Byron, S.J., wrote that Catholic social teaching is “underappreciated, undercommunicated and not sufficiently understood.” Byron suggests this is because “its principles are not...clearly articulated and conveniently condensed.” Despite the efforts of theologians and pastoral ministers, it can feel, even today in Catholic educational circles, as if Catholic social teaching continues to be the “best kept secret” of our moral tradition. But within Catholic social teaching we can locate the principles and core values of belonging, dignity and justice, which together articulate a condensed framework and an ethical vision that can guide our school communities.

Christians profess faith in a Trinity of divine and equal persons united in perfect and mutual love as one God while each retaining a unique identity. This diverse trinitarian community—this one God—moves out in love to all creation. In God’s loving embrace, each human person is offered a place in the life and heart of the Trinity itself and is personally invited and empowered with grace to create diverse communities of solidarity that reflect a trinitarian experience and vision. The Second Vatican Council teaches,

“God did not create man as a solitary... Companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential” (“Gaudium et Spes,” No. 12).

In the Gospels and throughout the Scriptures we see what the value of radical belonging—what Greg Boyle, S.J., calls kinship—truly looks like. Jesus’ mission inaugurates a beloved community characterized by nonviolence—i.e., the reign of God—in which there are no outcasts and no division between insiders and outsiders. Each person Jesus encounters, regardless of background or identity, meets in him a sense of belonging and care. The parable of the good Samaritan; Jesus’ striking and countercultural treatment of women; the Pentecost story, in which the Holy Spirit establishes the church within a multicultural and multilingual gathering; St. Paul’s controversial insistence that Greeks and Gentiles are worthy of faith, grace and salvation—each of these stories offers a profound example of the value of community, diversity and belonging.

Catholic social teaching rests on the conviction that every person is created in the image of God and therefore endowed with dignity. As Byron writes:

the principle of human dignity forms the bedrock principle of Catholic social teaching. Every person—regardless of race, sex, age, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, employment or economic status, health, intelligence, achievement or any other differentiating characteristic—is worthy of respect. It is not what you do or what you have that gives you a claim on respect; it is simply being human that establishes your dignity. Given that dignity, the human person is, in the Catholic view, never a means, always an end.

This principle also appears in the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, which call us “to walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice.”

Justice, the third core value of Catholic social teaching’s moral framework, is distinguished from charity and, at the same time, is its corollary. Service to our neighbor and sharing our resources with the “least of our brothers and sisters” (Mt 25) exemplify the virtue of charity. But the church teaches that “Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated” and that working for justice is a constitutive element of our Catholic faith (“Justice in the World,” 1971 Synod of Bishops). Therefore, the demands of this faith are not satisfied solely through practic-

ing direct service to the poor and acts of charity, or even through avoiding personal sin.

Catholic social teaching affirms that evils like racism exist in systems or structures, as opposed to consisting merely of private acts of bigotry committed by individuals. This affirmation requires us to recognize and question the social realities and structural dynamics that perpetuate these inequalities. As the apostolic preferences state, “the path we seek to follow with the poor is one that promotes social justice and the change of economic, political, and social structures that generate injustice. This path is a necessary dimension of the reconciliation of individuals, peoples, and their cultures with one another, with nature, and with God.”

In adopting Catholic social teaching’s core values of “belonging, dignity and justice” and using them as a framework, Catholic and Jesuit school leaders can offer their students and communities a clear moral foundation and a compelling ethical vision for their programs and policies. They can also motivate and inspire their schools to become shining examples in the world of education and beacons of the beloved community. And they will deliver anew on the promise and the purpose of St. Ignatius Loyola and his companions in approving the Society of Jesus’ founding of schools in the first place: to create through their alumni a vanguard within society that will advance the common good.

In this way, we can hope that someday a future Bayard Rustin—a prophetic changemaker, a drum major for justice and righteousness—will be able to say: “My activism is rooted fundamentally in my Catholic faith, my Jesuit education, and the values of belonging, dignity and justice they instilled in me. They were based on the concept of a single human family and the belief that all members of that family are equal.”

Christopher J. Devron, S.J., is the president of Regis High School in New York City.



Edward P. Jones and the Ghosts of James Joyce

By Joshua Hren

In literature, the anxiety of influence always dies hard, but a beautiful wake—worthy of the Irish—sometimes follows its passing. Once we confess how much we owe to an inheritance we did nothing to earn, we can celebrate with greater lucidity and appreciation that which is newly invented.

In the years after Edward P. Jones garnered acclaim for his debut short story collection *Lost in the City*, he buried James Joyce's *Dubliners* under an appreciative but faded pall—a “(nearly) nothing to see here” nod. In 1993, when Jones's collection was a wee year old, an interviewer alleged: “Some reports discuss the fact that you were inspired by Joyce's *Dubliners* when you wrote *Lost in the City*, but you exchanged Dublin for Washington D.C., and you interchanged Irish denizens for African-Americans.” Jones confesses to having “read *Dubliners* when I was a sophomore

at Holy Cross and I liked it very much,” but he insists that “*Lost in the City* is not patterned after Joyce's book.” No, “None of them are patterned on stories in *Dubliners*.”

By 2012, Jones's circumspection eased. At the College of the Holy Cross, he studied under Maurice Geracht, who, Jones wrote in *Lost in the City*, “pointed across the ocean to the east where dwelled Joyce's *Dubliners*.” Jones admitted that year to “admiring Joyce's bold and evident love of his Dublin people; I knew all the people in that book because they weren't doing anything different than what black people in Washington, D.C., were doing.”

The grandness of *Dubliners* mingled with what Jones called “the ignorance of the whites at Holy Cross” in *Lost in the City*. Jones turned on the stove of his “secret room”—the Washington, D.C., of his soul—and he began to percolate the



Wyatt Counts via AP

Edward P. Jones is rarely read as a “Catholic writer,” perhaps because after he won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2004, he stated, “I’m not a religious man at all.”

stories that would become *Lost in the City*. *Dubliners* “planted a molecular seed of envy in me, made me later want to follow Joyce and do the same for Washington and its real people.” He even arranged the stories so that, like *Dubliners*, they begin with younger characters; as the collection unfolds, increasingly older characters inhabit the stories.

Edward P. Jones is rarely read as a “Catholic writer,” perhaps because shortly after he won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for his novel *The Known World* in 2004, he stated, “I’m not a religious man at all.” But when *Lost in the City* was named a finalist for the National Book Award, Jones declared, “I am Catholic.” It shows. Like the haunted Dublin of his forebear James Joyce, Jones’s Washington, D.C., is visited by spiritual powers left off the tourist maps. Both Joyce’s and Jones’s stories move us through tragic epiphanies that leave the soul, pained by paralysis, on the threshold of conversion. Both ask us to peel our eyes open with pity for their people.

Jones’s own aesthetic could be encapsulated in Joyce’s praise of art that strengthens our “sense of mercy for all creatures who live, die, and yield to their illusions.” The clearest connection across the collections is between Joyce’s “The Dead” and Jones’s “Gospel,” both of which have crucial scenes that feature falling snow.

Joyce and ‘The Dead’

The end of “The Dead” features some of the most famous, most sublime sentences in modern English literature. Gabriel Conroy, a middle-aged husband given to self-absorption and rationalized snobbery, is impatient to exit a dinner party, but something is detaining his wife, Gretta, from leaving. This con of a king (Conroy) champions the hostess’s charity as a “princely failing”—unwittingly providing us with a portrait of himself.


At last, Gabriel finds a woman “standing near the top

of the first flight, in the shadow also,” listening to a singer who, in spite of bad congestion, is beautifully belting out “The Lass of Aughrim.” Startled, he sees that the woman “was his wife.... There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were the symbol of something.” Caught up in the romance and in her beauty, he dubs her “Distant Music,” setting off a series of ironic reversals that propel him toward a final snowfall anticipated by the snowflakes stuck to his galoshes from the first page:

...snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

Before this communion with the dead and after his romanticized vision of his wife, Gabriel followed Gretta to their hotel room thrilled by a “keen pang of lust,” only to find her falling to the bed in tears. The catharsis leads her to confess a secret she had kept from her husband until now: Her childhood sweetheart Michael Furey, doomed to die young from consumption, threw a stone at her window and sang, sickly, “The Lass of Aughrim” before, she says, “he died for me”—for the chill he catches while standing outside singing results in his death. Her romantic interpretation of Michael’s passing is a knife in the portrait of “Distant Music” Gabriel was caught up contemplating.

Gabriel receives an epiphany that reveals to him the core of his being as a “well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own clownish lusts.” Michael (named, like her husband, after an archangel) may arrive, like the furies of Greek tragedy, to take revenge on the protagonist’s sins, but even if Gretta’s image of the dead 17-year-old may be mingled with a sentimentality that protects her against her husband’s spiritual and emotional impotence, the ghost has something holy about him: “He had never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love.”



Jones's Washington, D.C., is visited by spiritual powers left off the tourist maps.

How can we help but connect Michael's death with Christ's maxim of martyrdom: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13)? As "generous tears" wet his eyes, Gabriel sees in the "form of a young man standing under a dripping tree" a goad to love, reversing his familiar insecurity and self-justifying paralysis.

