

# America

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# What to Think of the Reverend Graham

The name Billy Graham first appeared in these pages in the issue of May 4, 1957, under the byline of Gustave Weigel, S.J. The essay was simply titled, “What to Think of Billy Graham.” Hard as it is to imagine today, just what Catholics should think about the dashing, charismatic preacher from North Carolina was, at the time, a pressing question. “Billy Graham,” Father Weigel wrote, “is something more than the name of a man. It is the label of a phenomenon.” By 1957 Billy Graham was already a global force; a preacher with such boundless energy and rhetorical power that, in the words of one biographer, he ranks alongside the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Pope John Paul II as “the most creatively influential Christians of the twentieth century.”

Father Weigel’s assessment was broadly positive, but more measured. That’s understandable. As that same Graham biographer, Grant Wacker, has observed, in the 1950s “evangelicals and Catholics eyed each other with deep suspicion. Most evangelicals felt that Catholicism was sub-Christian at best, and many believed that it was not Christian at all.” Yet Weigel knew that Graham did not belong to the more odious anti-Catholic element. In fact, Graham made it a point to write a letter to John F. Kennedy in which he said that, should Kennedy choose to run for president, Graham would not raise “the religious question.” That was progressive and open-minded for its day.

It was in that spirit of friendship that I welcomed William Franklin Graham III to our headquarters in

New York on March 28. He is the fourth child of Billy and Ruth Graham and the current president and chief executive officer of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and of Samaritan’s Purse, an international Christian relief organization. This Reverend Graham contacted my office because he was promoting a new documentary on the work of Samaritan’s Purse in Liberia during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. His team wanted an interview.

I was hesitant. In my judgment, as well as that of many others, Franklin Graham has said things that are manifestly anti-Muslim, anti-L.G.B.T., uncharitable and just plain incorrect. On the other hand, I have a Christian obligation to welcome anyone who wants to enter my house as a guest. And I admired the fact that he would want to do so knowing full well that he was not likely to find a wholly sympathetic audience here.

He was polite, friendly, honest and forthright. We certainly saw eye to eye about the reason for his visit: The work of his team in Liberia is a moving testament to Christian virtue in action. “Facing Darkness,” which will be shown in select theaters on April 10, is a riveting portrait of a people in crisis and the Christians who came to their aid. Two of Graham’s team contracted Ebola. Both survived, but only after a harrowing rescue. He made the film, he told me, because he wants “to inspire a younger generation.” “I want them to see,” he said, “what young people were doing, fighting the world’s most deadly virus, and they didn’t run from it.”

That’s true. You should see the movie.

We also talked about several other topics, including his views of Muslims and Islam, which I found unnuanced and myopic; his thoughts about Pope Francis, which are hopeful yet circumspect; and his views on the Trump administration and its great wall of Mexico, which are uncritically positive. It will not surprise you to learn that we disagreed. Still, I encourage you to watch the excerpts of the interview on our website and to judge for yourselves. For my part, I found much of what he said to be deeply evangelical, yet insufficiently Christian, especially if charity is the principle mark of Christian discourse. I think he mischaracterizes Islam, for example, painting it as “a very violent faith system.” To my ear, this is an argument by assertion, one that is easily refuted by the reality that a clear majority of Muslims worldwide live in peace.

At the risk of sounding patronizing, I have no doubt that the Reverend Graham’s faith is deeply felt and that his views are sincerely held. But they are, unsurprisingly, far afield from a Catholic worldview. More surprising, perhaps, is that his views appear to be in serious tension with the more inclusive and sophisticated evangelicalism that is associated with his father. What Father Weigel said of the father, in another context, seems to apply in even greater measure to the son: “Graham’s sincerity is no guarantee of the accuracy of his understanding.”

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Matt Malone, S.J., editor in chief;  
Twitter: @americaeditor



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Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry



The funeral for Martin McGuinness, a former Irish Republican Army leader turned peacemaker and political leader, was held in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, on March 23. (CNS photo/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters)

(Cover: CNS photo/Etienne Laurent, EPA)

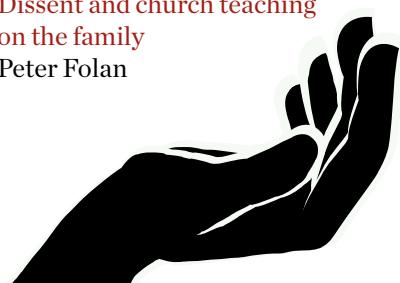
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It is through encounters with other  
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KATHRYN JEAN LOPEZ  
On the road with St. Katharine Drexel

## What does Catholic health care reform look like?

In light of the Trump administration's promise to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, we wanted to hear how some of our readers view health care reform. In an informal survey distributed across our social media platforms and through our email newsletter, **America** asked what Catholics should prioritize in health care reform.

In response, 77 percent of our small sample of readers argued in favor of universal health care coverage. Emilia Tanu of Washington, D.C., was one such reader. "If universal health care is prioritized, then other health care mandates concerning religious liberty will be more easily negotiated and protected," Ms. Tanu wrote. "We need to provide a foundation of accessible, universal and affordable health care to allow the possibility of opt-out coverage." Carl Neimeyer of Maryland also stated that providing universal coverage would encourage "respect for religious liberty," in addition to upholding patients' rights.

Many readers who thought health care reform should include universal coverage commented that, as Catholics,

they think health care should address their concern for every human life. From Philadelphia, Meg Retz wrote: "As a Catholic who works as an advocate for people who are sick and homeless, I think of access to health care in the same way I view access to food and shelter: as a basic human right. How can we as Catholics say we value human life and also support health care reforms that will reduce or eliminate care for the poorest and sickest among us?"

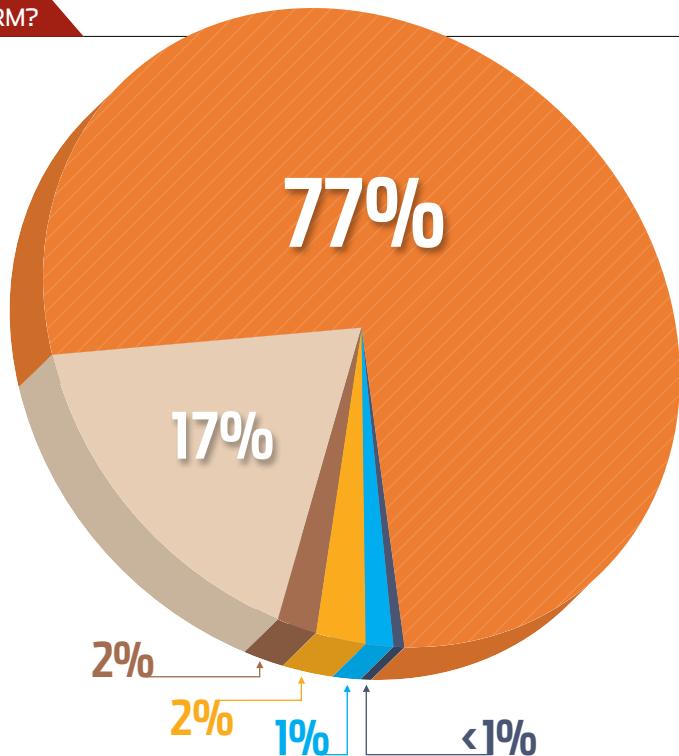
Concern for the most vulnerable motivated 17 percent of our readers to select "supporting access to health care for the poor" as their top priority in health care reform. This option was not necessarily counter to universal coverage and, for some readers, led directly to expanding health care coverage. Charlotte Thurston of New York, for example, told **America**: "Universal health coverage and supporting access to health care for the poor are really equally important, because they both come out of a social justice mentality that says we should live out the teachings of Jesus by looking out for each other, and stewardship is key."

### WHAT SHOULD CATHOLICS PRIORITIZE IN HEALTH CARE REFORM?

Universal health care coverage	77%
Consumer choice	< 1%
Lowering costs for consumers	1%
Reducing the growth of health care costs overall	2%
Religious liberty protections	2%
Supporting access to health care for the poor	17%

**“** If universal health care is prioritized, then other health care mandates concerning religious liberty will be more easily negotiated and protected. **”**

— Emilia Tanu of Washington, D.C.



The results of this unofficial poll are representative of a sample of **America** readers who responded to our questions on Facebook and Twitter and through our email newsletter.

**Our Turbulent Time**

Re “What Has Pope Francis Taught Us Four years Into His Papacy?” by Helen Alvaré (4/3): Once again, Ms. Alvaré nails it! Such a comforting piece in our turbulent time. I hope we can move away from the amenities war and move on to giving everyone around us that “look of love that they crave” and then accompany that look with action on their behalf—no matter the circumstances.

**Barry Fitzpatrick**

Online Comment

**God and Unity**

When St. John XXIII became pope, I was in Catholic elementary school. At that time there was much rejoicing that he was a pope for the people, a pope with a compassionate heart who also saw the long-overdue need for the church to change. The Second Vatican Council was his inspiration, and we all lost his guiding light because he died too young.

Much like St. John XXIII, Pope Francis is a pope of the people and one who espouses virtue, mercy, compassion and the spirit of the law over a rigid interpretation of doctrine. His vision for the church is for bishops and priests to be pastors and not judges who only see the letter of the law and sin. Pope Francis sees things differently: The Curia must be reformed, more responsibility and authority should be given to local bishops, and bishops and priests should focus more on the people who live in moral dilemma and hardship. Let us pray for Pope Francis, that his vision for our church changes hearts and minds, and for unity, instead of division.

**Michael Barberi**

Online Comment

**Toxic Shame**

Re “Confessions of a Porn-Addicted Priest,” by John Smith (4/3): Many thanks for sharing this story. As one who has lived with toxic shame, I am deeply touched by the author’s transformative story—a story, I am sure, that continues to be written. I hope his story will inspire those who are hounded by shame to reach out for help and to hear the voice of loving acceptance.

**Frederick Hill**

Online Comment

**Further Cause for Alarm**

In “Supreme Extremism” (Our Take, 3/20), the editors focus solely on Democratic reservations about Judge Neil Gorsuch related to abortion. It is unfortunate that they chose not to mention the criticism of Judge Gorsuch’s predilection to favor the wealthy and corporations over individuals, as is evidenced in various shareholder lawsuits. His cozy relationship with the billionaire Philip Anschutz should indeed be a cause for alarm.

**Marilyn Hoffman**

Online Comment

**Lay Saints**

Re “Saints, Not Superheroes,” by Robert Ellsberg (3/20): I would totally agree that saints were mostly ordinary people who had doubts and fears and failed miserably at times, just like the rest of us. I also agree we desperately need more lay saints, because lay people constitute most of the church.

It can be powerful to invoke those who have gone before us, and I would like to think that after death, people who suffered certain illnesses in this life or struggled with certain problems or had certain dreams or accomplished specific tasks are given the grace of being able to help those still on earth with similar problems, goals or struggles. We should turn to the saints—both living and dead—for help.

**Stephen Fratello**

Online Comment

**Breathe Together**

Re “At a Time of Real Division, How Can We Help Clear the Air? First, Breathe,”<sup>1</sup> by Kerry Weber (Of Many Things, 3/20): What a timely feminine perspective, offering a hopeful practice in these unsettling times: Breathe! And even better counsel, perhaps: Breathe together. I would like to take this opportunity to thank **America** for its new formatting, which is also a “breath of fresh air.” The articles themselves, in addition to the more clearly delineated content, beckon the reader to tuck the magazine away, to steal a read while in transit—small practices to keep us alive and breathing. A tribute to **America**’s creative, evolving contribution to shaping the future. Great work!

**Lillian Needham**

Westmont, N.J.

## President Trump Continues Obama's War From Above

During his run for the White House, Donald J. Trump assured voters that he had a “secret plan” to take out ISIS. Two months into his presidency, it appears that plan amounts to making good on Mr. Trump’s other campaign-trail promise to “bomb the sh\*t” out of the terrorist organization. American air power has been ramped up in Syria and Iraq, and according to the senior United States commander in Iraq, the military has sped up and decentralized the process for approving airstrikes. But ISIS fighters are not the only ones getting caught in the crossfire. In March, it was reported that up to 200 civilians in the northern Iraq city of Mosul had been killed by a series of airstrikes—potentially “the highest civilian death tolls in an American air mission since the United States went to war in Iraq in 2003,” according to The New York Times.

Mr. Trump is not unique in his preference for waging war from above. Just over a year ago, the editors of **America** published one of several editorials that condemned President Obama’s prolific use of air power, despite his openness about the number of people these strikes killed. “Telling us ‘how many’ is hardly sufficient from a president who claims to head ‘the most transparent administration in history,’” wrote the editors. “True accountability demands that he also explain why and on what authority” (4/23/2016). Mr. Obama justified his use of drones by overstating the imminence of threats to U.S. security, thereby excusing himself from considering

longer-term strategies for protecting the country.

Loosening White House oversight and accepting a higher risk to non-combatants, Mr. Trump similarly ignores a long-term threat—that a higher toll among civilians, in addition to being repugnant in its own right, will serve as a powerful recruitment tool for ISIS.

Mr. Obama conducted 10 times as many airstrikes as President Bush, and until recently it remained to be seen how President Trump would employ this method of “defense.” Unfortunately, it appears that Mr. Trump is more than willing to continue—and expand upon—his predecessor’s devastating legacy.

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## Internet Regulation Is About the Common Good, Not Just Competition

From one perspective, no immediate change occurred when the House and Senate voted recently, and President Trump signed into law, a rollback of internet privacy protections adopted by the Federal Communications Commission in the final days of the Obama administration. Those regulations had been announced but had not yet gone into effect. The rejection of the new rules merely leaves the existing policy as it was, with internet service providers free to collect and share

data about their customers’ internet browsing patterns without first obtaining their specific consent. Yet this shift, along with the declared intention of the F.C.C.’s new chair, Ajit Pai, to roll back net neutrality regulations, indicates a new balance being struck between the costs that regulations impose on telecommunications companies and the benefits they secure for the public.

Proponents of repealing the privacy regulations argued that because they applied only to internet service providers and not to companies like Facebook and Google, they were an unwarranted governmental intrusion into a competitive marketplace.

Yet it is telling that the only remedy considered by Congress was to eliminate the privacy requirements for one class of corporations rather than to extend them to cover others as well. Arguably, Facebook and Google’s collection of data, across multiple devices rather than limited to a single internet connection, is far more extensive and intrusive.

There are important reasons to be concerned about the burdens that regulation imposes on competition, but there are also important reasons to be concerned about the effect of the unrestrained collection, sharing and sale of internet usage data on the way citizens—not just “consumers”—use and trust the internet.

Although its connections, sites and services are maintained by profit-oriented companies, the internet is a medium for every form of communication, whether commercial, civic or personal. Internet regulation needs to serve the common good, not only the maintenance of profit mar-

gins. Expectations of privacy on the internet are a significant component of that common good because they allow people to more easily communicate with and understand each other without first having to evaluate how every click will affect a consumer profile. The recently repealed privacy regulations were far from perfect, but that is an argument for improving them rather than abandoning them. Not all aspects of the common good can be secured by competition.

## Easter Joy

The Gospels record that the disciples were huddled in fear in the upper room when the news reached them that the Lord had risen. One can only imagine the sheer disbelief, then unbounded joy that must have followed. Modern-day disciples are also huddled in fear. On April 3 we learned of yet another terrorist attack, this time in St. Petersburg, Russia—a reminder, as if we needed one, that the world is still at war. Yet Easter is also a reminder, one we do need, that bad news is never the last word. Amid our countless trials and anxieties, the good news breaks forth anew in all its transformative might: The Lord still lives. Hope still lives. He is risen! Alleluia!

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## Reporting the facts does not make the press “the opposition.”

President Trump has repeatedly denounced stories critical of his administration or its policies as “fake news.” His press secretary, Sean Spicer, barred some reporters considered unfriendly from a White House briefing on Feb. 24, and his senior advisor, Stephen Bannon, labels the press “the opposition.” On March 2 the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Society of News Editors, the PEN America Foundation and 78 other groups concerned with press freedom warned that the new president’s attacks on the press were an attack on democratic norms.