Jones and 'Gospel'

From the start, Jones's "Gospel" is a clear grandchild of Joyce's "The Dead," but the genes are rearranged with such freshness that it is far from being a derivative pastiche. The story emerges as a perfect embodiment of the paradox insisted upon by T.S. Eliot: "We shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." Preserving the central power of music as seen in "The Dead," Jones writes the story from the viewpoint of a Black gospel singer named Vivian L. Slater, whose husband, Ralph, is so handsome and apparently healthy that no one suspects he is dying of cancer.

Vivian and her fellow "Gospelteers" perform their typical Sunday singing duties with an interior spiritlessness akin to Gabriel's—never mind the applause they summon. On the way home from church, her friend Diane stops the car and makes tracks across "an inch or so of snow," which has fallen all across D.C. A man in a car—her own Michael Furey?—appears to be waiting. We remember, suddenly, that earlier that morning Diane "gave her husband a passionate kiss on the lips, a kiss that Vivian thought was too much for a Sunday morning at the kitchen table," and as Diane leans in "the kiss came in the dark, the two figures silhouetted against the dull light in the area behind the car."

When Diane returns, Vivian greets her with fury. But she later recollects the way the mystery man took off his hat in deference to Diane. No, "she had not seen a man take off his hat in that old-fashioned way in a long, long time," and the gesture sets off a nostalgic dream of childhood and the

bygone years of her earlier marriages when men—like the snow that fell universally on the just and the unjust of the city—tipped their hats to a woman's beauty. Obsessively, "she could still see him," and though she first disapproves of her friend's mystery man, Vivian's fascination snags and she wonders: "How much more grandness, beyond the gesture with the hat, there was to him?" One of the elders is not so sentimental. She says Diane "sure is playin with fire."

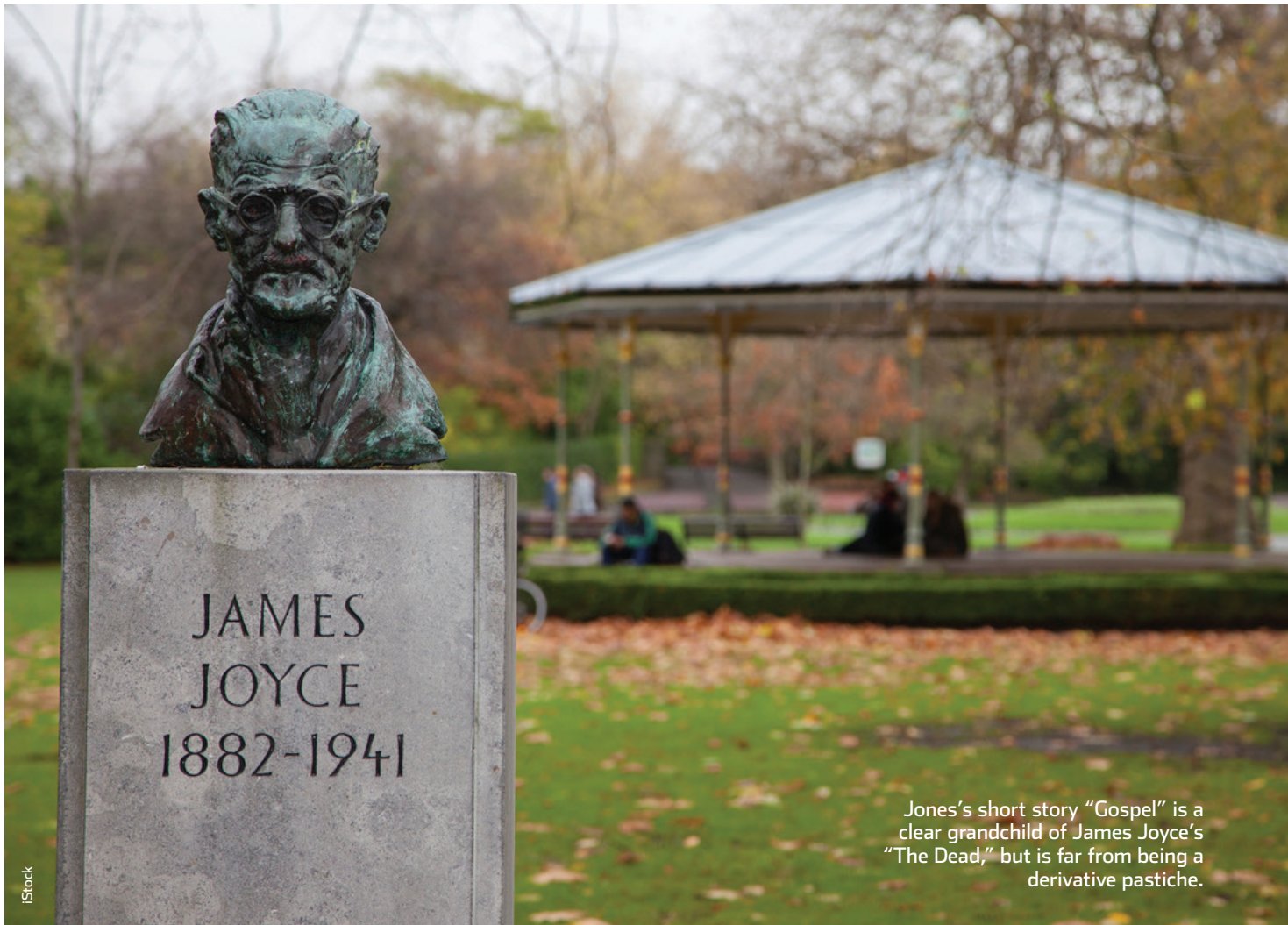
"She could see him," we hear in near repetition, but now the "him" is her sick husband Ralph, who she'll find "asleep in the same chair she had left him in that morning." Likely he "peed on himself again," and likely he is drunk, his empty bottles dirtying the TV table. Gone, suddenly, is the opening image of a husband who warned her that snow might complicate the weather, the "man who loved profoundly," who "had not stopped looking at her since she came into the room" and who had brought her fresh ice and drinks as she relished in her ritual Sunday bath.

Unlike "The Dead," with its epiphany of empathy wherein Gabriel's soul finds communion with his romanticized rival Michael under snow faintly falling over imagined symbols of torture, "Gospel" announces the fate that awaits the one who will not die to self:

The snow now covered the windows of her car and all she could make out were shadows moving about. She could hear voices, but she could not understand any of what people said, as if all sound were being filtered by the snow and turned into garble.

Her idle car grows colder "and colder still, and at first she did not notice, and then when she did, she thought it was the general condition of the whole world, owing to the snow, and that there was not very much she could do about it." She had been trying to muster the gumption to "go home to Ralph," but her final resignation is filled with a cold-hearted reticence.

When Gabriel's lust for Gretta is cut short and he reaches into the regions of the dead, he can only vaguely "apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence." But unlike Vivian, whose soul dwells in garbled misunderstanding, Gabriel—guided by "generous tears"—closes the distance between him and his fellow human host. The snow in "Gospel" covers all in confusion instead of communion. Vivian's nostalgic pangs do not serve as a salutary sentimental education. Instead, the chasm between her high illusions and her handsome, dying husband increases. He looks so good that folks cannot fathom that when she returns, "he would not be able to remember what he had seen throughout the day."



Jones's short story "Gospel" is a clear grandchild of James Joyce's "The Dead," but is far from being a derivative pastiche.


The distance between Vivian and the dead past also increases: Her recollection of the bygone men only reinforces how irretrievable they are, even as the very memory of their "grandness" condemns all contemporary men. (Sadly, she is not entirely wrong: One of the story's recurrent characters, Counsel, *is* a womanizer bereft of the manners she so misses.)

The distance between the gospel music and the women who sing it is greater than anything else in the story, which begins ironically with Vivian in the bathtub "as the House of the Solitary Savior Baptist Church burned to the ground." Vivian's name—meaning "life," from the Latin *vivus*—bespeaks her hypocrisy. Certain that she has "outgrown a storefront like the House," accustomed to bigger checks from marquee churches padded with money, Vivian comes back to sing there every Sunday because, back in the day, she received her first break from its founder, Reverend Saunders.

Although "Gospel" announces the storefront church fire in its opening sentence, when the event is narrated

midway through the story the actual decimation is anti-climactic because Vivian is indifferent to its ruins. The contrast between the soulful and much-applauded Gospelteers' songs and the "dead men's bones" (Mt 23:27-28) they carry within is clearly tied to the burned-down church. Solitary, without a savior, Vivian bears away the epiphanies Jones lets the readers witness, revealing by negation the good news that links the living and the dead.

Joshua Hren is the founder of *Wiseblood Books* and co-founder of a master's degree program in creative writing at the University of St. Thomas in Houston. His books include *How to Read (and Write) Like a Catholic*, *Contemplative Realism*, and the upcoming *Blue Walls Falling Down*.

A portrait of Mary Beth Keane, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a black blazer, smiling slightly. She is positioned in the center of the page, with her arms crossed. The background is dark and out of focus.

For Mary Beth Keane, learning the catechism seemed to provoke a greater sense of questioning and skepticism.

Mary Beth Keane Finds Grace in the ‘Achingly Ordinary’

By Mike Mastromatteo

AP Photo/Chris Pizzello

A 2009 *Christian Science Monitor* review by Marjorie Kehe of Mary Beth Keane’s debut novel, *The Walking People*, said the young novelist “creates characters as believable as they are quietly decent and wise. Never heavy-handed, she allows us to journey with them as they slowly accumulate bits of life knowledge: Whether you stay or leave, everything changes. Even when you find a better place, some around you will still long to be elsewhere.” It was insightful praise for a then-emerging writer who has since staked her claim as a creator of subtle but poignant storytelling.

Following *The Walking People*, Keane released *Fever* (2013), a fictional portrayal of “Typhoid Mary” Mallon, the cook born in late-19th-century Ireland whose unwitting dissemination of the typhoid bacteria created havoc in Gilded Age New York. She followed up *Fever* with *Ask Again, Yes* (2019), another tale of Irish-born immigrants staking out new lives in New York and its environs. The book furthered Keane’s reputation as an engaging new voice. Early in her writing career, she was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for fiction writing; she has also received citations from the National Book Foundation, PEN America and the Hemingway Society.

Growing Up Catholic

In a recent interview with *America*, Keane shared about the experiences and observations that have influenced her contemporary literary imagination.

Keane attended a Catholic high school in New Jersey, not far from the Irish-expatriate enclave of Pearl River, N.Y., and later attended Barnard College and the University of Virginia, where she earned a master of fine arts degree. Being of Irish heritage, raised Catholic and a woman have played key roles in shaping her worldview. While the expatriate Irish experience is important, so too is the Catholic sensibility that many Irish writers from James Joyce to Pete Hamill could never quite abandon.

For Keane, learning the catechism seemed to provoke a greater sense of questioning and skepticism. “I do think going to Catholic school, learning church doctrine, attending weekly Mass did turn me into a person who questioned things,” Keane said. “I think it helped me become a good critical thinker. ‘Why do we believe this or that?’ I resented the notion of blind faith, the idea that asking questions is a bad thing and not to be encouraged. I also bucked against the idea that our Catholic version of who and what God is was

the right one. Why would it be? I resented having to listen quietly to priests and never question anything they said.”

“Unlike nuns, who always seemed to be one of us, priests were sort of held above, and I could never make my peace with that. I remember being quite young when it struck me that Father So-and-So was just a regular person, with all the flaws and foibles regular people have, and didn’t have the ear of God any more than I did. Why do they alone get to make law?”

Keane suggests the resentment surrounding “the worship of priests” intensified as she learned more about church history and practices. “The Irish part, or at least what I think of as the Irish part, came in the questioning. I do think there’s something Irish in bucking authority, in saying to myself, ‘F this,’ and walking away. If I want a relationship with God, I don’t need this guy in the middle, navigating. I have a direct line in my heart.”

That same attitude is inherited by some of Keane’s characters. In *The Walking People*, for example, Keane describes Irish immigrants looking for housing in mid-1950s New York:

Michael told the owner of the building that we are his sisters otherwise he wouldn’t have let us live there with Michael. The man is a German Catholic in the old style and he likes Irish because all Irish are good Catholics. We didn’t tell him how long it’s been since we’ve seen the inside of a church, but Johanna pointed out that seeing the inside of a church has nothing to do with it when you consider how many miserable cranks never miss a Sunday. Take Lucy Sullivan for example how we’ve long said she wouldn’t give a person the steam of her piss but is up there with her tongue out for communion every morning.

Despite her early struggles with Catholicism, Keane grew to appreciate the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who operated her local high school. “They were good Catholics in that they taught us the tenets of the church but also allowed respectful discussion.” Nonetheless, Keane could not escape a growing disenchantment with what might be termed the institutional characteristics of the Catholic Church. The issue came to a head in late 2018, shortly before the release of *Ask Again, Yes*.

Addressing the Scandal

Keane was invited to prepare an essay for Vogue magazine outlining her views on the church in the wake of the scandal caused by abusive priests and the cover-up still reverberat-

ing around the universal church. For her, the scandal and the bishops’ poor efforts to take responsibility—and in turn work for atonement and reconciliation with victims—was the last straw.

“I’ve thought back on other dark periods of Catholicism’s 2,000-year history and feel a jolt when I realize the most shameful may be right now, during my lifetime,” Keane wrote in Vogue. “I simply can’t set aside the fact that priests just like the ones at the parishes near my home, men who were held in the highest regard by their communities, were grooming little children, and that their bosses’ bosses’ bosses likely knew it—and, worse, helped them hide it.”

Though her young sons were baptized in the church and had received the sacraments of first Communion and reconciliation, by that point Keane had finally had enough. “It’s simply no longer possible to be a casual Catholic in the way I used to imagine myself,” she added in Vogue. “To be in this church, even in a small way, is to be party to abuse. I can’t solve the church’s problems, obviously. But I can do the one thing within my power: leave and take my children with me. Maybe if more leave, and those pews (and coffers) are finally empty, then the Church will do a more sincere self-examination.”

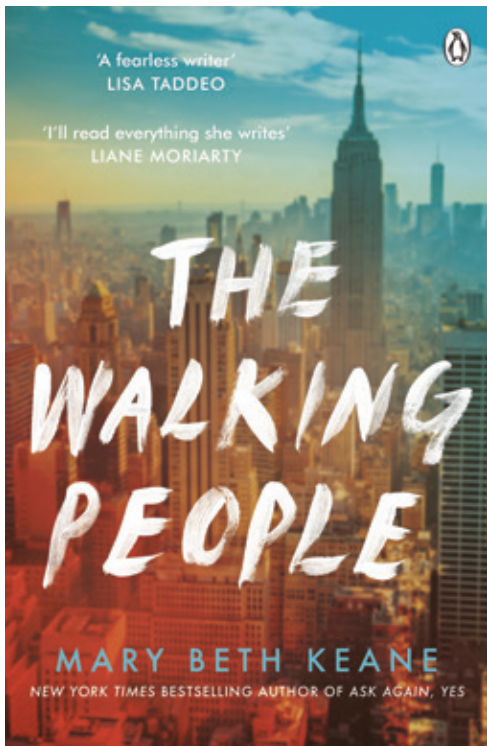
Portraits of Grief and Hope

Would she have continued as a semi-committed or casual Catholic if the priestly abuse scandal had never occurred? Probably not, Keane said. There were other church teachings and practices that would have eventually taken their toll.

Despite this attitude, Keane emphasizes that she has friends and family who still go to Mass regularly and who take comfort from their faith. “I’m not trying to convert anyone to my way of thinking,” she said. “When I wrote that article for Vogue, it was partly because no one was talking about it, and if there were Catholics out there who felt like I did, then they should know they’re not alone. And that worked. I heard from so many people from all over the world.”

As for her writing, Keane eschews the belief that novelists must deliver a message in their work. “I know people read and write for a variety of reasons,” she said. “For myself, when I read, I really just want a portrait of something—of grief, of hope, of a particular life, whatever it might be—and I don’t set out hoping to learn anything, nor, when I write, to accomplish anything. I’m not interested in teaching anything, and I don’t read to find lessons.”

She writes, she said, “to describe a feeling that might be so complicated that it’s difficult to sum up into a single word or vision, and so it becomes a story. And in reading



Mary Beth Keane's debut novel, *The Walking People* (2009), and her follow-up, *Fever* (2013), established her reputation as an engaging new voice.

that story, in really feeling it in their bones, a reader might feel less alone."

The novel she is working on now begins in the west of Ireland, then unfolds in Montana and eventually New York City. While based on her own father's experiences, it will almost certainly feature characters similar to the protagonists from her first four books. "[My father] had his dreams and ambitions, of course, but I don't think he ever lost track of how lucky he was to have the things a lot of people fail to appreciate—a stable life, food in the fridge, love, healthy children," Keane said. "At the end of his life, as he was declining, he suddenly voiced a few regrets. I guess my new novel is about that, though I'm still finding it. 'Why are we here? Why do we mean so much to each other? Why do we carry things in the privacy of our hearts for so long, a whole life?'"

In reviewing Keane's latest release, *The Half Moon*, for *The New York Times* this past April, the author Janice Y. K. Lee noted another distinguishing element of Keane's four-novel body of work. Keane, she noted, "manages to find the extraordinary grace in our aching ordinary world."

Keane's "achingly ordinary world" is aptly described in the lives and actions of her striving and often contradictory characters. "When I think of characters as they become more fully fleshed out, I like to think most about their contradictions, the differences between what they say and what they actually do, or how they might act against their

own best interests, and why—if it's possible to know why," Keane says. "I think the most interesting lies are the ones we tell ourselves and I think finding out what that lie might be for each reader is a real driver."

"So many problems in this world are real, of course, yet I think so many problems I encounter in people are of our own making," she says. "I'm susceptible to this too, of course, we all are—but when I step back and really think about it and count my many blessings, everything really does look very different."

Contradiction, uncertainty, wonder and fleeting glimpses of simple good fortune also seem to bubble up in the writer's creative imagination. "It's possible that I'm arguing again and again that life is hard, cruel, unfair, but also very beautiful, and [that] we are lucky to be here," Keane suggested. "I'm not a believer, but that's something I try to make myself understand. One tiny difference of timing or change and I would not exist. And why do we mean so much to each other when our expiration date comes up awfully fast, compared to the history of the world?"