“The effort to delegitimize the press undermines democracy, and officials who challenge the value of an independent press or question its legitimacy betray the country’s most cherished values and undercut one of its most significant strengths,” the groups said in a joint statement.

The characterization of the press as “the opposition” is especially dangerous. It is an attempt to delegitimize facts, to denigrate reporting gathered through objective methods as nothing more than ideological agitation. To call journalists the opposition demotes them from truth-seekers to partisans. Mr. Bannon’s characterization is likely to stick because it fits neatly into the current habits of ideologically cosseted news consumption, in which citizens tune into Fox or MSNBC, right-wing or left-wing radio, to hear their own ideas parroted back at them, with details that complicate the story edited out. More insidious is the delivery of news via Facebook or through “selected just for you” algorithms that

spoon-feed articles to readers based on their previously surveilled interests and reactions.

This is the opposite of being informed, even if the source articles are written by legitimate news organizations—and so much on Facebook is worse, just compilations of outrage and misleading headlines meant to gin up ad revenue. In this format, news that reinforces your beliefs becomes a cudgel, ammunition for your side, while news that makes you uncomfortable can be dismissed as propaganda, partisan manipulation for the other side.

Journalists are far from perfect. We make mistakes and get facts wrong. We suffer frequently from group-think, and our attempts to deliver the news to readers are hemmed in by an establishment consensus on acceptable ideas. This has led to real problems in even the most respected news organizations, from uncritical reporting in the run-up to the Iraq war in 2003 to a blindness to growing economic stratification that was not corrected until after the Occupy Wall Street movement. But acknowledging our failings should not be an excuse for dismissing the importance of journalism to the functioning of a democracy.

These attacks by the Trump administration come as the press is severely weakened by decades of newspaper and magazine closings, a desperate drive to flatter and entertain fickle internet-addled readers, and a dive into punditry, which is cheap to produce but useless for the acquisition of knowledge. Each of these developments has been bad

for democracy and has eroded the nation’s ability to engage in critical discourse about public life.

Journalists need to resist the label of opposition. What we need to do is report. We need to accumulate facts in a sea of supposition. Actual, old-fashioned reporting, which involves calling strangers, leaving the office and refusing to carry water for anyone, is the solution to these threats and our diminution as an industry.

Mr. Trump’s description of the press as “the enemy of the people” had me thinking about a different characterization of the press—one favored by the investigative journalist and Trump biographer Wayne Barrett. He trained scores of journalists during his long career, instilling in us a zeal for precision, fealty to detail and an appetite for tireless digging. (He died of a rare lung disease on the eve of the Trump inauguration.) While he was a thorn in the side of many politicians, he did not consider himself *against* anyone. He was *for* honesty. Mr. Barrett referred to journalists as “detectives for the people.” When we are doing our job correctly we are not the enemies of the people or cheerleaders for politicians. We are detectives.

---

Eileen Markey is the author of *A Radical Faith: The Assassination of Sr. Maura* (*Nation Books*), a biography of one of the churchwomen killed in El Salvador. She has covered urban policy and poverty as a reporter for two decades.



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—Peter Choi, City Church San Francisco



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# SCORCH EARTH DAY?

By Robert David Sullivan

# E D

Donald J. Trump and the Republican-led U.S. Congress may have been stymied in reforming health care, but there is one area where the president can make big changes almost single-handedly: the environment. On March 28, Mr. Trump signed an executive order dismantling the Clean Power Plan, the centerpiece of the Obama administration's policies to fight global warming, and lifting the requirement that federal policymakers consider the impact on climate change before approving environmental permits. When Earth Day is observed for the 47th time on April 22, there may be an air of disbelief that one election can change so much.

The reversals make it all but impossible to meet the commitments of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. They also defy the message of Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si'," issued almost two years ago. In that document, the pope urged more collaborative efforts toward the protection of our "common home" and criticized the global community's "weak responses" to the mistreatment and degradation of the earth.

The White House budget director, Mick Mulvaney, shared a different view at a press conference on March 16: "Regarding the question as to climate change, I think the president was fairly straightforward—we're not spending money on that anymore; we consider that to be a waste of your money."

The Clean Power Plan was designed to shut down hundreds of coal-fired power plants and to encourage greater use of wind and solar energy. Dan Misleh, executive direc-

tor of the Catholic Climate Covenant, charged that Mr. Trump's abandonment of the program "neither protects our common home nor promotes the common good." Before gutting that program, the Trump administration had already repealed a federal initiative to impose higher fuel-economy standards on automakers.

The past three months have also seen a budget proposal that includes a massive cut to funding for the Environmental Protection Agency, the overturning of decisions to halt the controversial Keystone XL and Dakota Access oil pipelines, the scrapping of a rule barring surface-mining companies from polluting waterways and the lifting of a moratorium on coal leasing on federal lands.

Environmental and social-justice activists have condemned the Trump administration's policy changes, but after last year's election victories by the Republican Party, which has long promised to relax regulations on business and to revive the U.S. coal industry, their immediate goal is mobilizing public opinion. On April 29, a week after Earth Day, protesters will arrive in Washington, D.C., for the People's Climate March to demand "action on the climate crisis."

The Franciscan Action Network is among the Catholic groups organizing for the march. In addition, the Catholic Climate Covenant released a letter signed by 125 Catholic leaders in mid-February in support of the Clean Power Plan, and in March it collected 15,000 signatures on a petition to the White House supporting measures to fight global warming.

The U-turn on environmental policies comes as evidence mounts that climate change has already caused significant damage, from killing large sections of Australia's Great Barrier Reef to causing severe drought in Africa. Yet there has also been some good news, at least until now. Even as the U.S. economy grows, emissions of carbon dioxide, the chief cause of global warming, have leveled off—largely because the manufacturing sector is burning less coal. (Mr. Trump has promised to revive the coal industry, but it seems unlikely that industries will go back after finding cheaper and cleaner alternatives.)

According to a March report from the World Economic Forum, it takes less and less energy to attain the same

economic output as a result of improvements in technology and more use of renewable energy sources. The International Energy Agency, an intergovernmental agency that counts the United States among its 29 members, also reported in March that global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions were flat for the third consecutive year in 2016, even with a growing economy. Emissions from the United States dropped by 3 percent; in China, the economy expanded by 6.7 percent but emissions fell by 1 percent, thanks in part to reduced reliance on coal.

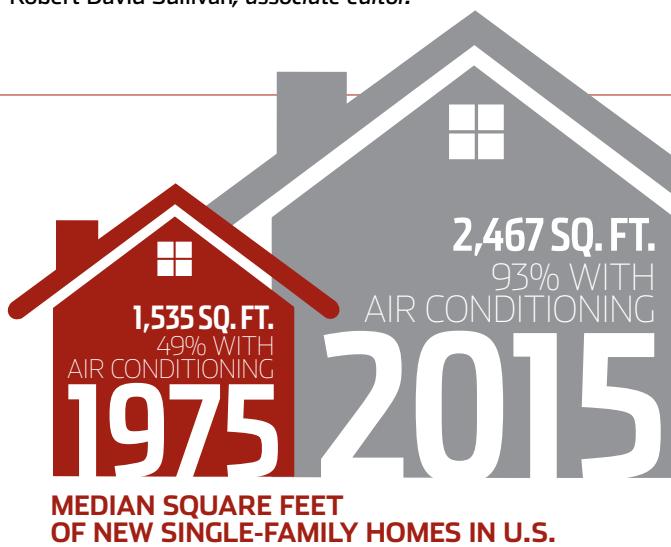
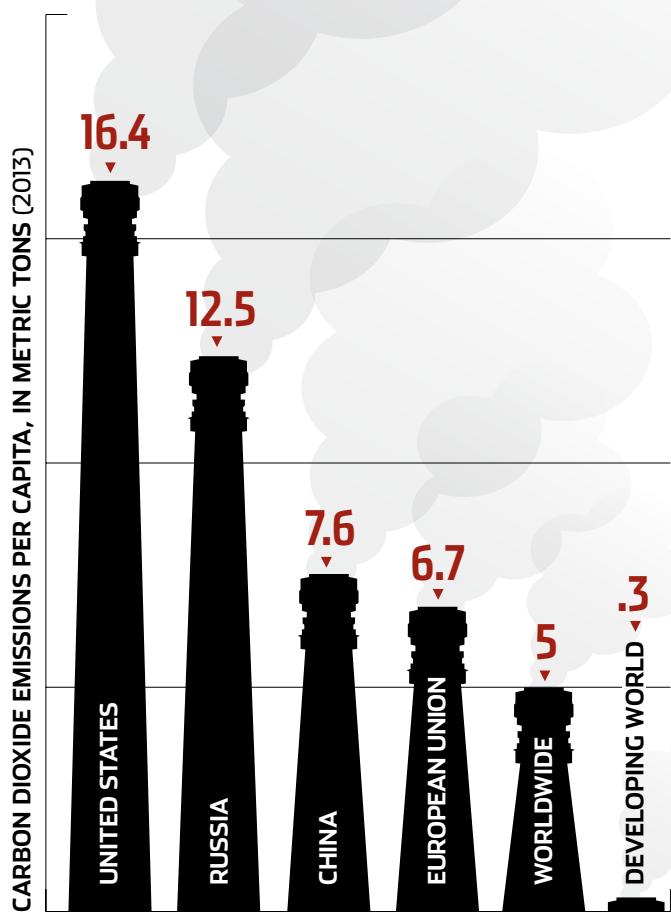
But this trend is not happening fast enough to stop global warming in the near future, even under the Obama administration's policies. Last month The Washington Post reported that carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere climbed at a record pace in 2015 and 2016. Because the effects of greenhouse gases are cumulative, the concentration of carbon dioxide in

the atmosphere and in the ocean can continue to increase even as emissions level off.

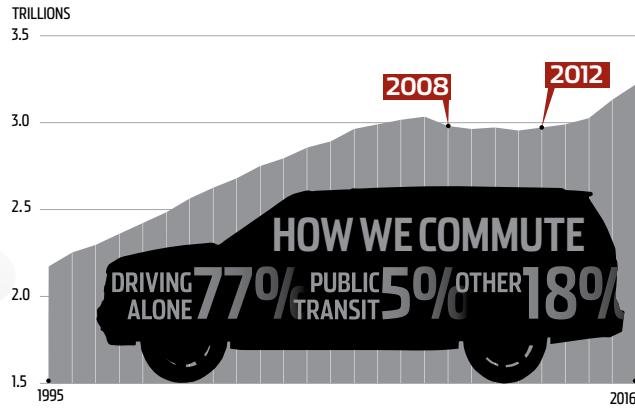
And there are indications that Americans have not taken the warnings of "Laudato Si'" to heart. Recession-era reports that they had reached and passed "peak driving" turned out to be premature, and Americans are again setting mileage records. Similarly, contrary to the idea that big cities are cool again, new U.S. Census data show that population growth is fastest in sprawling, low-density suburbs that require more driving and where new homes are getting bigger and bigger. Thanks to relatively cheap oil, Americans have also been buying bigger and less fuel-efficient cars—notwithstanding Pope Francis' warning that the biggest threat to hope "is to believe that by having a big car you will be happy."

**Robert David Sullivan, associate editor.**

#### FOLLOWING CARBON FOOTPRINTS



#### TOTAL ANNUAL MILES TRAVELED ON ALL U.S. ROADS AND STREETS



Sources: data on carbon dioxide emissions from the World Bank; data on new housing and commuting from the U.S. Census Bureau ("other" includes telecommuting, carpooling, bicycling and walking); data on street and highway mileage from the Federal Highway Administration. Mileage declined in 2008, at the start of the last major recession, but resumed a steady increase in 2012.



## As elections approach, a fragile peace holds in Liberia

Conditions in the African state of Liberia have been driven from global headlines by more pressing crises of violence and famine in other African states. But with elections there coming up in October, a study by Catholic Relief Services suggests that the international community has not done enough to prepare Liberians for what could be a wrenching transition.

The fall elections will be the first conducted without a significant international peacekeeping presence since the civil war ended in 2003. According to the C.R.S. study, just over half of Liberians fear that unresolved tensions from the war present a “very high risk” of returning the nation to armed conflict. More than 80 percent of survey respondents say that Liberians who suffered grave injury during the war did not receive justice through the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The report concludes: “Reconciliation did not reach deeply and widely enough to rebuild the torn relationships within and between ethno-regional groups. In the eyes of many Liberians, the elites manipulated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to absolve themselves of wrongdoing and to gain political advantages.”

“People felt that perpetrators of the violence and those who should have been held accountable for the war got off too lightly,” Robert Groelsema, the team leader for C.R.S.’s Africa Justice and Peace Working Group, says.

Some of the tensions troubling Liberian life have deep social and historical roots. Liberia began as a colony established by former slaves and free-born African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans who first arrived in 1822. Descendants of that founding minority maintained an economic and political grip on the nation, contributing to tensions that first flared into violence during a coup d’etat in 1980.

Worse suffering began in 1989 as two rounds of a bru-

Liberia is a poor nation that has endured much. A woman prays for the end of an unprecedented Ebola outbreak outside the capital of Monrovia in October 2014.

tal civil war tore the nation apart. The war ended in 2003 after unprecedeted bloodshed. But according to Mr. Groelsema, the Americo-Liberian minority, perhaps 5 to 10 percent of the population, still exerts a disproportionate power in Liberia.

Another outstanding problem is youth unemployment as high as 60 percent. That is a significant concern in many developing countries, but “that is a particularly acute problem in the Liberian context,” says Nell Bolton, senior technical advisor for justice and peacebuilding at C.R.S. She explains that many of the nation’s young adults were child soldiers and received little or no schooling.

What many do possess, unfortunately, are skills picked up in combat. Now, says Ms. Bolton, there is widespread fear that the combination of high unemployment and political disillusionment will leave these youth “exquisitely vulnerable to being mobilized into action by various political factions, especially the closer we get to the elections.”

Ms. Bolton suggests that the elections in October represent an opportunity, not to draw down international support, but to step up an investment in Liberia’s—and West Africa’s—future. “During the war, there were up to about 700,000 Liberians that were displaced throughout West Africa, and a return to conflict could spark massive displacement, sending refugees to neighboring countries and beyond,” she says.

Renewed strife in Liberia would be a threat to the entire region, Ms. Bolton warns. But with months to go before the elections, she says, a renewed, proactive international commitment can still make the difference in preserving the peace in Liberia.

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Kevin Clarke, chief correspondent; Twitter: @clarkeatamerica.

# Bad neighbor policy? Mexico's President Peña Nieto struggles to respond to Trump administration.

Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto looked satisfied on March 21 when he signed into law a measure that is supposed to help young people deported from the United States have better access to Mexico's education system. The new law makes it easier for deportees to validate the level of education they attained in the United States, helps them improve their Spanish and sets up information points at border stations for deported pupils.

"With these actions," the president said, "we send a message of unity, certainty and faith in Mexicans living abroad."

The education plan for deportees represents one of the first attempts by the Mexican government to push back against the policies of the new occupant of the White House. President Donald J. Trump's executive order to begin constructing a border wall, ambitions to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement and moves to enforce U.S. immigration laws more aggressively have contributed to a deterioration of the U.S. relationship with Mexico not seen in generations.

The Mexican political world "has definitely been very angered by Trump," said Genaro Lozano, a political commentator for the Mexico City-based *Reforma* newspaper. "The relationship with the U.S. had improved when Obama was president, but it's now in a very bad place."

Mr. Peña Nieto's countermeasures came after he canceled a visit to the White House in January in protest against Mr. Trump's decree to construct his border wall. That same month, Mexico's secretary of economy, Ildefonso Guajardo, suggested that Mexico might leave Nafta altogether if

future negotiations would cause his country to lose benefits. And in late February, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Luis Videgaray rejected a U.S. Department of Homeland Security plan to deport undocumented migrants to Mexico regardless of their nationality.

Despite these gestures, domestic critics say the response from Mexico is still not nearly enough to mitigate the hostile decrees and policies emanating from the White House.