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

CALLING THE COLORS

By Angela Townsend

People give me bookmarks, but I prefer paint swatches.
They are free and ubiquitous, earnest and ridiculous.

I hide under a pink baseball cap in Home Depot,
rose-colored criminal pinching paper strips.

I tell myself I favor the orphans anyway,
burlesque magentas and yammering egg yolks
fit for no wall but the chambers of a child's heart.

I shake hands with the writers whose wordplay lives here,
legends whose novels hide in notebooks.

The world should honor their names,
because they call blue "Hope's Horizon"
and beige "A Dream of More."

Pink could be cotton candy,
but some lover has named it "Glad Heart."

The customer asks for brown,
not knowing she needs "Soft Animal."

The palest lavender is "Guardian Angel,"
a paint chip writer's revelation.

I wonder if she rode the color wheel
all the way to the six-winged seraphs
and heard what no book can contain.

Angela Townsend's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Dappled Things*, *Fathom Magazine* and *The Razor*, among other publications.

CLASSIFIEDS
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Alleluia: A Grace to Hold Life's Interruptions

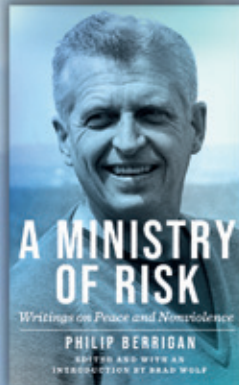
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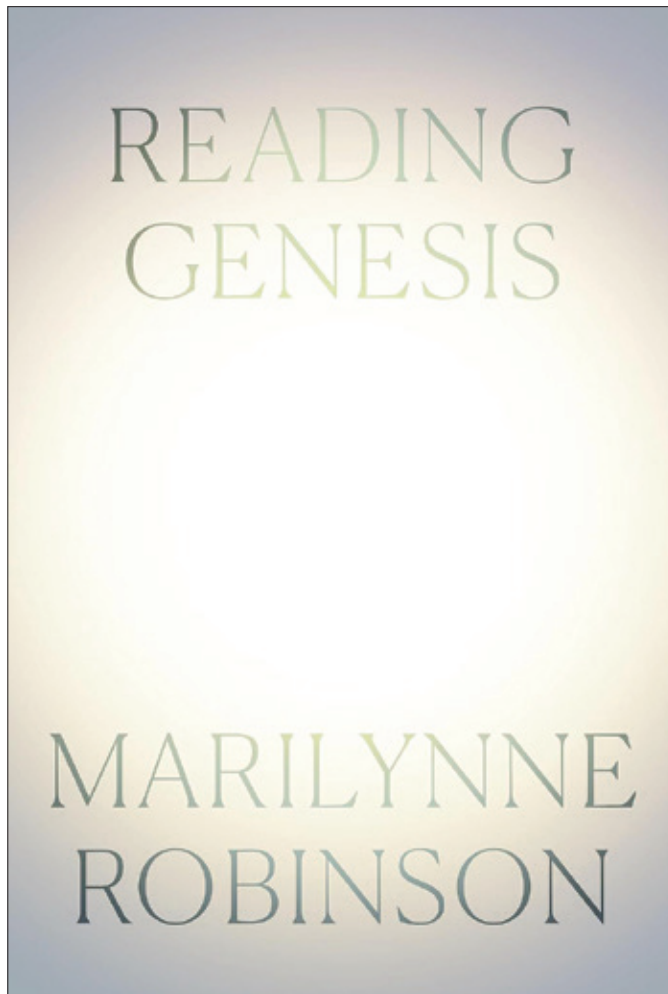
JAMES MARTIN, SJ
AUTHOR OF *JESUS: A PILGRIMAGE*



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS



ABRAHAM AND FAMILY



Farrar, Straus and Giroux / 352p \$29

Considering how often the Bible is characterized as a great work of literature, it is rarely read like one. Few would suggest a piecemeal approach to *Crime and Punishment*, jumping from chapter to chapter with little regard to the whole, but a book like Genesis is often studied only as a collection of isolated episodes.

In her latest book, *Reading Genesis*, Marilynne Robinson argues that such a reading is “so deeply ingrained that the larger structures of the text, its strategies of characterization, its arguments, can be completely overlooked.”

Perhaps Robinson’s concern about missing the forest for the trees explains why she decided not to divide her exploration of Genesis into chapters, sections or even subheadings. It is a bold choice for a book so dense, but at the very least, it forces readers to take in the Scripture as a grand narrative, one that resists easy fragmentation. The result is a meandering journey through Genesis guided by one of the foremost Christian humanists of our age. Robinson’s sharp literary eye and clear, lyrical prose shine new

light on some of our oldest stories.

Robinson argues that the early chapters of Genesis tell the story in detail of “a series of...declensions that permit the anomaly” of how human beings, flawed and foolish as we are, are so beloved and exalted by God.

Through her comparison of the Hebrew creation and flood narratives with the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Robinson illustrates how distinct the Hebrew story’s insistence upon the goodness of God and creation would have been among other Near East peoples. Her comparative-literature approach reminds modern Western audiences just how radical the notion really is that there is one God who made all things good—and how much responsibility that bestows upon human beings. Since the Hebrews believed all things were made good, human agency is the root of toil, suffering and even natural disaster, as in the story of the flood.

Adam and Eve’s sin leads God to curse the ground but not humanity; our culpability affects the world but never denigrates our being, Robinson insists. She faces our faults dead-on, unflinching in her commitment to humanity: “That human beings were so central to Creation that it would be changed by them, albeit for the worst, is, whatever else, a kind of testament to who we are,” Robinson writes. Human beings are co-creators with God.

Because Robinson constantly jumps back and forth between episodes while drawing comparisons to other Near East literature, reading the first 80 or so pages of *Reading Genesis* can feel like wading through a “formless void” (Gen 1:2). The structure is sometimes circuitous and difficult to follow, but patient readers will find astute insights on the power and gravity of human agency, and even some hope. After all, our great power points to our divine origins. In her stirring prose, Robinson asks, “If we could step back from the dread we now stir in ourselves and look at all of this with some objectivity, would we not feel awe? Would we not feel struck by how absolutely unlike everything we are, excepting God Himself?”

But *Reading Genesis* is strongest when it turns to Robinson’s analysis of the lives of Abraham and his descendants. As a novelist, Robinson is most comfortable in the domestic, intimate complexities of human relationships, making her well-suited to tell the story of this remarkable family. As a result, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and the other men and women throughout Genesis are shown to be living, breathing human beings, flawed and complex, who nevertheless play major roles in providential history.

Although Robinson insists on a broad, thematic read of Genesis, she is ever-attentive to the sequence of the narrative in her analysis. For example, she sees Hagar and Ishmael’s exile in the desert and the binding of Isaac as par-



allel cases, told one after the other. They are commentaries on child sacrifice: two people exercising profound faith, entrusting their sons' lives to God's word, only for God to deliver them from harm's way.

This attention to structure invites sometimes startling revelations. She says, for instance, that Isaac's journey to find a wife and Jacob being cast out after stealing Esau's birthright frame Isaac's life to show his decline in fortune. But she takes this a step further to suggest that it also calls attention to Rebekah's unhappiness: "Though the text says that Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob, there is really no evidence that Rebekah loved anyone." And as she traces out Rebekah's life from Isaac's arrival to her pregnancy to her relationship with her sons, Robinson makes a strong case that this might be true, and even providential.

And so while Robinson explores the family feuds that exist throughout Genesis, her writing is attentive to God's presence even in the most silly, self-serving and confounding moments of the book. "The remarkable realism of the Bible, the voices it captures, the characterization it achieves, are products of an interest in the human that has no parallel in ancient literature." She treats all of Genesis's "domestic malaise" with deep reverence, because, after all, so does God.

Unfortunately, Robinson's vastly connective interpretive vision sometimes comes at the expense of accuracy. For example, early in the book she says that the boast of Lamech (Gen 4:23-24) closely mirrors his son Noah's drunken rage (Gen 9:18-29) in order to comment on humanity's tendency toward vengeance; it is a powerful insight. The only problem is that Lamech, the boastful descendent of Cain, is not Noah's father, but rather a distant cousin. Noah's father is also named Lamech, but he descends from Seth, not Cain.

So her conclusion, over 100 pages later, that "providence would act through the life of Cain to arrive at Noah," is less of a brilliant callback than a stuttering reminder of *Reading Genesis's* shortcomings. A more thorough investigation of Robinson's claims throughout the book would require a biblical scholar, or at least a bibliography. (At no point does she cite any external source, save the occasional, offhand reference to another book of the Bible. You wonder how she got away with it. You then remember that she wrote *Gilead*; Pulitzer Prize-winning novelists earn a certain editorial license that theologians lack.)

And yet, from her attention to the intimate, human reality at the heart of Genesis, we gain insight into this family affair that only a once-in-a-generation novelist like Robinson could provide. Noting that "at no point are the actors' motivations insufficient to account for events, and at no point are their actions out of character," Robinson

Robinson is strongest in her analysis of the lives of Abraham and his descendants.

concludes, "The story could, no doubt should, function as a theological proof that the earthly and the providential are separate things in theory only."