"To say the Mexican government is being more assertive is very generous," said Rodolfo Soriano-Nuñez, a sociologist based in Mexico City. "Its response has been late, weak and insufficient."

Mr. Soriano complains that the education law, for example, fails on a very practical level. It ignores the magnitude of the problems deported Mexicans who spent most of their lives in the United States will have integrating into Mexican society. "What the Mexican education secretariat offers is validating primary education, but that's ridiculous," Mr. Soriano-Nuñez complained.

"What's most needed is recognition of high school and college education. But if you're deported, you don't have a chance to get your academic documents in order," he said. "This policy offers no real help."

"With regard to Nafta and free trade, the Mexican government appears to have taken a sort of wait-and-see attitude, hoping for the storm to blow over," said Javier Urbano, a professor of migration studies and international relations at the Iberoamericana University in Mexico City. "The entire strategy appears to be focused on the fear of change to the free trade agreement. The government wants to



maintain the status quo."

And "when it comes to migration, the focus is no longer on solving humanitarian issues for Mexicans living abroad, but dealing with deportees," he adds. "But that reaction comes very late." Under the Obama administration "there have already been deportations on a massive scale for years."

The Mexican government's weak response to Mr. Trump may be attributable to its own severely diminished popularity. Mr. Peña Nieto, constitutionally barred from re-election, is the most unpopular Mexican president since the early 1990s. Plagued by corruption scandals, rising criminal violence and a disastrous rise in gasoline prices early this year that caused widespread unrest, he has seen his popularity drop below 30 percent.

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Jan-Albert Hootsen, *Mexico City correspondent; Twitter: @jahootsen.*

## Opposition to Óscar Romero's canonization was political.

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life and postulator for the cause of Blessed Óscar Romero, experienced firsthand pushback against the archbishop's canonization. The delay was political and "like a dagger in my heart," he told James Martin, S.J., in an interview with *America*.

"His beatification was the result of a great struggle," said Archbishop Paglia. "There were many in Rome, including some cardinals, who did not want to see him beatified. They said that he had been killed for political reasons, not religious ones."

"I even received threats when I took on this task," he said. "But I believed that the example of Romero was so extraordinary.... Romero did not live for himself but for his people, like Jesus. This witness is so clear that in a globalized world it can touch the hearts of millions and millions of individuals. And if we want to change the world, we have to change the hearts of the people, just like Romero did."

Archbishop Paglia recalled that Archbishop Romero became more involved with the struggles of the people of El Salvador after the assassination of Rutilio Grande, S.J.

"Romero had become archbishop only 17 days earlier, and he stayed up all night watching over the body of Grande, his good friend. That night, Romero wrote, he realized that it was his duty to take the place of Rutilio Grande. And in this sense, the martyrdom that Grande suffered before Romero led Romero to conclude that the evangelical life, the life of a pastor, is worthwhile only if it is spent in the service of others."

According to Archbishop Paglia, Pope Francis has been crucial in moving Archbishop Romero's canonization forward. Though the pope never met Archbishop Romero, he did meet Father Grande and has also wanted to push his canonization forward.

José Dueño, associate editor; Twitter: @jrdueno.

► Commemorating the 37th anniversary of Blessed Óscar Romero's death in San Salvador



CNS photo/José Cabezas/Reuters



People in Mexico City demonstrate against U.S. President Donald Trump and local politicians on Feb. 12.

CNS photo/Mario Cabezas/EPA

The background image shows a coastal town with buildings perched on a hillside overlooking a body of water. In the distance, there are several layers of mountains under a sky with scattered clouds.

# NAVIGATE the BENEDICT



# NO OPTION

*Rod Dreher thinks Christians should withdraw from society. What he gets right and what he gets wrong.*

By Patrick Gilger

Saint George Benedictine monastery, Kotor, Montenegro

Whether you come to it from the left or the right, Rod Dreher's long-awaited *The Benedict Option* is a book that will not satisfy. Which is exactly why you should read it.

While Dreher has been thinking and writing about the Benedict Option on his blog at The American Conservative for almost a decade, the roots of the idea stretch back much further. They run, in fact, all the way back to Benedict of Nursia, one of the fathers of monasticism, who walked away from the gathering darkness of a decadent sixth-century Rome to build small islands of light, monasteries where communal prayer and scholarship, work and spiritual practice could be preserved.

To Dreher, today's American Empire is like unto Benedict's Roman: We are in crisis, descending quickly into moral chaos and social disorder. After the triumph of the sexual revolution and the napalming of community performed by an individuating neoliberal capitalism, we "have been loosed," he says, "but we do not know how to bind." The options for Christians in the face of such a crisis are limited. For Dreher, there is perhaps only one: Benedict's. In order to resist the corrosive social forces that swirl around us, we must imitate him and strategically withdraw from public life so as to build disciplined communities of coherent Christian practice. Dreher has diagnosed our collective illness and given us a prescription for a remedy. And it is from this paired diagnosis and prescription that all of the conclusions in this problematic, beautiful, infuriating, necessary book flow.

It ought to come as no surprise that the book fails to satisfy. *The Benedict Option* is, after all, a rejection of both the liberal and the conservative political projects; the former because it rejects the values of the left, the latter because it believes the right has already been defeated.

On the left it does not satisfy for the expected reasons: Because it advocates pulling children out of public schools and seceding from the cultural mainstream. Because Dreher unabashedly calls for a return to traditional gender identities and celebrates disciplines that constrain individual freedom. And, if I am being honest, at times it fails to satisfy because of his teeth-grinding tendency to use "traditional," "orthodox" and "conservative" as stand-ins for "good" and "true."

But this is a book that will not satisfy the right either—and not just because of Dreher's outright rejection of Trumpism as a farce. It will not satisfy because Dreher thinks that, after the Obergefell decision legalizing gay marriage and the subsequent prosecution of Christians for what they view as practicing their faith, the culture wars

are already over. Christian America is already a contradiction in terms, because in Dreher's reading the sexual revolution has already won and a morally vacuous capitalism is already dominant. In light of this, his advice to Christians is to "come to terms with the fact that we live in a culture... in which our beliefs make little sense" and move on.

A book that leaves most of its readers dissatisfied is one that is easily pigeonholed, and already *The Benedict Option* is being forced into predictable corners. Which is not to say that the many criticisms of the book and its thesis are incorrect—many are right as far as they go.

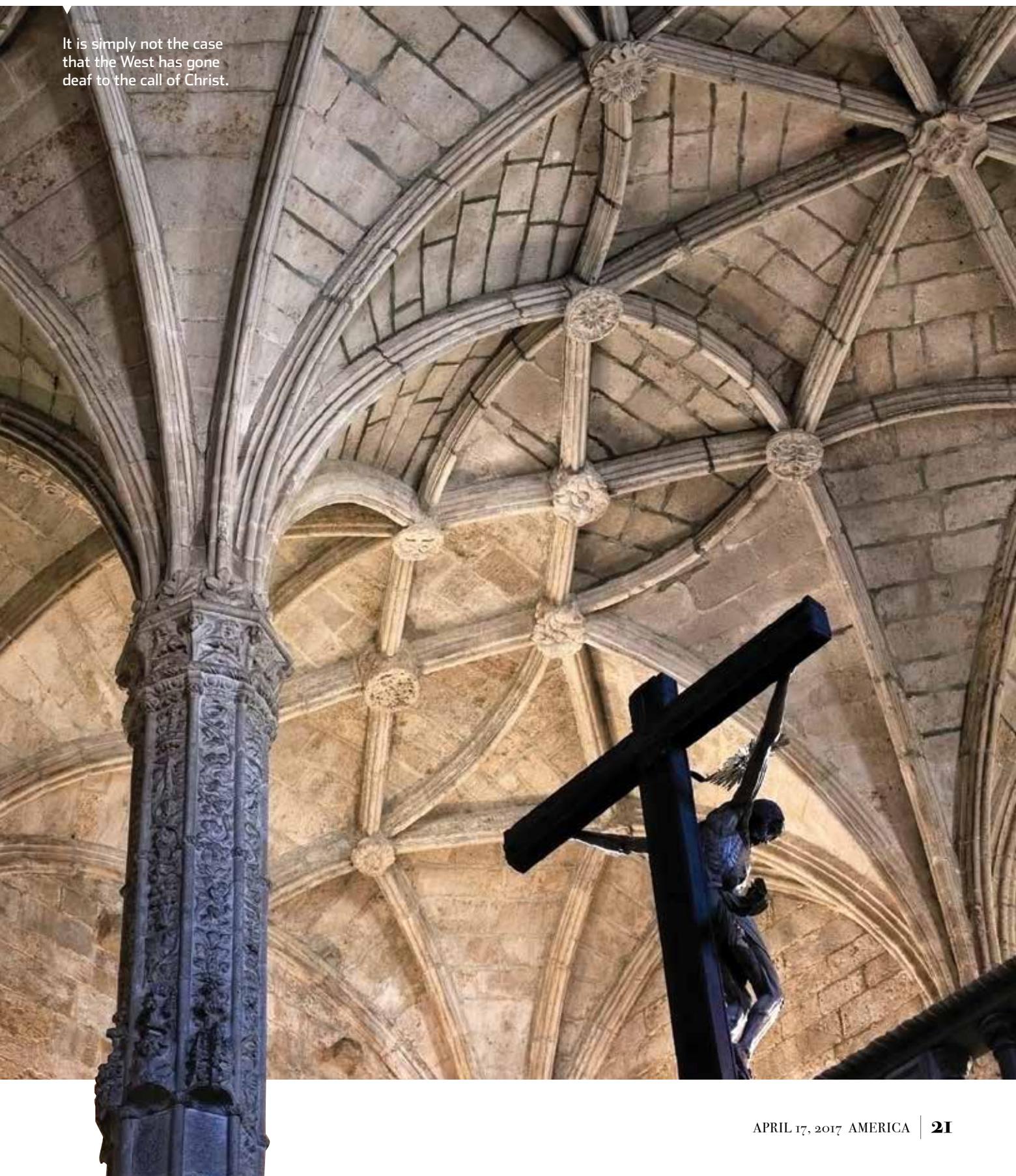
To wit: I take it to be true that Dreher's overemphasis on withdrawal lends itself to solipsism. It's true that his reading of pluralism as a problem prevents him from seeing it as a gift. It's true that his tone can be dismissive and caustic at times, especially when he writes of that notorious "L.G.B.T. agenda." It's true that he does not engage with the different experiences—Christian, political or otherwise—of black and brown and Native Americans. And I take it to be true that, although Dreher tries to distance himself from a let's-get-back-to-the-golden-age dreaming, his diagnoses often sound darkly pessimistic and his prescriptions for the present nostalgic.

This may seem like a long list—and it is. But nothing is gained by settling only for critique. To do so means refusing to learn from the large swaths of what Dreher gets right. What Dreher gets right is just as important—perhaps even more important—as where he misses the mark.

The signal gift in Dreher's work, the one our legitimate dissatisfactions may allow us to overlook too quickly, is his steady insistence that in order to be Christians today—to bear the name of Christ in truth as well as in title—we must relearn two things: practices and disciplines. That is, Dreher is right in his persistent repetition that, when it comes to the question of how we build Christian persons, how we become Christians in habit as well as in mind, "what we think does not matter as much as what we do—and how faithfully we do it."

The shivering importance of this emphasis on practices can be better seen when we notice that we are, all of us, being formed by the things we do every day. As the philosopher Will Durant put it in his one-line-synthesis of Aristotle: "We are what we repeatedly do." And what do we do every day? We check our phones; we watch our televisions; we drive our cars. We perform these "cultural liturgies," as James K. A. Smith names them, by rote. They sink so deeply into us that they become muscle memory. It is these repeated actions that shape our habits, our habits that shape

It is simply not the case  
that the West has gone  
deaf to the call of Christ.



The conflict between individual freedom and the common good is what lies at the heart of what is most necessary and most problematic about the Benedict Option. ●●

our characters, our characters that shape our tastes and our tastes that shape ourselves. It is this insight that Dreher rightly refuses to let go of.

Dreher holds on to the consequence of this insight, too: that help is required to take on Christian habits. It is because we need help maintaining our practice that we require one another. In other words: It takes a community to make a Christian, a structured support system to take on habits. This is the idea that lies behind Dreher's insistence that "we need to embed ourselves in stable communities of faith," that we should "live within walking distance" of fellow believers and that we should turn the home "into a domestic monastery" with "regular times of family prayer."

Certainly, this is true for me. I have been a Jesuit for 15 years, and if there is one thing I can say about this vocation, it is that I cannot do it alone. Every week for the past six years I have prayed compline with some of my brothers (ironically we do it over Google Hangout). I need a community to sustain me in my effort to practice being a Christian. As do we all. When looked at in this light, the Benedict Option begins to look less like a reactionary withdrawal from pluralist societies than a recommitment to a local politics of subsidiarity.

It is by looking again at our human need for such small communities of practice that Dreher's admittedly controversial take on individual and communal disciplines comes more clearly into focus. The heart of his argument is that there are times when communal goods must trump individual freedoms. And this is because churches, argues Dreher, fall apart when they become simply another "loosely bound assembly of individuals committed to finding their own 'truth.'"

The conflict between individual freedom and the common good—between loosing and binding—is what lies at the heart of what is most necessary and most problemat-

ic about the Benedict Option. This is because, on the one hand, the trumping of individual freedoms by a common way of life always threatens to turn into autocracy and domination. But, on the other hand, we are all too aware that in the liquid modernity in which we find ourselves, the trumping of the common good by individual freedom always threatens to destroy community.

This is what accounts for the strange mixture of attraction and repulsion that so many of us—liberal individualists that we are—feel when we read about the Benedict Option. We are attracted to it, and our attraction resonates because of how deeply we want community, how desperately we want to be reassured that the world makes sense and that our lives have a place within it. But the repulsion is there as well, and not only because, like the freedom-addicts we are, we are so hooked on individuality. The repulsion is there because there is a great goodness that we have found in the recognition that each of us is—really, in all actuality—a unique facet of the immortal diamond, the one who shines, as Gerard Manley Hopkins writes, in "ten thousand places, lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes not his."

This is why *The Benedict Option* fails to satisfy. Not because Dreher has failed, but because he has succeeded in showing us our own failure to hold these two constitutive goods in loving tension. He is right to say that we "have been loosed but we do not know how to bind." We must relearn how. And if you choose to read Dreher's book, the exact shape of your dissatisfaction with it will, I venture to guess, correspond to the extent that you have experienced God as a loosing or as a binding force in your own life.

But the fact that these parts of his remedy are correct does not mean that all of his diagnosis is. There is, in fact, one final point that must be challenged. Dreher is convinced that part of the reason Christians must withdraw from the world is that, as he puts it, "we speak a language



that the world more and more either cannot hear or finds offensive to its ears.”

Certainly, there are many instances in which this is true today. Anecdotes abound. But it is simply not the case that the West has gone deaf to the call of Christ. Even if the hearing of our secular world is more attuned to calls for justice and inclusion, more ready to find a call for holiness absurd or offensive, we should take seriously the evidence of God’s being already at work in both the world and human hearts. We must live more trustingly in the active work of an incarnational God—one who mercifully refuses to withdraw from anything human—than to be tempted to think such.

Human beings remain, malleable creatures though we are, what Karl Rahner saw that we have always been: a question to which only God is the answer. Neither the fall of Rome nor our present crisis has stilled such questioning. It is because “my Father is still at work” that withdrawal is not the only Christian response. This is why there are more ways to practice a disciplined Christianity than by withdrawal.

Nevertheless, I take Dreher’s book to be doing the church a genuine and needed service. To the extent that his work reminds us that Christianity is a way of living together in the truth—reminds us that today binding is perhaps more necessary than ever—our response ought to be not dissatisfaction but gratitude.

Finding, then, in the Benedict Option a reminder of the grace of having been bound to a spouse, a family or a church, Dreher may become an ally rather than another rival to scapegoat. And Dreher, being reminded that there are more ways than Benedict’s to bind, may himself discover that he has allies in unexpected places.

After all, it was none other than the co-founder of the Catholic Worker, that holy fool Frenchman Peter Maurin, who at midcentury wrote:

*And we are now  
in the age of chaos.*

*In an age of chaos  
people look  
for a new order.*

*Because people are becoming aware  
of this lack of order  
they would like to be able  
to create order  
out of chaos.*

*The time  
to create order  
out of chaos  
is now.*

*The germ of the present  
was in the past  
and the germ of the future  
is in the present.*

*The thing to do  
is to give up old tricks  
and start to play new tricks....*

*The thing to do right now  
is to create a new society  
within the shell of the old  
with the philosophy of the new.  
which is not a new philosophy  
but a very old philosophy.*

*a philosophy so old  
that it looks like new.*

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Patrick Gilger, S.J., is a graduate student at The New School for Social Research, where he studies the sociology of religion and culture. The founding editor in chief of *The Jesuit Post*, he now serves as the contributing editor for arts and culture at *America*.

# ROD DREHER

BY BILL MCCORMICK

Rod Dreher, senior editor for *The American Conservative*, has spent years writing about faith and culture in the public square. Mr. Dreher spoke with *America* by phone on March 7, 2017. The interview has been condensed and edited for clarity. A longer version can be found at [www.thejesuitpost.org](http://www.thejesuitpost.org).

***In our conversation you said, “Being a faithful Christian is not the same thing as being a faithful G.O.P. or Democrat.” How can people challenge themselves to live by their faith rather than by their political ideology?***

The wonderful thing about Roman Catholicism is that it doesn't track one-to-one with American political divisions, and for me that was one of the liberating things about being a Catholic. It's good to step outside your ideological puzzle and realize that the Gospel is so much bigger than your political commitments, and sometimes being faithful to the Gospel means standing up to your political allies. I have progressive friends who do that on the issue of life, and I have conservative friends who do that on the issue of the environment or economics. But that's liberating, frankly. When you don't feel captive to a political party, when you realize that the church is not the Republican or Democratic Party at prayer, that opens up some really amazing possibilities for your own growth as a neighbor and as a citizen and as a Christian.

***Many people bemoan the lack of common ground today. How is the Benedict Option going to promote more common ground, when you seem to be pulling away from what common ground there might be in the public sphere?***

That criticism is on point, and I am less concerned with finding common ground than I am with being faithful. That doesn't preclude finding common ground with others outside of my faith tradition, and I look for that. But that is not the thing that I am most concerned about. I believe that we have the culture war because people on both the left and the right believe in things that are incommensurable—we can't agree on what is the good.

We have to find some way to live together without being at each other's throats. But having lost a





Rod Dreher speaks at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on March 15.

CNS photo/The Trinity Forum

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common story, it is difficult to find a common ground in reality. So we end up in a situation—Alasdair MacIntyre described this quite well—where the only common ethic is emotivism, that is, the only thing that many of us seem to believe is true is our feelings. People have lost the ability to distinguish between an argument and an assertion.

*In your comments on Emma Green's review of your book at The Atlantic, you note that "quite often secular or progressive people want to know why conservative Christians are so concerned about LGBT issues." But you counter with the claim that, "This is not the fight that most conservative Christians I know (including me!) want to have. But it's the fight that has been brought to us." Can you explain?*

After Obergefell [v. Hodges], we are, constitutionally speaking, seen on the same level as racists, and increasingly in culture this is also true. We're not being allowed to hold on to our views, and to be faithful to our views, no matter how tolerant and irenic we are. We're being challenged and punished for holding them.

This is where the fight is being brought to us. Insofar as progressive Christians or people outside the church demand that Christians give up what we know to be true from the Bible and our traditions about homosexuality and sexuality in general, then we are going to have to fight, and we are going to have to take a stand, even if it means we lose, and we lose certain privileges, because to do otherwise is to burn a pinch of incense at the statue of Caesar.

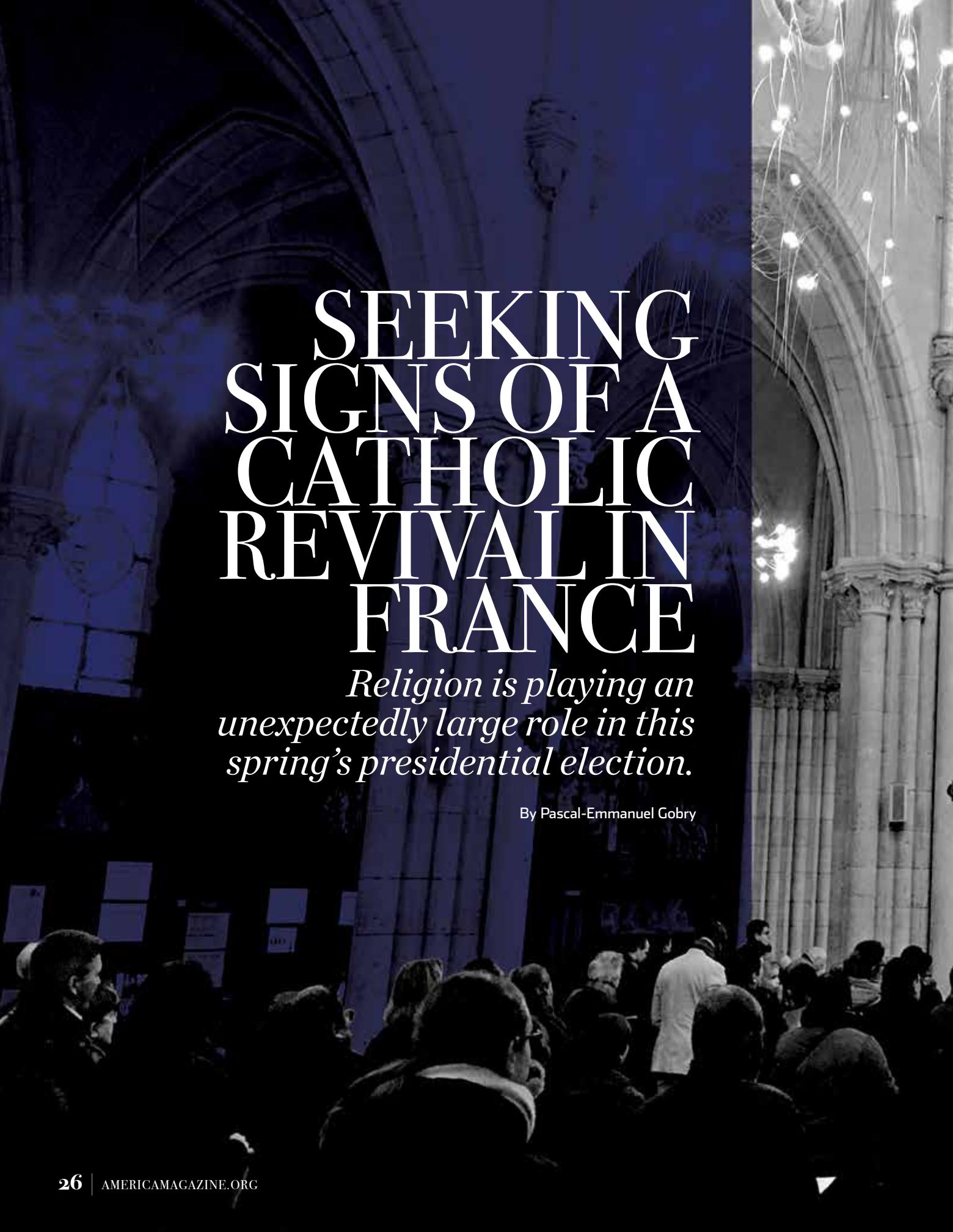
*You've been thinking and writing about the Benedict Option for a while. What have you learned about the Benedict Option or about yourself through the experience of writing the book?*

It should give us hope that even when our own efforts in this lifetime seem to fail, we can't lose heart. We just have to be faithful to what God has given us and leave the rest up to God.

I learned that we don't have to win the victory in this lifetime, and it can't be won in this lifetime. All we have to do is to do the very best we can where we are and let God do the rest.

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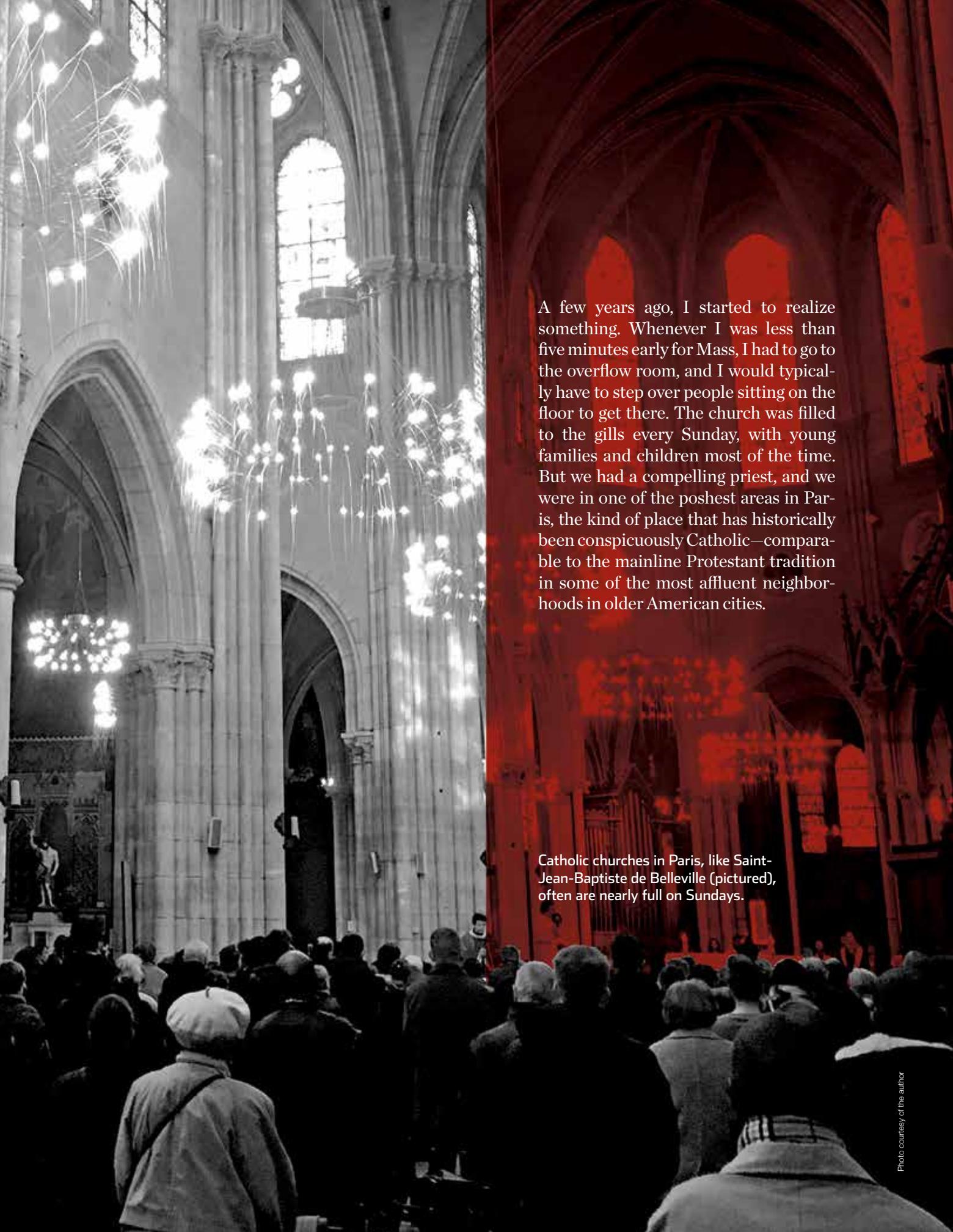
Bill McCormick, S.J., is a scholastic in philosophy studies at Fordham University. He is an editor of *The Jesuit Post*.



# SEEKING SIGNS OF A CATHOLIC REVIVAL IN FRANCE

*Religion is playing an unexpectedly large role in this spring's presidential election.*

By Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry



A few years ago, I started to realize something. Whenever I was less than five minutes early for Mass, I had to go to the overflow room, and I would typically have to step over people sitting on the floor to get there. The church was filled to the gills every Sunday, with young families and children most of the time. But we had a compelling priest, and we were in one of the poshest areas in Paris, the kind of place that has historically been conspicuously Catholic—comparable to the mainline Protestant tradition in some of the most affluent neighborhoods in older American cities.

Catholic churches in Paris, like Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Belleville (pictured), often are nearly full on Sundays.

The resurgence of Catholicism as a political force in France ▶ began in 2013 with the startling intensity of the movement formed to oppose France's same-sex marriage bill.

Then I moved. And I saw the same thing. I live in a very different neighborhood now, one that is "upwardly mobile," as real estate agencies coyly say. But on Sunday morning the church is packed. There are upscale Catholics and the senior citizens you see everywhere, but also immigrant families, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa and Indian Ocean countries. There are the kinds of hipsters you might not expect to be religious. There are children everywhere.

I have started going to other, random parishes on Sundays, just to see if this is a real trend. And indeed, Sunday high Mass is packed in most parishes in Paris. This is also true in Lyon, the second biggest city in the country.

If there is a Catholic revival in France—the evidence is still mostly anecdotal in a nation where 53 percent of citizens identify as Catholic but only 5 percent regularly attend Mass, according to a recent poll conducted by Ipsos and reported by the Catholic newspaper *La Croix*—it may be starting in the cities, with the highly educated and, as the presidential campaign to be decided on May 7 may prove, with those highly attuned to politics. Now this is fine. You need a mustard seed. The French Revolution was originally an elite phenomenon, and historians like Rodney Stark have shown that for all the talk of early Christianity in Rome as "a religion of slaves," it also appealed early and consistently to the elite. But now I have seen something I never expected. I think that in my entire life I had never seen more than a dozen people in the church in the village that my family hails from on any day other than Christmas and Easter. When I returned recently, it was about two-thirds full. There are also more activities outside of weekly Mass than I remember; the parish is now caring for a family of Iraqi Christians, and local teenagers have started a project with a local crafts school to beautify the church.

At first, the revival of Catholicism in France was something you could fleetingly smell in the air. I would notice more and more of my Easter-and-Christmas Catholic college friends posting Facebook updates about going to church, raising money for Christians in the Middle East or handing out food to the homeless with some Catholic charity. I have two previously irreligious friends who, out of nowhere, dropped their high-status careers and walked the road to Compostela, still one of the most active pilgrimage destinations in the world, had a religious experience when they got there and changed their lives when they returned.

### The Rise of the "Zombie Catholic"

True, vocations to the priesthood, perhaps the ultimate criterion of the church's health, are not palpably growing, but it is significant that they have finally plateaued after a multidecade decline. The number of priests in the Archdiocese of Paris has already showed an uptick, something that can only help attract people to the pews.

The Ipsos survey also suggested that Mass attendance may not be the only measure of the strength of Catholicism. It estimated that 23 percent of the French population are "involved Catholics" who "feel attached to the Church by means of their donations, their family lives or their commitments" and who "live their lives differently" than less engaged Catholics.

Another category of church members, with a less flattering name, has been much discussed lately: "zombie Catholics," who may not attend Mass but have proven highly influential in this year's presidential campaign. The historian Robert Zaretsky described them in the journal *Foreign Policy* as such: "Highly educated and meritocratic...[with] a strong attachment to social, community and family activities; and a general wariness over the role of the state in private and community affairs, including [Catholic schools]."

The resurgent Catholic bloc was foreshadowed by the backlash in the 1980s to the Socialist government's unsuccessful plan to merge public and private schools, and by the opposition to same-sex marriage in 2013.

Then, last Nov. 20, something happened in French politics that made the world raise an eyebrow. That was when France's Republican (conservative) Party held the first round of its first-ever primary for a presidential nominee and a previously written-off candidate named François Fillon smashed all his competitors, coming in 15 points ahead of Alain Juppé, the frontrunner in most polls. (One week later he beat Juppé in the run-off election almost exactly two to one.)