God's will is not dependent on us, but using the unique, fickle motivations of each of his co-creators, God is able to make something great. To anyone who wonders where God could be in such a broken world, *Reading Genesis* reminds us that this question has always plagued humanity, and God has always drawn near to us anyway. Robinson's book is an insightful exploration of "the ways in which the faithfulness of God is manifest in the world of fallen humankind." The stability of the covenant is not due to our worthiness, but to God's love for human beings.

In her 2004 novel, *Gilead*, Robinson's protagonist, the Congregationalist minister John Ames, reflects on how the theologian is never truly separate from the God about whom he or she writes: "I suppose Calvin's God was a Frenchman, just as mine is a Middle Westerner of New England extraction." In the same way, Marilynne Robinson's God is in love with humanity. In all our flaws and folly, power and glory, she insists, "Human beings are at the center of it all."

Delaney Coyne is a Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., fellow at *America*.

A RELIGIOUS AND LITERARY HIT PARADE



HarperOne / 384p \$33

Where are the great religious and spiritual leaders of yesterday—now that we really need them?

Has this question come up in your discussions with friends, family and colleagues? It certainly has in mine. We usually go on to lament that today there is no Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. or Dorothy Day or Albert Schweitzer or Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel to guide us. If only there were.

Perhaps it is a small consolation, but while we don't have these august figures anymore, we do have their writings, letters and speeches that continue to inspire and call us to action.

Quite remarkably, the writings of many of these inspirational figures—and these four in particular—were set down and released in book form by one man in the publishing industry: Eugene Exman. Exman is hardly a household name. Even his biographer, Stephen Prothero, admits that he had never heard of him when he first stumbled upon a storehouse of old books and papers at Exman's old house on Cape Cod.

Prothero, who recently retired as a professor at Boston University, is one of the freshest modern thinkers about American religion. In addition to his prodigious scholarship, he writes important popular books about religion, including the best-selling *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn't*.

Prothero spent several years poring through the Exman archive and, in this enriching book, *God the Bestseller*, takes the reader on a journey through the publisher's life and works. Exman ran the religious books department at Harper & Brothers (later Harper & Row) for over five decades, from 1928 to 1968. He published thousands of books, including hundreds of best sellers. In addition to King, Day, Schweitzer and Heschel, there were books by others so famous that (in religious circles) you don't even need to include first names: Huxley, Niebuhr, Teilhard de Chardin and Eliade, among many others.

To be sure, the life of a book editor is rarely grist for a book-length biography, but Exman was more than just an editor. Exman, Prothero argues, was an advocate for religion who helped shape the United States into what Prothero calls "a nation of seekers in which spiritual experimentation was something of a national sport, even for self-identified Christians and Jews." The spiritual books that Exman published—on a variety of Western faith traditions as well as on Hinduism, Zen Buddhism and even on the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous—had a lot to do with making us the religiously diverse and spiritually curious nation that we are.

Exman, Prothero writes, helped Americans move from "Protestantism to pluralism, from dogma to feeling, and from organized religion to the religion of experience."

God the Bestseller operates on two levels. One is a biography of Exman, who was born in 1900 on a farm in Ohio and died 75 years later at a hospital in Rhode Island. Prothero reviews Exman's publishing career and his mildly interesting spiritual journeys, including his experimentation with LSD and his failed efforts to establish a religious community with a group of like-minded seekers.

On another, more compelling level, the book is about Exman's interaction with a hit parade of the great religious leaders of the 20th century. Although many of those books are now legendary, getting the author to write the book—and meet a deadline—was anything but easy. And if you thought you suffered from writer's block, rest assured that you are not alone.

How did Exman get Day to write *The Long Loneliness*, her outstanding and enduring autobiography? Well, Prothero tells us, Day needed \$1,000 for a down payment for a farm on Staten Island for her Catholic Worker movement.

Exman dangled the check before her and she bit. He got a best seller and she got the farm.

In 1950, Exman embarked on a two-month journey to Africa with one goal in mind: to sign up Albert Schweitzer to write a book for Harper. As Prothero notes, history has been unkind to Schweitzer (few young people today know his name) but in his day, he was a living saint. He was on the cover of Time magazine, and Life declared him “the greatest man in the world.”

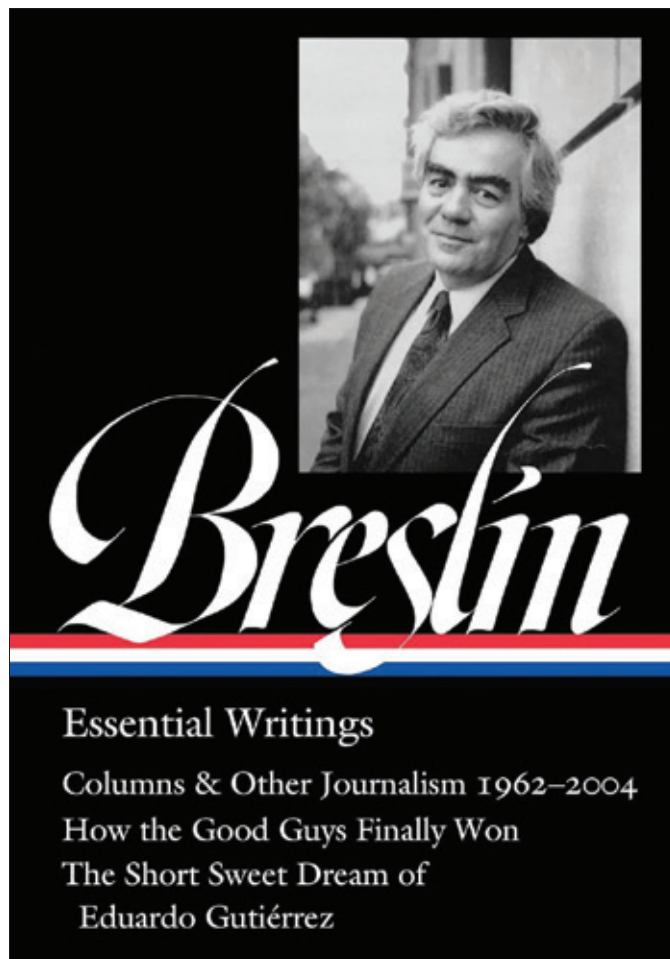
Exman was on his way to Schweitzer’s field hospital in Gabon to get him working on an autobiography. In the end, the book never materialized, but Exman did publish two books of essays by Schweitzer, *Music in the Life of Albert Schweitzer* (1951) and *The Problem of Peace in the World Today* (1954).

History has been much kinder to Dr. King. In 1957, Little Brown, Houghton Mifflin and other publishers were trying to get King to write a book about the Montgomery bus boycott. “Amid a flurry of letters,” Prothero writes, “Exman showed up at his doorstep.” King, who was just 28 at the time, signed with Harper and promised delivery in three months. When King didn’t meet the deadline, Exman got back on the train to Alabama to make sure King finished the book. Later that year, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* was published by Harper.

These are just a few of the wonderful stories we are treated to in *God the Bestseller*. Prothero gives us artful mini-biographies of these religious figures and shows how they all had one thing in common: Exman. When we return to the question of “where are they now”—when we really need them—we can open one of their books. And we can thank them for putting it all down and thank Eugene Exman for being the midwife to their creativity.

Ari L. Goldman, a professor of journalism at Columbia University, is the author of *The Search for God at Harvard*.

HEART OF THE CITY



Library of America / 734p \$40

After the death of “The French Connection” director William Friedkin last year, the author Jonathan Mahler recalled that Gene Hackman was reluctantly cast as Popeye Doyle in the film, and only after Jimmy Breslin (among others) was seriously considered for the iconic role.

That’s how big a deal “JB” was in 1970.

A decade earlier, Breslin was just another thirtysomething sports-writer, raising four kids on Long Island. He had managed to publish a book with Doubleday about a late 19th-century racehorse trainer. A fine life. Not exactly Hollywood.

Yet Breslin was on his way to becoming a national figure and would remain one for decades. The Queens native filed news copy from the days of Jackie Robinson through the re-election of Barack Obama and was often in the middle of current events, rather than their mere chronicler.

Some of Breslin’s best work has now been collected in the Library of America’s latest volume, judiciously edited by one of Breslin’s true heirs, The New York Times correspondent Dan Barry. *Essential Writings* includes dozens of newspaper columns and magazine articles from 1960 to 2004, as well as two complete nonfiction books. Excerpts from Breslin’s uneven but undeniably powerful novels *World*



Reverence for honest, intricate labor, for the daily grind, imbued Breslin's writing.

Without End, Amen (1973) and *Table Money* (1986) might have rounded out this volume nicely. Overall, though, Barry has curated a collection that is not only a treasure but also a thought-provoking ramble through what Philip Roth called the “American Berserk.”

A journalistic trailblazer in form as well as content, Breslin wrote of many subjects that could broadly be defined as “Catholic,” from the nuns who taught him at St. Benedict Joseph Labre grammar school to the Irish and Italian barflies who waxed philosophic atop Queens barstools, from the overwhelmed staff at St. Vincent’s Hospital in the earliest days of the AIDS crisis to the feckless bishops who enabled decades of child abuse. “One statement reportedly made by Christ,” Breslin wrote in July 2003, “is ‘Woe to those who do harm to children.’” After reciting a now-familiar litany of church leadership failures, Breslin thundered: “Anybody who puts five dollars in a collection basket approves of what they’ve done.”

In 2004, he wrote a book called *The Church That Forgot Christ*, filled with sadness and rage, in which the author dubs himself “Bishop Breslin,” adding that he and others “qualify for the rank” because they are not a “pedophile or pimp.” *Essential Writings* instead includes two very different books: *The Short Sweet Dream of Eduardo Gutierrez* (2002), which, if there is any justice, will come to be seen as one of the more prescient books of the early 21st century; and *How the Good Guys Won* (1975), a peek behind the scenes of the Watergate investigation. The latter makes for a complicated read in Donald Trump’s America.

Breslin is perhaps most famous for his Nov. 26, 1963, dispatch about Clifton Pollard, who “finished breakfast, and left his apartment so he could spend Sunday digging a grave for John Fitzgerald Kennedy.” It is “a classic of its journalistic form,” Barry notes, reorienting how big, emotional news stories could and should be covered. Numerous Breslin trademarks are already fully formed in the Pollard column: an urgent yet unhurried tone, one that is serious but not somber. “Pollard got behind the wheel of a machine called a reverse hoe...which scoops earth toward the opera-

tor, not away from it as a crane does,” Breslin writes before adding: “One of the last [people] to serve John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who was the thirty-fifth President of this country, was a working man who earns \$3.01 an hour and said it was an honor to dig the grave.”

Reverence for honest, intricate labor, for the daily grind, still imbued Breslin’s writing 40 years later in *Short Sweet Dream*. He reports from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border to tell a story that is both a real-life update of Pietro di Donato’s 1930s Italian immigrant saga *Christ in Concrete* and a prologue to the migration crisis that may eventually define the entire 21st century. More than even the Pollard column, this short, explosive book is what should be read right now in journalism classes, as well as by history and political science—and urban planning and law school—professors.

It might be tempting to see Breslin’s *Essential Writings* as some kind of exercise in fedora-clad nostalgia. Even the excellent 2018 documentary “Deadline Artists,” about Breslin and fellow New York City wordsmith Pete Hamill, opened with a soundtrack reminiscent of Glenn Miller or Artie Shaw, even if these writers were closer in spirit to Dylan or Springsteen.

But just because such ink-stained giants will never again stalk the earth does not mean Breslin’s work is a mere “eulogy for journalism,” as *The Atlantic* referred to “Deadline Artists.” The raw material for quality journalism is still very much out there. It is the collection and delivery of this material that is currently (and radically) in flux. Breslin himself understood such challenges—but also the opportunities they present—back in 1981, riffing on a journalist who won a Pulitzer Prize with a heavily fabricated story. “Why she had to make up the story is beyond me. Walk the city streets and you get anything you want; in Brooklyn the other day there was a seven-year-old who took part in a felony homicide.”

Journalists from Patrick Radden Keefe to Adrian Nicole LeBlanc to Dan Barry himself ably carry Breslin’s torch. But so do varied documentarians and bloggers, true-crime sleuths and social media influencers. The New Journalism’s influence is neither dead nor buried. It has merely been democratized, diffused—and, yes, diminished and dumbed down. Many 21st-century journalistic(ish) “narratives” are indeed trashy, melodramatic and preachy, but the Breslins and Tom Wolfes were not above dipping their toes into such waters. They still consistently put readers on the front lines of fierce domestic, international and intellectual wars, with an immediacy that entire reality TV production crews can’t replicate.

An old saw has it that journalism is a first draft of histo-

ry, as if this were some kind of shortcoming. Much of *Essential Writings* reads simply like a raw, unpolished chronicle of post-World War II America. “Sure there was brutality last night. Terrible, sickening brutality,” Breslin wrote in the summer of 1964, after yet another clash between cops and African Americans in Harlem. “But this was a mess, an absolute, incredible mess, and if you were on the street with the bottles coming down and who the hell knows what was going to come from these rooftops, there was only one thing to do.”

James Earle Breslin (1928-2017) was born in a stretch of Queens he once described as “sooty.” His father vanished, and not long after, young Jimmy saw his stressed-out mother hold a pistol to her head. The episode was never spoken of—though Breslin did include it in a hand-drawn newspaper he produced as a child. As a working-class public high school graduate (“I went the full five years,” he liked to joke), Breslin used sportswriting as the side door into the world of letters.

Soon Breslin is hawking Piel’s beer on TV, then finds himself at the Audubon Ballroom when Malcolm X is killed. And by 1977, when a serial killer “from the gutters of NYC” wanted to take his terrible crimes public, to whom did he reach out? Say what you will about the ethics of Breslin playing ringmaster during Son of Sam’s bloody circus. But the very same events also took Breslin to a “bedroom in the rear of a second-story apartment on E. Fifth St. in Flatbush” for a restrained portrait of a grieving father. (In other poignant writings, Breslin himself would mourn the loss of his first wife, as well as two daughters.)

By the late 1970s, of course, something had shifted—in Breslin’s work and the culture. Watergate seemed to confirm that the country—as Breslin’s book title, *How The Good Guys Finally Won*, suggests—could be divided between “good guys” and “bad.” Another old saw has it that great journalism comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. That sounds righteous, except that one pundit’s “comfortable” bad guys are another’s “silent majority.” Breslin won his own Pulitzer in 1986 as a fierce critic of police brutality, by which time a sizable portion of New York voters believed that Rudy Giuliani, not JB, spoke for them.

This is one of the many things that makes *The Short Sweet Dream of Eduardo Gutierrez* so extraordinary. It transcends many (though not all) of the contentious tropes and traps that mar contemporary journalism. Ultimately, *Short Sweet Dream* is a harrowing portrait of the ties that bind the world, America and New York—a city thick with charlatans and “crooks with blueprints” that the planet’s most desperate just can’t stay away from. That includes Eduardo and his girlfriend—“fifteen and a half years old...

working sixty-five hours a week and she thought it was glorious.” And so it goes for the thousands heading north to the border, just as it was for those “dreadful old ships from Magilligan in Northern Ireland, from...Naples and Palermo and Odessa.”

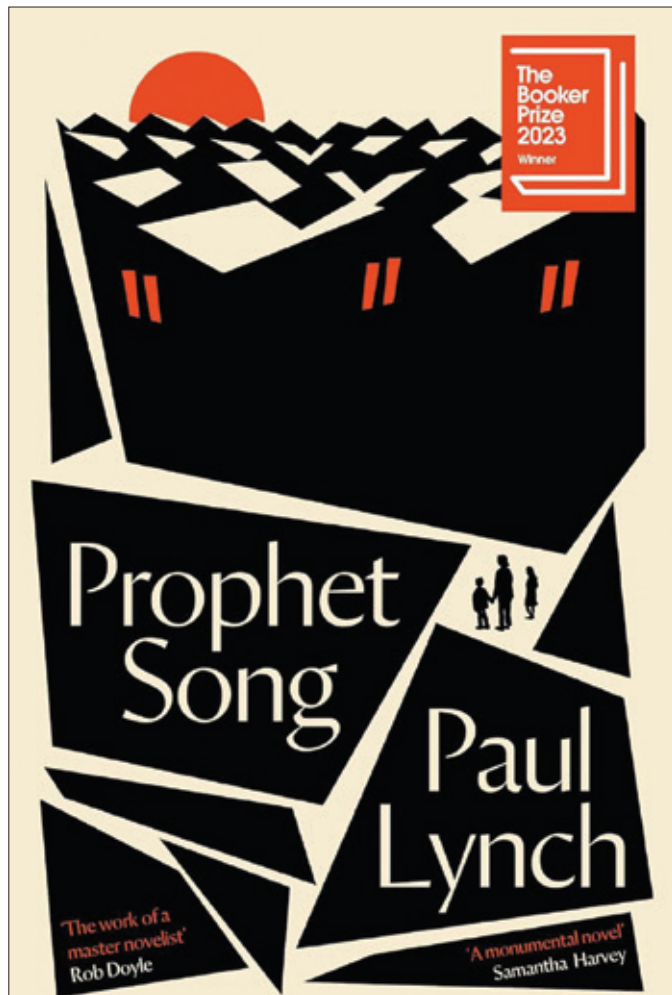
Even one of Breslin’s bad guys in *Short Sweet Dream* “fled Hungary in 1944,” while another had a father who “pulled burglaries and holdups,” and told prosecutors “he did it because of unemployment” before going to prison, and watching his son—Rudy Giuliani—become kind of a big deal. But *Short Sweet Dream* is also about C-joists—that is, beams used in building construction “that can be from six to twelve inches wide and an inch and a half thick.” They hold all of New York City together—so long as they’re installed correctly, and treated to resist fire. And as long as they’re not the cheap kind.

Short Sweet Dream hits as hard as Robert Caro’s *The Power Broker*, and at a fraction of the length. It may turn out to be more enduring than anything else written about 9/11. It may turn out that 9/11 was as much about the factors that sent Eduardo across the border as it was about Allah or Israel.

Some things about Jimmy Breslin may not have aged all that well. But Eduardo Gutierrez, Clifton Pollard and the Son of Sam are timeless. And there are plenty more out there where they came from. Go walk the city streets and see.

Tom Deignan is a columnist for *Irish America* magazine and has contributed to numerous books, most recently *Nine Irish Lives*. He has written about books for *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The New York Daily News*.