What made Fillon stand out was his pride in his Catholicism and his friendliness toward socially conservative causes in a country so secular and so libertine that this makes one an odd duckling even in a conservative party's primary. (Juppé described himself as an "agnostic Catholic.") During a primetime interview in January, Fillon put his hand on his heart and said: "I am a Gaullist and furthermore a Christian. It means that I will never take a decision that would run counter to the respect of human



dignity, the respect of the individual and solidarity.” To millions of devout Catholics, this was like milk and honey. He had broken a powerful French taboo: mentioning religion in public. As a left-wing friend of mine put it: “He has a right to be Catholic, but he doesn’t have the right to say it and run for president.”

No one believes committed Catholics provided all of Fillon’s margin of victory in the primary, but they provided a crucial measure of support. According to a poll conducted for the news site Atlantico in late November, 83 percent of “practicing” Catholics were planning to vote for Fillon in the Republican Party run-off.

Campaign shenanigans are froth, but they can establish as incontrovertible something that could be glimpsed only through a glass, darkly. I first wrote about the French “Christian revival” for the American edition of *The Week* in early 2015. When the piece filtered back across the Atlantic to the world of French Catholicism, the main piece of feedback I got from most of my Catholic acquaintances boiled down to, “I’ve been seeing it too, but couldn’t believe it’s real.”

### The Reversal of May 1968

France is known as one of the most fiercely secular countries on earth. A Pew Research Center survey released in February found that only 10 percent of French citizens considered “being a Christian” a “very important” part of French identity—compared with 30 percent in Italy and 32 percent in the United States responding affirmatively to the same question about their own countries. The French Revolution was a rebellion against altar as much as against the throne—the Reign of Terror was an orgy of anticlerical

violence—and the struggle between progressive forces and the church played out over centuries.

That struggle seemed to have ended in a complete and permanent victory for the secular side. The 1905 law establishing the separation of church and state is an obvious marker, but the May 1968 student and worker protests proved almost as important. The cultural heights of the country were seized by those who were shaped by the 1968 spirit of libertarian free love—and who, Steve Jobs-like, added a love of money to its love of sex and its patina of counterculture. The result was laws liberalizing divorce and abortion, and a secularism so harsh that nobody outside the country can understand why banning the Islamic veil from schools is supposed to make sense.

The resurgence of Catholicism as a political force in France in fact began in 2013 with the startling intensity of *La Manif Pour Tous* (“Protest for All”), the movement formed to oppose France’s same-sex marriage bill. Why this issue, more than abortion or contraception, suddenly got Catholics off their behinds is a bit of a mystery; there has not been a comparable backlash against same-sex marriage among Catholics in the United States. Laurent Bouvet, a political-science professor at Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines University, speculated to the *Financial Times* last fall that traditional Catholics in France “never really accepted the Revolutionary notion that individual freedom should supersede the moral authority of the priest or the family head. They are...wary of the concept of equality.”

Whatever the reason, *La Manif*—officially a secular, nonpartisan nonprofit, but in reality almost completely a Catholic phenomenon—moved hundreds of thousands to



take to the streets in protest of the government's policy, over several weeks in 2013. The marches included pink, baby blue and white balloons, along with signs with such messages as "Father + Mother = nothing better for a child." For years, the question about La Manif and the energy it unleashed was whether this newfound political intensity would produce results at the polls; Fillon—who is not vowing to overturn same-sex marriage but remains opposed to the adoption of children by gay couples—may have showed that it can.

More interesting is La Manif's potential as a kind of "May '68 in reverse," in the words of commentators like Jean-François Kahn, or as a touchstone for a decisive shift in mores, as well as an incubator of leaders, social networks and experiments that end up pollinating across the culture.

Indeed, many movements and ideas have arisen thanks to La Manif. On one end of the spectrum is Les Veilleurs ("The Watchmen"), a leaderless movement of youngsters who, after the same-sex marriage bill was passed, spent nights standing in front of government buildings holding candles, reading poems and protesting government's encroachment on Christian society, with a few of them getting arrested. The movement seemed to be made up mostly of idealistic youngsters who got the adrenaline rush of their life during the Manif protests and didn't want to quit it.

While La Manif remained scrupulously nonpartisan—even though no one was oblivious that its appeal was to the right—some of its alumni founded Sens Commun ("Common Sense"), a group affiliated with France's Republican Party with the avowed goal of playing a role similar to that of the Christian right in strengthening America's Republican Party. Still, many of France's newly observant Catholics are, like most French people, jaded about politics. Catholic social teaching appeals to them precisely because, though it commands engagement in the public square, it transcends any partisan platform. These are not conservatives in either the American or traditional French, soil-and-tradition mold. They are just as likely to bang on about Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, "Laudato Si'," or his calls for solidarity with migrants as they are to wax enthusiastic about John Paul II's theology of the body. One of La Manif's most prominent spokesmen, Tugdual Derville, promotes the concept of "integral ecology," or "écologie humaine," a term that tries to signify that care for the environment, care for the poor and care for the unborn go together. It seems that the vast majority have never been to a traditional Latin Mass.



François Fillon stood out for his pride in his Catholicism and his friendliness toward socially conservative causes.

Strengthening the arguments of Catholics who are wary of becoming too partisan, François Fillon's campaign is turning out like something out of a biblical morality tale. The shining knight of the new French Catholic right has become enmeshed in a scandal relating to an alleged fake job held by his wife, a devastating blow for the man whose appeal in the Republican primary was largely based on his probity. As of late March, he was running third in public opinion polls, behind an independent centrist candidate, Emmanuel Macron, and the leader of the far-right National Front party, Marine Le Pen (who has been making a late bid for Catholic votes, though she admits, "I only go to church for weddings, funerals and baptisms.") The election may turn out to be a warning from Providence about what happens when Christians put their faith in political leaders.

### The Catholic Social Network

So, while many new Catholics are politically active, some talk about being "meta-political," as the popular Catholic lawyer and blogger (and author of *Identity: The Evil Genius of Christianity*) put it. They understand not only that the magisterium transcends political boundaries; they understand a fundamental lesson of May 1968: Politics is downstream from culture.

These new Catholics have identified the enemy as "liberalism," in the French sense of a drive for ever-greater individual liberty. Liberalism, in this view, is responsible for sexual depravity and the culture of death, and for the



excesses of globalized capitalism red-in-tooth-and-claw. Pope Francis' warnings about a "throwaway culture" that leads both to abortions and to quasi-slaves in third world factories making disposable consumer items of questionable worth are tailor-made for them.

Some exponents of this doctrine have started an intellectual review called Limite ("Limits"), marrying a scathing critique of capitalism to excoriation of progressive dogmas regarding sexuality. The inaugural issue featured an article criticizing artificial contraception for going against the philosophy of consuming organic, locally sourced products. It is hard to tell how much of this is genuine and how much of it is artful trolling of a French left that likes to think of *itself* as the opponent to "liberalism."

And in Lyon, new Catholics opened a "cooperative café" named after Simone Weil, the mystical Jewish-born philosopher who had a lifelong love affair with Catholicism. Young people gather there to hear speakers on the evils of globalization, environmental degradation and the culture of death.

Protest movements and intellectual reviews are well and good, but if a tree must be judged by its fruits, then the true criterion of whether the new Catholicism is for real will be the Beatitudes. One reason to be optimistic is the story of a nonprofit named Entourage.

Entourage is an iPhone app that bills itself as a "social network for those who don't have a social network." It helps volunteers for organizations that help the homeless coordinate and share information. But it is also a public-facing app that helps anyone help the homeless around them. Someone can post about a person on the corner of such-and-such streets who needs a blanket, and someone else can bring it to them.

Jean-Marc Potdevin, the founder of Entourage, is as earnest as anyone you will meet. An engineer by training, he became wealthy by working in several internet startups before undergoing what he calls a mid-life crisis: Why was he working so hard when he didn't need to, and what for? Although raised Catholic, he had stopped believing, praying or attending church. One day, Potdevin decided to walk the road to Compostela, and he says that during his trip he had an encounter with Christ. In his earlier career as a scientist, "I worked in a cognitive science research lab, so I know the mind can play tricks on you," he quickly adds after describing how he believes the Lord spoke to him. After two years of working out his mystical experience under spiritual guidance, he got the idea for Entourage after spending more time with homeless people. Some who work at Entourage used to live in the streets, and the nonprofit has an advisory group

made up of homeless people. More and more homeless people can now find smartphones, get online through free Wi-Fi hotspots and are now on Entourage making requests.

In a first world country, he explains, homeless people can find ways to feed themselves or get emergency health care or shelter: "I'm not saying things are good, they're not, but that's not [addressing] what kills homeless people. What kills homeless people is loneliness." Behind the practical good that Entourage can do, he unfurls a vision that goes beyond hot meals to enabling social connections. "Look at this society, where it's a permanent rat race, where we're all divided," he says. "What are we missing? We're missing the face of Christ, which is in the poor."

Potdevin makes it clear that even though he does not hide his faith, Entourage is a secular group, with that status enshrined in the nonprofit's bylaws, and that he works with everyone. He seeks to partner with as many groups that help the homeless as possible, whether secular, Christian, Jewish or Muslim. But some groups refuse to work with him because he doesn't hide his faith, he says.

But this isn't about Entourage. After all, in every era and country Catholics are coming up with worthy initiatives to help the needy. The French government recently launched a contest called "La France s'engage," awarding grants to the innovative nonprofits that received the most online votes. Voters could vote again each day, and every Catholic I knew on Facebook and Twitter kept pestering their followers to vote for Entourage repeatedly. As the app vied for first place, a story came out trying to trigger *bien-pensant* outrage at Potdevin for appearing at an event where a spokesman for La Manif had been featured, but Entourage nevertheless triumphed. The victory cannot be credited wholly to Catholic networks, as Potdevin's friends in the startup world also beat their drums. Nonetheless, the fact that an app like Entourage could win is a sign of serious engagement by Catholics, and engagement for the right causes.

The new Catholics comprise a movement that is still young and small, and which faces many pitfalls. It is still, sociologically, an elite movement. It might be lured by the temptations of politicization. It might still frizzle out. But I don't think so. I believe this is a real movement of the Spirit—one that could change the country in my daughter's lifetime.

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# WELCOMED HOME

*When our lives were unraveling,  
the Catholic Worker was our refuge.*

By Shannon Evans

We sat side by side on a hay bale, knees under a makeshift picnic table and bellies full of homemade bread. Samantha lived in a tent by the river. I could sometimes make out the tip of it when I drove by the woods in our SUV on the way home from running errands with my kids. I had heard that she and her boyfriend were troublemakers, a reputation no doubt fueled by their respective addictions, neither of which do any favors for one's interpersonal skills.

But there at the table, I saw no signs of all that. I saw only a woman who cooed over the baby in my arms. We made small talk, or at least attempted it, until her curiosity could contain itself no longer: "Why are you here?" she asked. She could not keep the skepticism out of her voice, and I did not blame her. I was married and clearly middle class, despite my best attempts to play it down. Why on earth was I hanging out at the Day House, a place frequented mostly by people experiencing homelessness? I chuckled low and got honest: "Because we need friends."

Three years earlier, my husband and I had returned to the United States after two years of serving as Protestant evangelical missionaries in Indonesia. When we came home, it was as first-time parents to a newly adopted son. Between reverse culture shock and the tangled web of adapting to the complications of our son's early childhood trauma, our lifelong faith suddenly came up lacking. We prayed fervently for healing for our little boy, that his brain would be rewired to send signals of safety instead of fear, but nothing ever changed. And we began to break under the weight of our own inadequacies as our best parenting efforts

failed day after day, until we barely resembled the healthy, competent people we once knew ourselves to be. I had never imagined there could be such darkness within me. But then I had never needed to.

We were unraveling. It seemed everywhere we looked we met suffering, and our deeply held faith could not help us. When we spoke to those around us or listened to teachings from pastors within our circle we were usually told to keep praying for healing, even though each prayer that went unanswered left me weakly holding off the lie that we had been forgotten by God. At best we found sympathy and encouragement, but it was a drop of water in a dry, bottomless well; it was never enough. Despite the best intentions from salt-of-the-earth people, we felt broken, misunderstood and terribly alone.

### TAKING A CHANCE

My husband was fairly well versed in church history and began referring to Catholic teaching from time to time, especially as it pertained to redemptive suffering and the implications of Jesus' incarnation for humanity. I was surprised to discover a rich theology of suffering that I had never heard before and could not stop thinking about how the passion of Christ united him to other human beings in a way I had never deeply contemplated. We began reading the works of Jean Vanier and Dorothy Day, devouring their understanding of the human experience. We bought a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on Amazon. We signed up for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. *It couldn't hurt*, we thought. *We'll just see what happens*.

We were particularly intrigued by the Catholic Worker movement. In the 1930s, the movement's co-founders, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, had pioneered the idea of creating a community that would open its doors and its arms to those on the margins of society by treating them with the dignity already bestowed on them as image-bearers of God. Peter Maurin famously envisioned a society "where it is easier for people to be good." There are now hundreds of Catholic Worker communities around the world, and from time to time we would toss around the idea of visiting one.

That day came sooner than I expected. Halfway through the adult initiation process, my husband was browsing the Catholic Worker website and discovered a new listing. There was a brand new house of hospitality right in our little city of Denton, Tex. We felt a jolt of hope. We were at the Day House within the week.

The Denton Catholic Worker Day House—a play on words to simultaneously honor the movement's founder and communicate the open hours of the house—was a rundown rental property on a busy street near the center of town. No one spent the night inside, including the three single men who ran it, but the doors were open from dawn until dusk for those who needed a place to shower, cook, nap and socialize. There were scheduled times for yoga class, night prayer, *lectio divina* and community dinner, to which all were invited but none were forced. The majority of those who frequented the house were homeless, though some had apartments. There were several college students with eager eyes, and then there was our transracial family of four. A ragtag collection of human beings if ever there was one.

The foundational principles of the Day House were simply those of Catholic social teaching: Every human being is made in the image of God; therefore every human being has inherent dignity and equal worth. The concept was not new—I hope every Christian, if asked, would assent to something similar. It was the acting on it that was new. It is easy to apply this tenet when defending the dignity of an innocent, unborn child. It is not always as easy to apply it when the child has grown up, is 40 years old and owns too many addictions and too few clothes.

Holding close their principles of nonviolence and voluntary poverty, men and women younger than ourselves were daily showing us what it meant to live out the works of mercy. Theirs was the kingdom of God: a messy, imperfect, upside-down world where the powerful humbled themselves to become servants of the needy. In fact, so deep was the conviction that often it was hard to discern between the privileged and the impoverished. Even the word "homeless" failed to distinguish because there were those who lived in their vans voluntarily. There were no awards or accolades for piety here, only the sincerely held belief that the face of Christ shines through the people for whom society has made no room.

Once I stood with Andres, one of the three founders of the house (he would later become my younger son's godfather), discussing a tragic situation he had responded to the night before. One of our friends from the Day House had been raped, and Andres had been in the hospital with her for much of the night. There was talk among people that she was lying, and I had asked him whether he thought her story was true. There at the kitchen sink, he continued to scrub dishes but paused thoughtfully. "I don't know if her



# *Young and old, educated and mentally impaired, healthy and addicted, they wrapped strong and weak arms around us and they held us up.”*

story is true,” he said. “But I know she’s suffering, and she needs mercy.” His words weren’t just true of the woman who may or may not have been raped, or of Samantha, who lived in a tent by the river. His words were true of me.

## **INTO HIS ARMS**

My husband and I almost literally fell into the arms of this community upon meeting them that winter, so weary were our souls. They recognized the sorrow in our eyes, some because it shone in theirs as well and others because they had become accustomed to gazing at it, and they welcomed us in. They had little and we had much, yet they fed us anyway. Young and old, educated and mentally impaired, healthy and addicted, they wrapped strong and weak arms around us and they held us up. There was no room left at their table, but they pulled up hay bales for us anyway.

It was not perfect: People are people, addictions are addictions, sin is sin. But it was a safe space for love and for kindness, and I both witnessed and received those things from seemingly unlikely vessels.