COMPLEXITY OVER CERTITUDE



Oneworld / 320p \$19

Paul Lynch's powerful fifth novel, *Prophet Song*, won the 2023 Booker Prize, considered the most prestigious award for fiction in the English-speaking world. The vote was unanimous, according to Esi Edugyan, the chair of the Booker judges, who called the novel "a triumph of emotional storytelling," praising its vividness and the way it creates "a visceral reading experience."

According to Lynch, the novel's plot was inspired by the Syrian Civil War and the plight of those seeking refuge from the destruction and death occurring in Syria. In an interview, Lynch said that he was especially troubled that the West denigrated the needs of the refugees—and in many cases denied them entrance.

Lynch noted that his novel has moral value, but it is expressed subtly because he prefers complexity and depth to cant and certitude. Lynch added that he brought "a high degree of realism" to the novel to "deepen the reader's immersion to such a degree that by the end of the book, they would not just know, but feel this problem for themselves."

All of which suggests the visceral experience noted by the judges.

An internationally acclaimed Irish film critic and novelist, Lynch is the author of four earlier books and has won several prestigious writing awards. These include the Kerry Group Irish Novel of the Year Award for his third novel, *Grace*, which resembles *Prophet Song* in its metaphysical nuances.

Both books exemplify literary fiction. They use poetic devices throughout the text as well as titles that suggest spiritual meanings that play out in the narrative. Both narratives are set in Ireland during a time of crisis. In *Grace*, it is the Irish Famine. In *Prophet Song*, it is a watershed moment set in the near future when the Republic of Ireland descends into totalitarianism.

The difference between the two novels, though, lies in their historicity. In *Grace*, the Irish Famine is based on a historic event that Ireland survived. But the crisis in *Prophet Song* is an invented one, and no one knows who will survive or whether there will be any survivors at all. The issue of survival adds intensity to an already haunting and apocalyptic story.

Lynch's title suggests a connection to "The Prophet's Song" by the British rock band Queen, in which the lyrics warn listeners that the world is about to end. Lynch also offers allusions to the prophetic books of the Bible. At the story's end, Lynch refers to the Book of Ecclesiastes, with its notion that all is vanity.

The story focuses on the Stack family, living in the Republic of Ireland during contemporary times as the country falls into totalitarianism. No one knows what exactly has happened to cause this descent.

Is it something to do with a mysterious pandemic and with a government clampdown to slow the spread of the virus? Is this virus possibly Covid-19? Molly, the only daughter in the family, spends a lot of time disinfecting door handles and light switches. Or is it something to do with the Troubles? The family doesn't seem to be religious, although they are deeply spiritual. (In the Republic of Ireland, 15 percent of the population now describe themselves as Nones.) Or is it politics—perhaps a party's right or left wing is seeking to exercise more power than it legitimately has? Lynch leaves the answers ambiguous but suggests all play a part.

One minute, everything is normal, with both parents working, the baby needing his nappy changed, and the three older kids going to school, playing sports, watching television, teasing each other, back-talking to their parents and studying their cellphones. The next minute, there is a loud knock on the front door.

Elish, the novel's main character, has a presentiment of danger that, like her porch light, seeps into her consciousness and into that of the readers. The story is told from Elish's limited point of view. Sometimes her perceptions are accurate, sometimes not. They are almost always alarming.

The police want to talk to her husband, Larry, who is not yet home. Later, Larry participates in a peaceful protest and is arrested as a political prisoner. Elish tries to find him and endures a Kafkaesque maze of officials and bureaucrats. Readers are caught in suspense as they wonder if Elish has missed a clue, made a wrong turn or confided in the wrong person.

Elish, a scientist, suddenly loses her job for no reason other than the politics of Larry's arrest. She finds herself the sole caretaker of her four children and her elderly father. Gradually, the plot coalesces into questions of whether to flee to Canada and seek asylum with her sister or to stay in Dublin and wait for her husband to return—although it seems unlikely that he ever will.

From the first page, the story creates a palpable sense of urgency that never lets up as the family and the country lurch from one crisis to the next. The government assumes emergency powers. The oldest son and then the second son are lost and found and lost again.

Elish sends Mark, her oldest son, to live with a neighbor so he can cross the border to Northern Ireland, but she doesn't know the neighbor as well as she thought she did. Bailey, the middle son, tries to help people wounded during a bomb attack and winds up with a piece of shrapnel lodged in his head. Worried about an infection, Elish insists that he receive medical treatment. Then he too is lost. When she finally sees him again, she realizes that she has made a catastrophic mistake.

Although Simon, Elish's father, is slipping into dementia, he is at times very prescient. When he warns Elish that she should take her children to Canada and live there with her sister, it seems that he knows more about their circumstances than does Elish, who doesn't want to leave Ireland because she still hopes Larry will return. She dreams about him frequently and often talks to him as if he were present. Simultaneously, she worries about seemingly vapid issues—such as her concern that leaving Ireland will disrupt the children's schooling or their sports activities.

Simon asks questions that deserve answers: He asks why there is now a secret police force in Ireland. No one knows the answer. No one knows who is in charge or who has issued these new rules. But Simon's questions are usually ignored, which deepens his mental problems.

Everything that can go wrong gets worse for this family. A good intention continually yields a bad choice. The story

reads like the verses of W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming," as "things fall apart" and "the centre cannot hold." As the "rough beast.../ Slouches towards Bethlehem," we as readers are mesmerized, wondering who that beast is—and if he's the enemy, could he be a metaphor for us?

Lynch doesn't specifically reference Yeats in the novel, though some of his lines hint at the poem. But he does discuss the connection in an interview on the Booker website, where he refers to the collapsing society's effect on Elish as she experiences "the blood-dimmed tide [that is] loosed"—a searing image from the poem.

The novel ends as what is left of the family tries to escape on a lifeboat. Elish, still trying to understand the meaning of her situation, has a flash of insight as to what her experience has meant.

"Out of terror comes pity and out of pity comes love and out of love the world can be redeemed again," she says, echoing the moral insights that play out in this compelling novel.

Diane Scharper is a poet and critic. She is the author of seven books and reviews books for several publications, including the *National Review*.

BROTHERHOOD

By Leath Tonino

once i was on a trail in big mountains
once my mind was a piece of junk, caught in so much
regret and whatnot despite the sunset light
once, by no doing of my own, more like that light
falling from way up high outside myself
i realized that my brother deserved forgiveness
i forgave my brother
i don't have a brother
he was me, every passed moment
on a trail in big mountains at dusk, wow
it all went away

Leath Tonino is the author of two essay collections, most recently *The West Will Swallow You*. His work appears regularly in *Orion*, *The Sun*, *Outside*, *Tricycle*, *New England Review* and other magazines.

A Spirit-Led Church: One Lead Actor With Many Supporting Roles

A priest once asked a parishioner from the young adult group, “What would you like to hear from the homily during Mass?” Her response is telling, “I wish there were more stories or examples of how God is working in the lives of people.” Without using biblical terms, this young woman was hungry for “testimony” and “witness” to help her navigate her own faith experience. She might be better able to pay attention to God’s subtle presence in her life by hearing of the diverse ways God appeared in the lives of others. This month’s readings bring the church through the Easter season and present several testimonies of how the life of the church grows with the help of the Spirit as its main protagonist.

Peter reveals the power of God working in his own life as he boldly proclaims Jesus Christ. The contrast with Peter’s earlier self is evident. He is no longer the timid disciple of the Gospels who denied Jesus three times. Throughout the Book of Acts, Peter is filled with the Spirit and works great healings while speaking boldly of the resurrection. In fact, the readings of the Second Sunday of Easter under-

score this transformation. “With great power,” reads Acts, “the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great favor was accorded them all” (Acts 4:33).

The readings this month highlight the work of the Spirit as it moves with power through the apostles Peter and Paul. They reach out to different communities, one Jewish and one Gentile, but the same Spirit is at work in both Apostles. On the last Sunday of April, we read in Acts 9:31 that the “church was at peace” that it was “being built up” and that with the help of the “Holy Spirit it grew in numbers.” The passage suggests ways that the church might measure its success today.

The passages from the Acts of the Apostles that the church reads throughout April suggest that success looked different in each community of faith. This provides disciples today with a useful insight. A healthy vision of the Spirit at work takes into account the size and diversity of the global church. God’s power and presence draw all of us beyond any individual horizon into a wider world.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (B), APRIL 7, 2024

With Power, the Apostles Bore Witness

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER (B), APRIL 14, 2024

With the Spirit, the Church was Emboldened

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (B), APRIL 21, 2024

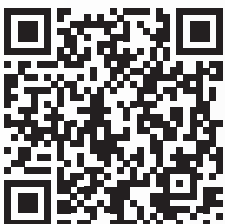
With the Spirit, Peter Speaks Out

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, APRIL 28, 2024

With the Spirit, the Church Was at Peace



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



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The Center at Mariandale is honored to host two exciting new Saturday events in April 2024:

Saturday, April 13, 9:30 to 3pm

**Revolution of the Heart:
The Spirituality of Dorothy Day**

With Robert Ellsberg, Editor-in-Chief of Orbis Books

Martha Hennessy, Activist, Granddaughter of Dorothy Day

Saturday, April 27, 9:30 to 2pm

Earth Ethics for Our Time

As the Sea is in the Fish: Drawing from Ancient Wisdom to Forge Earth Ethics for Our Time

Karenna Gore, Keynote Speaker

Executive Director, Center for Earth Ethics

St. Catherine of Siena Environmental Summit

Please join us! Luncheon is included on both days.