When Samantha asked what I was doing there, I did not blame her for a second. If I were her, I would be asking that of me, too. But the answer I gave her was as true as true gets: We needed friends. We needed friends among the poor, the homeless, the destitute, those struggling with addiction. We needed them to remind us that we all belong to each other, because of our God who chose to become human. We needed them to remind us that our suffering could be what brings us together and that admitting our poverty could be the most freeing thing in the world. We needed them to remind us that our brokenness does not discount us from community nor from joy. We needed them to show us what it meant to be Catholic. (Yes, even the atheists among them.)

Spring came and found me jogging through my neigh-

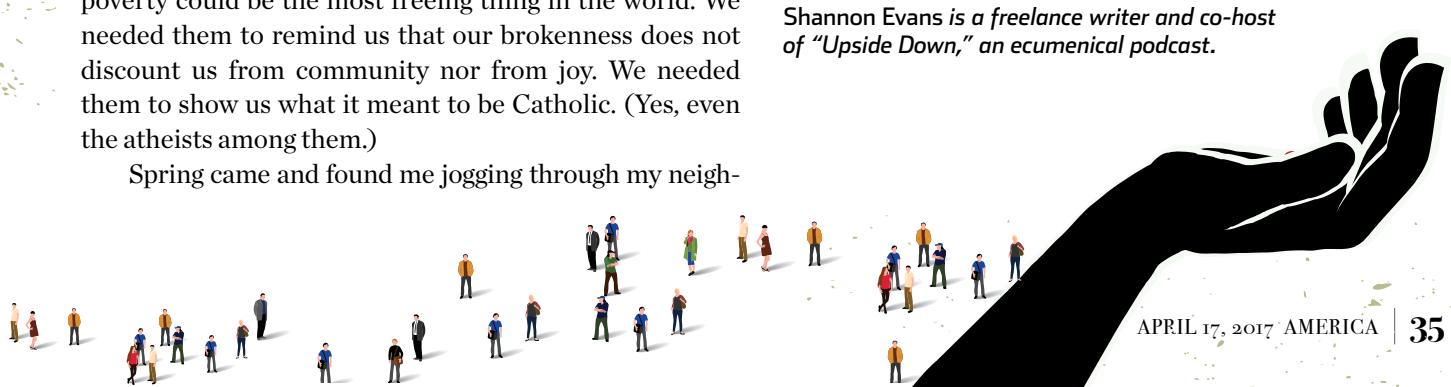
borhood, listening to the Stations of the Cross reverberate through my headphones. It was Lent, and I had only two more weeks to decide whether I wanted to be confirmed at the Easter Vigil. Was I ready to pull the trigger quite yet? We would be the only Catholics on either side of the family. All of our lifelong friends were Protestant. Was I sure? I could always wait until next year. I mulled it over while I ran.

Witnessing the suffering of my son and shouldering my own had nearly broken me. In the darkness of that time, the seemingly singular focus on the resurrection in my prior faith formation was just not enough. Catholicism had offered deep communion with a crucified God, a God who became man to suffer with us, a Christ who would go on to resurrection but could first sit with me in my pain and understand. Because our incarnated Lord communed with me, I, too, could commune with human beings quite different from me. And not only that but I could receive the touch of Christ through their hands; I could see my suffering in theirs and we could both be healed just a little bit more. Because Christ became human, all humans belong to me and I to them.

Could I remain Protestant and carry this new fire within me? Of course. Did I want to? I did not. Everything I loved was Catholic, in the full sense of the word. My husband and I entered that little chapel on Holy Saturday, bent down on our knees, consumed the bread and the wine, the body and blood, the love of God for broken people. People like me.

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## Can Catholics dissent from Pope Francis' teaching on the family? Wrong question.

April 8 marked the one-year anniversary of the release of “The Joy of Love,” the apostolic exhortation promulgated by Pope Francis after the close of the Synod of Bishops on the family in October 2015. For some this anniversary is celebratory, a reminder of the synod’s prayerful study of the mission and vocation of the family. For others it calls attention to what they see as the document’s dangerous ambiguities, particularly as they pertain to the pastoral care of Catholics who are divorced and civilly remarried.

For all Catholics, however, the anniversary and, specifically, the disparate reactions the pope’s exhortation continues to produce within the church—including among those with responsibility for the church’s governance—pose an important question: How free are Catholics to disagree with a teaching of the church? Some go further and use a more technical, and at that, a more provocative term: Is *dissent* permitted in the church?

The question is an understandable one, particularly in a culture where dissent, or something like it, is as easy as giving one’s Uber driver a single star.

Though understandable, the question is minimally fruitful, a point that the theologian Nicholas Lash emphasized in *America* (12/13/10). Professor Lash made a distinction between two ways the word *instruct* can be used: instruction as *teaching* (“She is under an expert’s instruction”) and as *commanding* (“I instructed him to stop”). The first has understanding as its goal (“Ahh, I see!”); the second, obedience (“O.K., I am stopping”).

“Dissent,” Professor Lash writes, “is disobedience.” Consequently, when the language of dissent is applied to church teaching, the conversation moves squarely into the category of “instruction as commanding.” And to understand the role of the magisterium, that is, the church’s bishops under the headship of the pope, as one of com-

manding is to misunderstand completely the tasks of the magisterium as described by the Second Vatican Council: “Teaching only what has been handed on [in Scripture and Tradition], listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully” (“Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” No. 10).

What is more, “instruction as commanding” is clearly contrary to the will of Pope Francis in his exhortation, where he advises against “a rushed reading of the text,” claiming instead that “the greatest benefit...will come if each part is read patiently and carefully” (No. 7). A person who is issuing a command does not discourage rushed listening and encourage patient consideration. One who teaches does.

So if the question of the permissibility of dissent is not the right question, then what is? How about this: What invitations does a teaching of the magisterium extend to believers?

I see three primary invitations.

**1. A teaching of the magisterium asks believers to remember that the intellectual dimension of ecclesial life is just one of its dimensions.** In other words, one cannot isolate a teaching of the magisterium to such a degree that all the other components of the life of the church—prayer, worship, community, works of mercy, reading the signs of the times, etc.—are forgotten. Indeed, the more persuasively the magisterium situates a church teaching in this broader context, the more authentically will its action be “instruction as teaching.”

**2. A teaching of the magisterium asks believers to take all available means to understand the form and the content of the given teaching.** The “form” of a church teaching is how the magisterium presents it. A dogmatic constitution at an ecumenical council is a more solemn form of teaching than an apostolic exhortation of a pope, which in turn is more solemn than the pastoral letter of a diocesan bishop.

The “content” of a church teaching is what the magisterium proposes. To hone what they teach, bishops can enlist the help of theologians, with whom they have “a reciprocal relationship,” according to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, during a teaching’s development and after its promulgation, asking theologians to strive “to clarify the teaching of Revelation with regard to reason and [to] give it finally an organic and systematic form” (“Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian,” 1990, No. 21).

**3. A teaching of the magisterium, especially when it prompts questions and confusion among people, asks believers—to use the image of the theologian Richard R. Gaillardetz—to wrestle with the tradition and not to give up on it.** This invitation extends to all believers, those who are members of the magisterium and those who are not.

It is incumbent upon the magisterium to be serious about “instruction as teaching,” which should compel them to do what all good teachers do when what they teach is not understood: try again, use a different approach, respond to questions.

And it falls to the rest of us to keep wrestling with what we find difficult, or, put in terms the International Theological Commission uses, to keep trying to recognize in a teaching of the magisterium “the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd.”

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# *The Vague Christianity Of Folk Rock*

By Teresa Donnellan

Mumford & Sons often uses religious language and biblical allusion in their music.

The song “There Will Be Time,” from Mumford and Sons’ latest album, “Johannesburg,” ends with the lines: “In the cold light, I live to love and adore you/ It’s all that I am, it’s all that I have/ Why do I keep falling?/ Why do I keep falling?”

For a Christian, the one “loved and adored” could be seen as God and “falling” a reference to man falling from grace. In the cold light we try and we fail; we try to be perfect but continue to sin.

Mumford and Sons, whose concert film, “Live from South Africa: Dust and Thunder,” was released on Feb. 3, often uses religious language and biblical allusion in their music. But while their songs nod to Christianity, they are typically scrubbed of its most important figure: Jesus. The Head and the Heart, Hozier, The Oh Hellos, Delta Rae and many more folk-rock bands often do the same. They allude to God without actually naming God.

To the Christian listener, the language these bands employ is familiar and accessible, but it also raises questions. What are they trying to say? Do they respect my religion? Are they bastardizing our sacred language? Does this language belong to everyone? Can Christians derive spiritual value from the religious language of musicians who are not willing to mention Christ?

Secular music that is colored by Christian ideas often reflects the faith of the “spiritual but not religious” demographic. While many secular folk-rock artists, including Mumford

and Sons’ Marcus Mumford and The Head and the Heart’s Josiah Johnson and Charity Rose Theilen, were raised in Christian households, most of them do not overtly lay claim to their faith.

Though Mumford’s parents founded an evangelical church in the United Kingdom, he balks at being identified with his family’s religion. In a 2013 interview with Religion News Service, he explained: “I don’t really like that word [Christian]. It comes with so much baggage. So, no, I wouldn’t call myself a Christian.” Instead of being seen as scaffolding upon which we can form our spirituality, religion, in the eyes of Mumford and others, is “baggage” weighing down their spiritual side. It is a burden that these artists apparently want to shed.

But not all folk-rock artists belong to the “spiritual but not religious” crowd. Some, like the siblings Maggie and Tyler Heath, of The Oh Hellos, self-identify as Christian. They produced a Christmas album of folk-ified traditional Christmas hymns, and their most recent album, “Dear Wormwood,” was inspired in part by C. S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters*. The Heaths do not, however, seek out recognition as “Christian artists.” Christian music as a specific genre, in fact, can be religious to the point of excluding the purely spiritual. Members of the Christian music community debate, for instance, how many times one must mention “God” and “Jesus” in a song for it to be considered “Christian.” Amy Grant’s

2016 Christmas album was dropped from LifeWay Christian Resources, a large Southern Baptist retailer, allegedly because it includes tracks like “Melancholy Christmas,” which do not explicitly mention Jesus.

It is also the case that songs can include religious language without being particularly pious. Hozier’s song “From Eden” seems to glorify adultery by presenting a sympathetic narrator as the devil: “I slithered here from Eden just to sit outside your door.” At other times, Christian language in secular music has no spiritual value at all. Some folk-rock songs are barely biblical, their Christian language (the occasional “O Lord”) functioning as kitschy phrases that give the song a vaguely prayer-like tone. Delta Rae’s “Bottom of the River,” which depicts the ramblings of a murderous crazy person, includes lines about the “Lord”—“The Lord’s gonna come for your firstborn son” and “The good Lord speaks like the rolling thunder”—that serve only as vivid examples of the narrator’s paranoia. Given that this song is about murdering a child, it is clear that the narrator, with her mordant appeals to the divine, not only has a disturbing view of Christianity but a distorted view of reality in general.

Secular artists using Christian language are not necessarily trying to advance Christian ideas, but their spiritual messages can align with Christian values. The song “Sigh No More,” by Mumford and Sons, ends with a message about the saving nature of love. The Oh Hellos’ “In Me-



“moriam” has an unclear addressee but ends with lines referring to the unfailing nature of God’s love: “And heaven knows I’m prone to leave the only god I should have loved,/ and yet you’re far too beautiful to leave me.” These songs risk glorifying a generalized love or some other “god” over the one, true God. But Christians can appreciate the beauty of the message of God’s love despite the fact that it is hidden in music with a secular tone.

Other folk-rock songs—including The Oh Hellos’ “Cold Is the Night,”

Mumford and Sons’ “Below My Feet” and Delta Rae’s “Morning Comes”—deal with spiritual dryness or despair. These songs are painfully honest about the artist’s strained relationship with God, a struggle most Christians experience at some point in their lives. “Below My Feet” includes the line “I was told by Jesus all would be well/ so all must be well.” In “Cold Is the Night” the narrator prays, “Lord, this road was meant for two,/ so I am waiting here for you.” In “Morning Comes” a voice wonders, “Can I be saved if I’m

barely clinging to hope?” These songs are refreshingly candid about the human experience of feeling at odds with God, feeling left by God or feeling unworthy of God.

The secular world is brimming with religious ideas and symbols, and Christians are called to engage with and serve the world as it is. The vaguely Christian echoes in folk-rock are, in fact, an avenue to religious interaction with the world. They are evidence that spiritual questions about grace, redemption and mortality are import-



The Oh Hellos's last album, "Dear Wormwood," was inspired by C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*.

ant and that religious language is rich, meaningful and valuable. To paraphrase Vatican II's "Gaudium et Spes," everything that is authentically human finds an echo in the hearts of Christians. The *imago dei*, the image of Christ, shines through great music, whether God is deliberately invited or not.

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Teresa Donnellan is a Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., fellow at **America**.

## One Hundred and Twenty-Three

She called me  
In from  
The storm  
  
Sat with me  
In her  
Gold cage  
  
She'd been  
Where I would be  
Going  
  
She told me  
She envied  
My youth  
  
She confided  
She'd been healed  
By Christ  
  
I stumbled  
Back into  
The storm  
  
Shivering  
But not from  
The cold

## Forty-Nine

What I fear  
Is language  
Will die  
  
With you  
If you do  
When  
  
I speak  
Already  
No one  
  
Understands  
A word  
I mean

Poems by Dan O'Brien

---

Dan O'Brien, a playwright, poet and librettist, was a Guggenheim Fellow in Drama and Performance Art in 2015. These poems come from a developing collection about concurrent cancer diagnoses for him and his wife. For more of Dan O'Brien's work in this new collection, go to [americanmagazine.org/section/poem](http://americanmagazine.org/section/poem).



Kenneth Clark arranged for the collection of the National Gallery in London to be transferred to a Welsh mine for safekeeping during World War II.

## Critic, curator, broadcaster, scoundrel

By Robert Hosmer



**Kenneth Clark**  
Life, Art and Civilization  
By James Stourton  
Alfred A. Knopf. 496p.  
\$27

He was a great man. He was not a nice man, not even a good man. But then, greatness may not dwell that often with goodness and kindness in the same person.

Kenneth Clark was a great man, the most influential art historian of 20th-century Britain and the holder of many lofty posts in the worlds of culture and government: keeper of fine arts at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; director of the National Gallery, London; surveyor of the paintings owned by the royal family; chairman of the Arts Council of Britain; chairman of the Independent Television Authority;

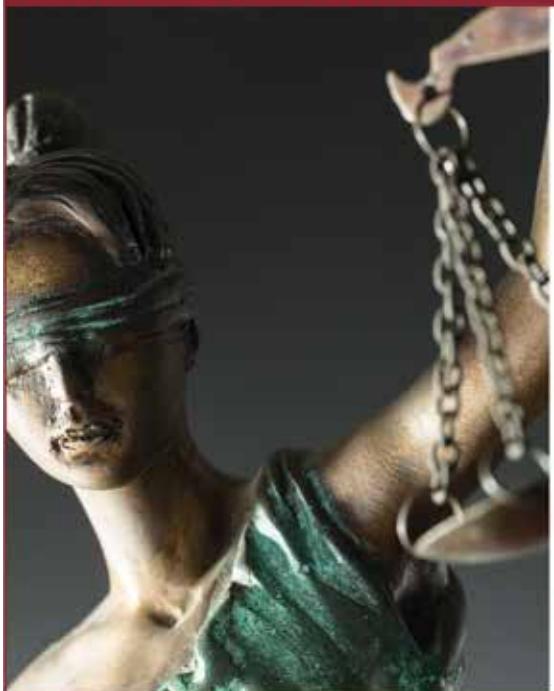
board member of the Royal Opera, the Royal Ballet and the National Theatre; and prolific author of books on art history. But he was best known as the creator of a 13-part television program he called "Civilisation: A Personal View."

In this exemplary chronicle, James Stourton, former chairman of Sotheby's U.K., tells this life story, bringing his own background in the arts as well as considerable scholarship and the full cooperation of Clark's heirs to the task. The result is a substantial, definitive "Life," organized chronologically in 39 chapters that move efficiently to an epilogue.

Clark came from an immensely wealthy family (an ancestor was the Clark who invented the spool for cotton thread). His father's share from the sale of the family firm amounted to about \$650 million in today's currency. About his parents Clark wrote, "Many people were richer, but there can have been few idler." His father drank and gambled, his mother vainly

tried to reform his father. After Winchester and Oxford, where he took an undistinguished second-class degree (having spent more time looking at paintings, sculpture and drawings than attending lectures), Clark decided that his avocation would become his vocation. He could have led the aimless life of a wealthy playboy, but he did not; instead, inspired by the writings of the 19th-century art critic John Ruskin, he devoted time, energy and a considerable fortune to bringing art to a wider audience.

Though some might claim that Clark's greatness lies in the significant accomplishment that was "Civilisation," his role as director of the National Gallery during World War II may just overshadow that. He presided over an empty space, having arranged for the entire collection to be transferred to a Welsh mine for safekeeping, but at the suggestion of Dame Myra Hess, the renowned pianist, he organized a series of weekly concerts, believing that



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the works of Mozart and Beethoven gave substance to the culture for which Britain fought. In conjunction with his “Picture of the Month” (one painting, brought from Wales and put on display), the popular concerts boosted morale during the war and brought thousands of people into the gallery.

He was not a kind or good man. His relationships, both personal and professional, were tense and difficult: he was cold and distant from his children, colleagues and subordinates alike. He was an icy, imperial, impatient presence. He did not suffer fools or bores, titled or not, and took no pains to hide his disdain in their presence. His relationship with his wife Jane, after some early years of happiness, devolved into a tangle of tension and temper.

In the 1930s the Clarks were a chic and glamorous couple, entertaining aristocrats, politicians, writers and artists. Jane, a gracious and elegant hostess, set the stage for her husband’s performances. Later on, Jane’s drinking got out of hand. As Stourton makes clear, Clark’s infidelities began afterward, so it is unfair to say that his serial womanizing caused Jane’s problems (made them worse, perhaps). Jane’s behavior included bouts of verbal abuse, and as Stourton puts it, “she worshipped and tormented him in equal measure.”

It is to Clark’s credit that he stood by Jane as her public behavior became more erratic. He rescued her time and again from embarrassing situations at parties, and he never criticized her.

Still, Clark took up with many women, some for brief flings, others for longer interludes. Nearly all these “relationships” he characterized as *amitiés amoureuses*. He needed fe-

male attention and flattery, perhaps to compensate for what he felt had been his mother’s neglect. As his daughter Colette put it, “He was very put out if women did not fall in love with him.”

Clark’s most disturbing womanizing involved Janet Stone, a married woman. Stone and Clark had a 30-year relationship, meeting on a regular basis and exchanging frequent letters in which Clark often declared his love. Yet after Jane’s death in 1976, when Stone evidently expected Clark to marry her, he instead hastily married Nolwen Rice, a French countess. In a letter written at the time, Clark assured Stone of his lasting love and of his new wife’s acceptance of that fact. But, as Stourton notes, “In this Clark was under a grotesque misapprehension.” Rice promptly and efficiently took charge.

Still, Stone clung to fantasy, hoping after the death of her husband in 1979 that Clark would leave Rice and marry her. Nothing doing. Perhaps the most damning aspect of this story and Clark’s greatest unkindness was revealed after his death, when his secretary found a box of Stone’s letters, not one ever opened or read.

Kenneth Clark knew and acknowledged that in his professional life he was a self promoter and a narcissist and in his personal life, a scoundrel. He himself told the story of an encounter at one of his clubs, when another member asked if he were “Kenneth Clark the baronet.” When Clark said “No,” the other fellow responded, “Good—the other one’s a frightful sh\*t.” Clark agreed, commenting that it was “good to hear the truth occasionally.”

The excellence of Stourton’s biography manifests itself not only in his

fine scholarship and attention to detail but also in his fair assessments of problematic areas. In evaluating “Civilisation,” Stourton underscores Clark’s singular achievement but does not ignore its flaws (for example, his deletion of female roles, except for the Virgin Mary; his over-reliance on Carlyle’s great-man theory of history; his ignoring Spain). In charting Clark’s extramarital antics, Stourton sets things out, but he makes no judgments; he does not have to, as the evidence speaks for itself. And in telling of what may have been Clark’s deathbed reception of the sacraments, he gracefully concludes, “Probably Clark felt that it was correct to leave the world in a sacramental way—a rite of passage to counterbalance baptism.”

Kenneth Clark was a great man. He was not a nice man, not even a good man. James Stourton has revealed him with human fullness. In depicting the man who was Kenneth Clark—an elitist and a socialist; an unbeliever and a man of spiritual vulnerability; a devoted husband and a serial womanizer; an ivory-tower scholar and a marketplace popularizer; a man of refined taste and a hoarder of Mars bars; a charmer and a cad—James Stourton has illuminated an enigmatic, paradoxical man. As a character in one of Muriel Spark’s novels opines, a paradox is not a problem to be solved, but something you live with. Clark knew that, Stourton knows that, and so do we...now.

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Robert Hosmer is an English professor at Smith College in Massachusetts.

*“God’s hidden jewel on the river in Metro Atlanta”*

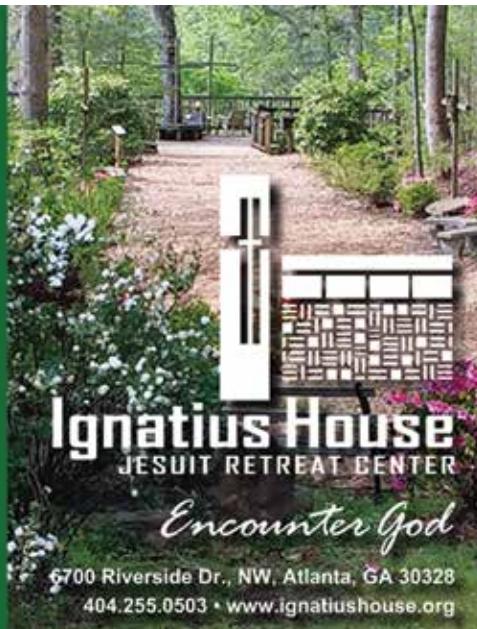
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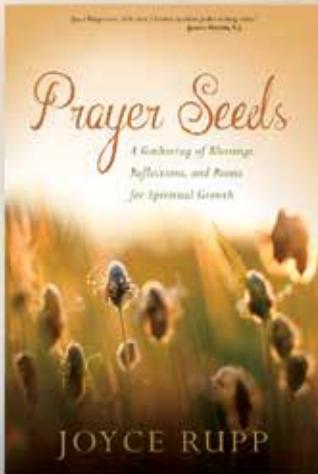
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## The seductions of war

The debate about whether the United States should have fought in the Great War is practically forgotten today. Although the war began in August 1914, a broad coalition of antiwar forces tried to stop their nation from fighting in history's most destructive war and, until April 1917, when President Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany, had succeeded. In the 19 months before the Armistice ended the war, 53,000 Americans died in battle and the peace movement was suppressed.

Michael Kazin, author of a history of the American left, believes that the second, more murderous war could have been avoided had the United

States stayed out of the first war. Although Wilson spoke of "peace without victory," American intervention encouraged the Allies, principally Great Britain and France, to hold out for a military victory over Germany. When the infusion of American forces broke the military deadlock, the Allies then imposed harsh terms on the defeated Germans, leading to resentment, the desire for vengeance and the rise of Hitler.

For almost three years, opponents of the war and military preparedness helped prevent Congress from massively increasing the size of the U.S. army, a measure favored by wealthy munitions makers and proponents of intervention including former President Theodore Roosevelt. Working

against intervention were Socialists, feminists, labor unions, civil rights organizations, Congressmen from small towns in the South and agrarian Midwest, and new peace organizations. As late as the election of 1916, Wilson found it advantageous to run as the peace candidate, because these antimilitarists commanded public opinion. Several months later, however, Germany's decision to resume unrestricted submarine warfare against neutral merchant ships persuaded him that war was the only option.

---

Mark J. Davis, a retired attorney, lives in Santa Fe, N.M.

## Back to the U.S.S.R.

"Breaking your family's heart was the price you paid for rescuing your own." So begins Sana Krasikov's debut novel, *The Patriots*, which explores how a Russian-American family's experience with their motherland strains familial relationships.

Spanning years of tension between home and native lands, *The Patriots* weaves together the narratives of Florence Fein, her son Julian and his son Lenny over the course of the 20th and early 21st centuries.

When she fails to find satisfactory employment in New York during the Great Depression, Florence sets out to reconnect with an old flame who has returned to the Soviet Union. Enamored of the ideals pedaled by the Soviet Union's propaganda machines,

she expects to adapt easily to the socialist utopia that was once home to her parents.

Once there, Florence faces myriad difficulties. From finding suitable housing to maintaining a job in an anti-Semitic society, Florence struggles to live out her Soviet dream. Desperate to return to the United States, Florence performs unspeakable acts, ultimately becoming a pawn in Stalin's police state.

The anxiety of living with a not-quite-native identity is palpable in Florence's narrative, and it echoes throughout her son's as he attempts to learn about his late mother's past. In sections alternating with Florence's story, Julian visits Russia on business, where he must negotiate a deal with a petroleum behemoth while tracking down information about his moth-

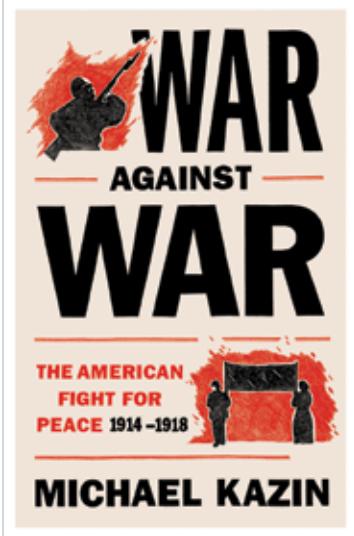
er. There he also visits his son Lenny, who, against his family's wishes, has moved to Russia to work in finance.

In addition to offering an illuminating glimpse of life in the Soviet Union and Russia, *The Patriots* deftly tackles the complexities of patriotism and parent-child relationships under the pressure of painful circumstances.

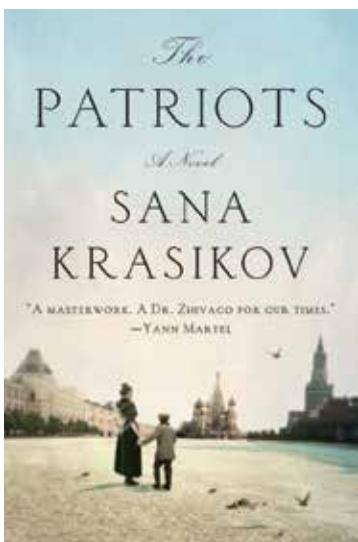
"[W]e're all leashed pretty tightly to the era we're living through," says Florence's brother to Julian, "to the tyranny of our time. Even me. Even you."

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Teresa Donnellan is an O'Hare fellow at America.



War Against War  
The American Fight for Peace, 1914-18  
By Michael Kazin  
Simon and Schuster. 378p \$28



The Patriots  
A Novel  
By Sana Krasikov  
Spiegel & Grau. 538p \$28

## A Polish poet's 'Brave New World'

Why would the Nobel Prize-winning, self-proclaimed realist, lyric poet and essayist Czeslaw Milosz, write a science fiction novel? The radical student movement of the late 1960s disturbed Milosz enough that poetry and non-fiction were not enough to express himself. The translator, Stanley Bill, a lecturer in Polish studies at the University of Cambridge, writes, "In the essays of *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, Milosz analyzes the trends as he sees them in contemporary America; in the fictionalized descriptions of *The Mountains of Parnassus* and 'Ephraim's Liturgy,' he imagines their future consequences."

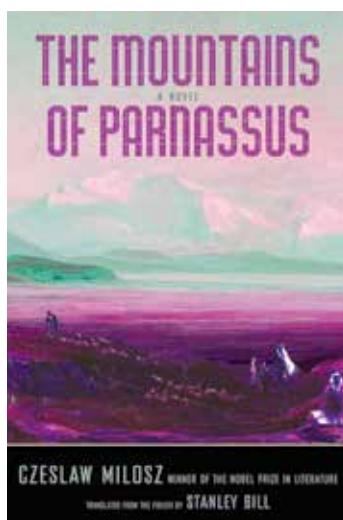
The novel describes a future world in which various unions compete with one another for dominance—the Botanists' Union, the Naturalists' Union, the Astronauts' Union—with the latter being top dog because of their immortality drugs and the privilege of space travel. Computers have advanced so far that gulags are no longer needed. If your thoughts swerve off course at all, the authorities steer you through tiny events into the correct way of thinking without your knowing it.

Milosz's dystopia resembles *Brave New World* more than *1984*. Watching television, indulging in promiscuous sex and pornography keep most people from rebellion. And the H.B.N. (Higher Brethren of Nirvana) gives an added zing to life by periodically culling the human herd by dematerializing random people. Although

the church has given up the ghost by trying to conform to the world and has been co-opted by the authorities, independent religious communities have nevertheless sprung up in isolated places. The last chapter of the book presents one of their liturgies, a blend of the Latin and Slavonic Masses with a homily in verse.

This book, abandoned by Milosz at the advice of his agent and discovered by a Polish graduate student, is a real find for Milosz fans. His nuanced work is a tonic in an age of absolutism, when both sides of the political spectrum seem driven toward an intolerant totalitarianism, a nightmare Milosz knew too well.

Frank Freeman, a frequent contributor, lives in Maine.



The Mountains of Parnassus  
A Novel  
By Czeslaw Milosz  
Translated by Stanley Bill  
A Margellos World Republic of Letters Book  
Yale University Press. 184p \$25



## A political life of Pope Francis, from Argentina to the Vatican

Released in Italian cinemas in late 2015, “Call Me Francis” could not have predicted the pontiff’s more startling recent statements about marriage and the clergy. But the series, now available on Netflix, obviously has a good sense of the pope’s character and ethos—and where they tend to lead him.

In one key scene, the pope-to-be, Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Rodrigo de la Serna), is ministering near Buenos Aires to a slum priest who has fallen in love with a young catechist. Bergoglio doesn’t chastise. He doesn’t judge. He counsels: The people here need you, he says; your work is important. And if you really can’t leave the girl, “there are churches that can accept you as a married priest. The Evangelical Church, for example.” The look on the younger cleric’s face is comically confused.

“Call Me Francis” is unafraid to delve into Francis’ subtle intellectual conflicts with himself, the anxieties of being a pro-Peronist in the polarized

Argentina of the 1960s, the real peril of defying, however clandestinely, the military junta that oppressed his native land from 1976 to 1983. But neither is it afraid to be funny. Or bitingly political. The challenge to Roman Catholicism dominance by evangelical Protestantism in South America has much to do with the church’s perceived moral rigidity and compliance with the kind of government that Bergoglio valiantly—if pragmatically—resisted as provincial superior of the Society of Jesus during the mid- to late-70s. It is also quite revealing of Francis’ nature as a spiritual shepherd. He does not instruct his subordinate in the course he must follow; he lays out the man’s options in a way that encourages the righteous path. One might say his papacy has taken a similar tack.

If one is inclined to celebrate the four years of this pope by watching the four parts of “Call Me Francis,” rest assured there are worse ways to spend one’s time. If you understand Spanish, great. Otherwise you will find

the subtitles less than fully illuminating. The initial episode of the series is something of a slog, at least until the young Bergoglio somehow gets the illustrious Jorge Luis Borges to visit his high school literature class in Santa Fe, Argentina—where, again, pro-and anti-Peronist sentiments clash and the half-blind Borges is insulted by the kind of privileged individual who will later be oppressing his country.

De la Serna brings to the role an inner life and intellectual gravity that serve his character well. The romance that the pope has said nearly derailed his early vocation is portrayed here as almost entirely one-sided—the young woman is in love with him, not he with her, and his extrication from what is less than a romance is a little awkward, but mostly gentle.