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Letter to an Agnostic

Why a life of prayer is not morbid

By Dorothy Day


115 YEARS
 1909-2024

Reading the eighth chapter of St. Teresa's autobiography recalled to me your objection to religion as being morbid. This is quite a natural feeling on your part and it is a very common attitude toward religion. If those who spend several hours a day in prayer, and hours more in spiritual reading, as she did, in a *wilful* search for God, had these feelings, these struggles—how much more those who are scarcely touched by faith or hope?

You know the reaction of my friends to religion, that it is a deliberate turning away from life. We Catholics know, with a supernatural knowledge, not with a worldly knowledge, that this is not so, just as we know the existence of God and love Him with our will, which is a power of our souls.

St. Teresa struggled for 20 years, she said, to avoid the occasions of sin.

St. Teresa knew that she was far from leading the life she wished to lead when she entered the convent. She wished to give herself up wholly to God. She wished everything she did, every word she said, to tend to that end. The very qualities in her which urged her to give herself to God, drew her to her fellows. She had an abundant love for them, an interest in them, and there was much time spent in conversations. The more her life was involved with her fellows, the more she was drawn to them, the more she felt she was drawing away from God.

She was making little account of venial sins, she said; she was not avoiding the occasions of them. She felt that she was a sinful creature and said so many times in her autobiography...

But St. Teresa had so great a desire for perfection that any time engaged in idle talk (the most innocent idle talk) seemed to her to be deliberately stolen from God. "I wished to live," she wrote, "but I saw clearly that I was not living, but rather wrestling with the shadow of death; there was no one to give me life, and I was not able to take it."

This is the *morbidness* that you mean, I know. If St. Teresa, with her knowledge and insight and the graces God gave her to go on struggling, felt that she was wrestling with the shadow of death, how one who knows nothing of religion must shy off from it every time the matter enters his consciousness!

The shadow of death she was talking of was the life she was leading, purposeless, disordered, a constant succumbing to second-best, to the less-than-perfect which she desired. But human nature will try to persuade us that the life of prayer is death, is a turning away from life.

As a convert I can say these things, knowing how many times I turned away, almost in disgust, from the idea of God and giving myself up to Him. I know the feeling of uneasiness, of weariness, the feeling of strain put upon the soul from driving it, instead of abandoning it to God.

You are very young, scarcely 21, and you have not yet really felt the need, the yearning toward God. You have not been in such agony and misery that you turned to One whom you knew not and said: "God help me!" Or if you did, you were ashamed of doing it afterward, feeling it to be cowardice to turn in misery to a God in whom you

did not believe.

On the other hand, you have not felt the ecstasy, the thankfulness, the joy, which caused the Psalmist to cry out, "My heart and my flesh rejoice for the living God." "My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord." You do not know how long I struggled. How I turned *to* God, and turned *from* Him, again and again; I, too, felt that distaste, I, too, felt that religion had a morbid quality.

We are taught that our souls need exercise just as our body does, otherwise it will never be healthy and well, and if it is not in a healthy state, of course we feel morbid. And prayer is that exercise for the soul, just as bending and stretching is the exercise of the body. It is intellectual pride, the arrogance of youth which makes the physical act of prayer difficult.

You submit yourself to the dogma of Communism, you accept the authority of Karl Marx and Lenin, you accept the philosophy of Communism and know while you accept it that you are accepting a "hard saying," that in all likelihood you will be persecuted for this acceptance.

Perhaps the main trouble is that to you Christianity is too simple. To you Christianity is the accepted thing, so you rebel, and knowing that your rebellion deprives your soul of life, you turn on religion and call it morbid.

This essay was first published in America magazine on Aug. 4, 1934.

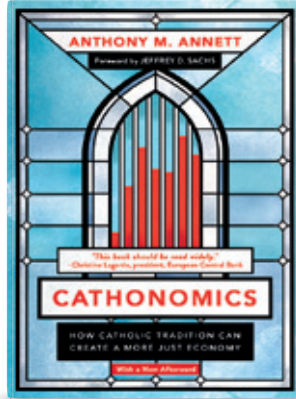
Servant of God Dorothy Day (1897-1980) was the cofounder with Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker movement in 1933.



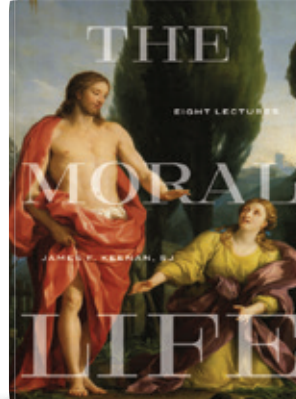
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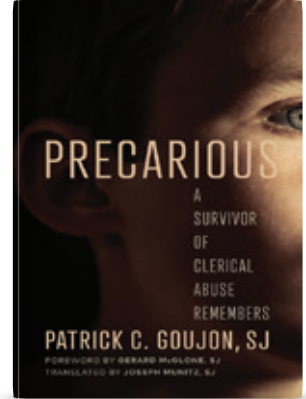
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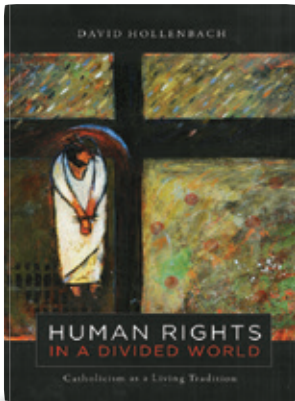
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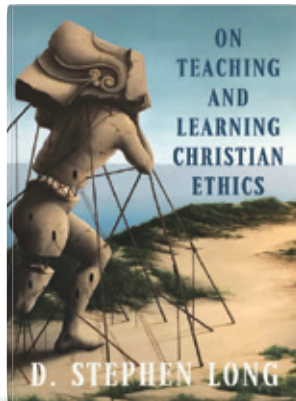
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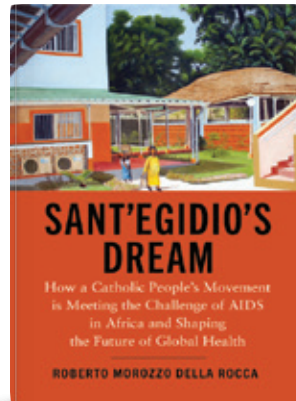
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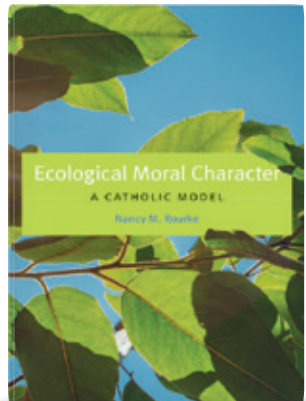
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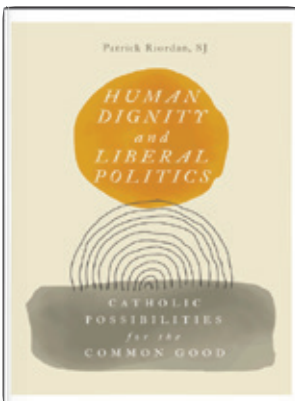
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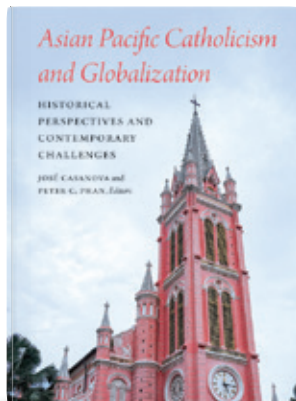
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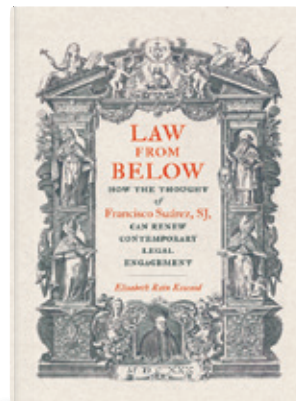
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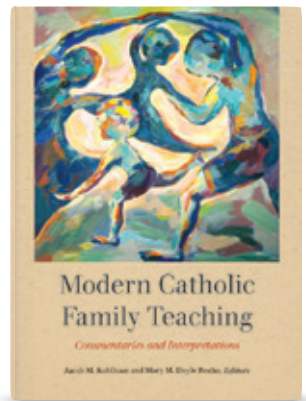
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This lecture is named after Joseph Bernardin, Cardinal Archbishop of Chicago from 1982 to 1996, for his influential work toward Church reform after the Second Vatican Council. Bernardin further sought to address social issues, especially in developing his "Seamless Garment Ethic of Life." He also worked toward ecumenism and interfaith dialogue throughout his life.

This year's Bernardin Lecturer is Cardinal Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States. Cardinal Pierre's lecture, *Pope Francis: Discernment and the Dialectic of Mercy*, will focus on exploring the transformative power of grace and learning the language of mercy through dialectical experiences and encounters.



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