As a de facto politician during the Junta, Bergoglio is unafraid to play hardball, using the imprimatur of the church to extort decency out of thugish generals who don’t mind torturing innocents if their hereafter is assured

"Call Me Francis" is unafraid to delve into Francis' subtle intellectual conflicts with himself.  
Pictured: Rodrigo de la Serra



Photo: Netflix/Angelo Di Pietro

by an accommodating church. Yes, the church takes a few beatings itself in "Call Me Francis," for absolving the sins of oppressors, for complicity with the dictatorship and, even, a decade after the fact, for urging "forgiveness" for crimes that were never prosecuted—or, in most cases, acknowledged. It was not anyone's finest hour, but Bergoglio, it is made clear, acquitted himself with honor, compassion and no small amount of remorse for some very human shortcomings.

"Call Me Francis" is occasionally much too talky, the direction workmanlike. But the charity and soulfulness of the story are considerable. That it was purchased by Netflix from an Italian production company owned by Silvio Berlusconi might give one pause. But why be small-minded about such a big-hearted story?

---

John Anderson is a television and film critic for *The Wall Street Journal* and a regular contributor to the Arts & Leisure section of *The New York Times*.

## The Leave-Taking of Jesus Christ (and Richard Simmons)

There was definitely some animated conversation that followed Jesus' announcement that he is ascending into heaven. I'm going to say a few voices were raised, a few tears were shed. And at some point, someone (ahem, Peter) almost certainly grabbed Jesus' knees and refused to let go.

The feast of the Ascension is still many weeks away, but listening to the popular podcast "Missing Richard Simmons," it has been hard not to think about that untold awkward and uncomfortable moment in the life of Jesus and his disciples.

"Simmons" presents itself as a celebrity version of the hit investigative podcast "Serial." In 2014 the hyper-extroverted fitness guru Richard Simmons suddenly withdrew from the world. He stopped teaching fitness classes, stopped coming out to say hello to all the tour buses, stopped answering calls or emails—even from people who had known him for decades. Dan Taberski, a former producer at "The Daily Show," had been a student in Simmons's weekly "Slimmins" exercise classes.



Photo courtesy of Dan Taberski

Concerned for his "friend," he sets out in the podcast to discover what had happened and whether Simmons is O.K.

Now, launching a public investigation via a national podcast might seem a strange way to check in on a friend. But at first, Taberski seems to be coming from a good place. We learn about Simmons's past, how he had considered becoming a priest and how he saw his fitness work as a ministry.

"Do you understand why Richard is so important to me?" Taberski asks Simmons's longtime manager, Michael Catalano, rushing to add, "And the people that love him?" He also notes that he feels better now, having heard that Simmons really is O.K.

"I can't say that Richard feels better as a result of the podcast," Catalano offers. "I think you've really created more worry and speculation."

A long pause as Taberski takes this in. Finally, he speaks...and gives more self-justification: "I would say he left in a concerning way and that people were worried about him."

It might seem strange to compare the sudden reclusiveness of a fitness guru with the ascension of our Lord and Savior. But listening to Taberski, I can't help but think this is what any actual ascension must have been like: people, despite all their best instincts, not being able to let go.

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Jim McDermott, S.J., contributing writer. Twitter: @PopCulturPriest.

► Richard Simmons and Dan Taberski

# I Make All Things New

Readings: Acts 2:42–47, Ps 118, 1 Pt 1:3–9, Jn 20:19–31

Anyone who has undertaken a new way of life knows how challenging it is to leave behind old ways of thinking. It does not matter if a person is a recovering alcoholic or a monastic novice. Beginners everywhere learn quickly how many of their behaviors result from deeply conditioned habits. After a lifetime, these patterns can be difficult to change, much less eradicate.

Living out the resurrection requires such a transformation. John the Baptist and Jesus called for *metanoia*, which is usually translated as “repentance,” but its fuller mean is something like “change of mind.” They knew that spiritual freedom required more than just acts of will. It required a new way of thinking that gives no room to previous habits and expectations. The first reading this week gives a superb example of this. The early Christians in Jerusalem shared a life that was starkly different from communities outside the church. In their prayer and care for each other, they gave the world an example of radically changed thinking.

The Gospel reading today shows how difficult such changes can be at first. Jesus won a victory not just over death, but over death’s grip on the human mind. His resurrection confounded the leaders who sought to gain by his death. He shared this victory with his disciples not with displays of power but with greetings of peace. He sent them out with the Spirit, not to do battle like Israel’s judges of old but to forgive sins and preach repentance.

Thomas too had to overcome his habits of thought. He initially responded exactly as the world had conditioned him to respond. Even if he had found his fellow disciples trustworthy in the past, he refused to believe their improbable story without the proof of his own senses. That Jesus returned a week later to give Thomas that very proof shows how much our Lord loved him and how important it was for them to understand and believe in his resurrection.

Disciples in every generation must overcome the same conditioning in order to live out the resurrection. Our second reading fixes our minds on the children of God we can become—imperishable, undefiled, unfading. We do not

*Through this belief you may have life in his name.*

(Jn 20:31)



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

**How has Jesus shared new life with you?**

**What unexamined habits or behaviors did you have to overcome?**

**Whom do you know who needs a message of new life?**

have the opportunity that Thomas had, to put our hands on the physical wounds of Christ, but images like this can help us transform our minds without having seen. Historically, many people have seen the wisdom of Christ’s ethical teachings and even applied them to their acts and decisions. Fewer have been able to live without a habitual, if subconscious, fear of death. The apparent triumph of decay and loss over everything we hold dear can drive even the best of us to despair and cynicism. New life requires committed belief that Christ’s resurrection is a foreshadowing of our own. As this belief in our own resurrection grows in us, old habits rooted in fear of death and loss start to lose their power. We can forgive and teach others to do so; we can experience peace even in the midst of conflict; we can find reasons for faith when all around us despair; we can become servants of Christ’s mission, sharing his risen life with all we meet.

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Michael R. Simone, S.J., is an assistant professor of Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

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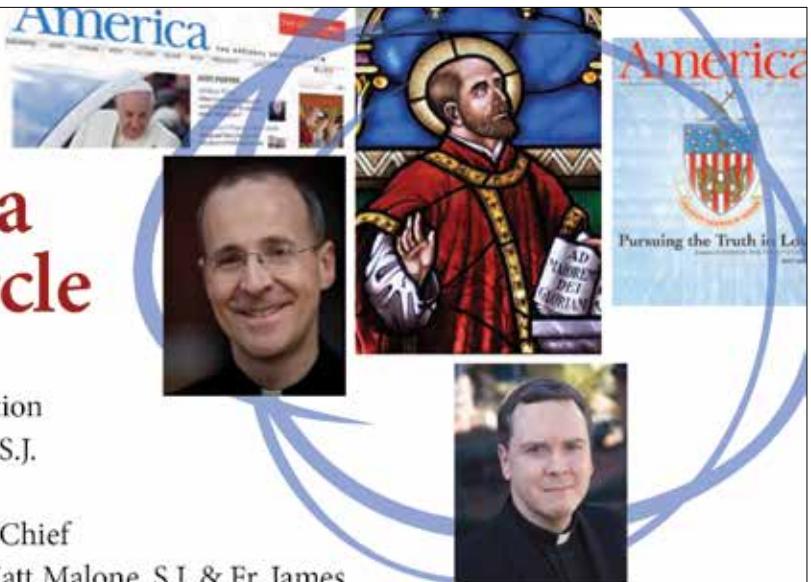
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# “Incredible Things Today”

Readings: Acts 2:14-33, Ps 16, 1 Pt 1:17-21, Lk 24:13-35

Early in “Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope,” Luke Skywalker meets Ben Kenobi, a “strange old hermit who lives out beyond the dune sea.” Luke is fascinated by the man’s stories and antique lightsaber, but much of what Luke sees confirms his uncle’s description of Ben: a “crazy old wizard” and something of a crackpot. When Ben invites Luke to join the rebellion with him, Luke thinks him delusional.

The viewer realizes before Luke does that Ben is not what he appears. When a team of stormtroopers stops to question them, Ben waves his hand and the troopers start to repeat every word he says. The viewer realizes that, whatever else Ben may be, he is not some senile kook. It is a moment of dramatic revelation, when all at once the viewer recognizes Obi-Wan Kenobi to be a Jedi knight of significant power.

A similar scene appears in the Gospel today. Luke the Evangelist likes these moments of dramatic revelation and gives us many of them in his writings. The shepherds in awe at the manger, Simeon and Anna giving praise in the

temple, the crowds astonished at the healing of the paralytic, Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus—Luke recognizes that for many of Jesus’ followers, discipleship only began with a moment of astonished recognition when, “struck with awe, they said, ‘We have seen incredible things today’” (Lk 5:26).

Luke passed on the Emmaus story to help later disciples share in this astonishment and recognition. The narrative begins with two disciples trying to figure out the meaning of the events surrounding Jesus’ death. Luke has them conversing and debating among themselves, but this was clearly getting them nowhere; Luke calls their frustration “slowness of heart.” It was only when they encountered a stranger with different ideas that their hearts began to burn with understanding. Moreover, it was only after an act of hospitality, their invitation to Jesus to lodge and eat with them, that they came to recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. In this we see the effects of Luke’s Greek education, which held that truth can best be found through extended dialogue.

In this Gospel passage, Luke teaches disciples of every era how to recognize Jesus even when they do not expect him. When the disciples looked only within, they met with frustration. There is something about life in Christ that resists solitary investigation. It is through encounters with other persons—through conversation, hospitality, service, even debate—that Jesus most reliably reveals himself. As the disciples did in today’s Gospel, we can prepare our hearts by meditating on the word of God, reflecting on our experiences and showing hospitality to others. Just as they found Christ only when they welcomed a stranger, so must we be ready to encounter another whose words can set our hearts afire.

*He was known before the foundation of the world but revealed in the final time.  
(1 Pt 1:20)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How have you frustrated yourself trying to find Christ without starting by encountering others?

When has Christ surprised you in an encounter with a stranger? What led you to recognize Christ’s presence?

Michael R. Simone, S.J., is an assistant professor of Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

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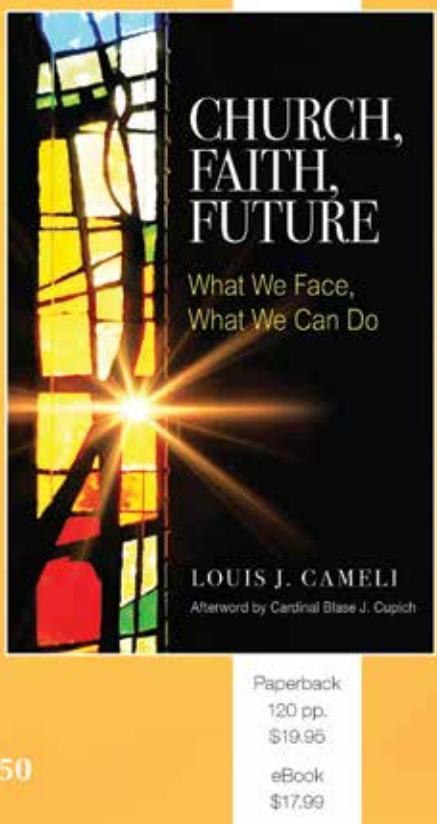
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# Sanctifying the Acela

## *My travels with St. Katharine Drexel*

By Kathryn Jean Lopez



*St. Katharine Drexel is stalking me.* This is a thought that often crosses my mind. I travel frequently between the Big Apple and the nation's capital. And as I look from my Acela Express window, or pass by in a cab at Philadelphia's 30th Street Station, I often have this feeling. The most obvious reason is the skyscraper building with her family name on it that you can see from the train.

"What about you?" It's the question St. Katharine, homegrown saint of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, heard from Pope Leo XIII when she was in Rome telling him about the need for someone in the church to do something about mission work to the poor—among the American Indian and black populations especially—in the United States. The successor of Peter turned it into an examination of conscience for the heiress (as it happened).

We are so prone (in the church and beyond) to ask what a pope, a bishop, a priest or a president should be doing. We are often exceptional at coming up with to-dos and wish lists and even demands for others. But instead we should ask: What about me? What can I do today, beyond protests and expressing our discontent or resistance?

As Pope Francis put it at St. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Philadelphia as he recounted the Katharine-Leo story: "Those words changed Katharine's life, because they reminded her that, in the end, every Christian man and woman, by virtue of baptism, has received a mission. Each one of us has to respond,

as best we can, to the Lord's call to build up his body, the church." How does the Gospel mission—the life of the Beatitudes—speak to each one of us, right now? As a counter to the misery of the world, in total gratitude for who God is in and what he has done for us?

Are we building up? Maybe it's the same question, but it seems worth asking again: Are we doing more than tearing down?

These are just some of the thoughts that cross my mind as I head to another "important event" in Washington or New York.

St. Katharine's presence seems to be a nudge to the memory—about the recent past and about who we are and are called to be. When Pope Francis came to the United States, he in many ways reminded us of everything we really need to know. He talked about conversion. He talked (naturally) about mercy. He talked about religious liberty and marriage and family and immigration. And none of it was box-checking or talking points but a pastor's plea. (I often think of him as the Jesuit spiritual director of the world, prompting an examination of conscience at nearly every turn, especially in his homilies.) When he was here at the Festival of Families on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, setting aside prepared remarks, he also talked about God dreaming us. At a time when it can seem like we have no time—or hope for such a thing—God wants to draw us out of all distractions

and temptations to despair. To dream with him in love.

Sometime around the pope's visit, I noticed that Katharine Drexel died the same year William F. Buckley Jr. founded National Review, the magazine I have worked at for two decades. Something struck me about that little historic fact, like a torch being passed at the end of a marathon. It was as if Katharine were pointing it out to me as an added prod to the urgency of holiness, radical generosity and total surrender to the life of the Trinity. It prompted the question again: What about me?

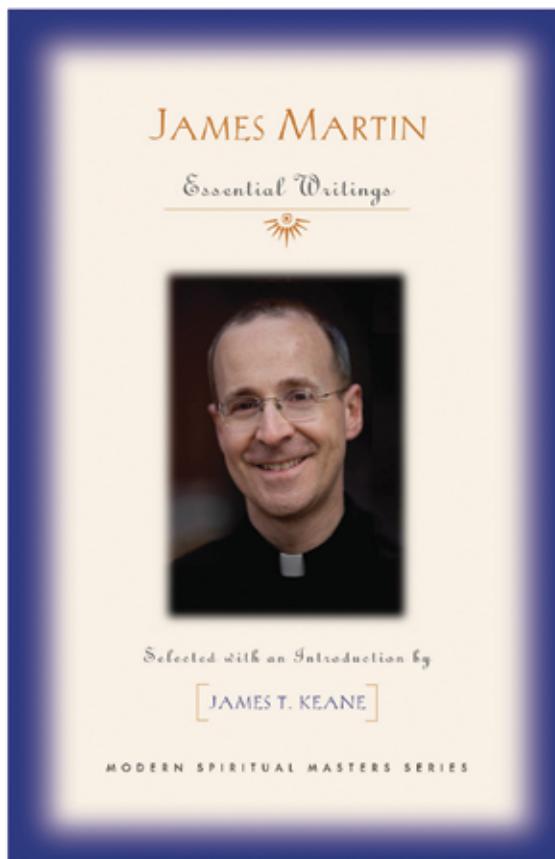
Instead of cursing the darkness, as they say, maybe the journey of Lent and Easter this year is for each one of us to ask God: "What about me?" Our list of complaints about injustices may be only as good as our credibility in answering Pope Leo's question. And let God dream his will in us—and give us the grace to transform our lives and the lives of men and women and children on the peripheries all throughout the Northeast Corridor and the world over.

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Kathryn Jean Lopez, a senior fellow at the National Review Institute, directs its Center on Religion, Culture, and Civil Society. She is editor at large of National Review and the co-author, with Austen Ivereigh, of *How to Defend the Faith Without Raising Your Voice*. Twitter: @KathrynLopez.

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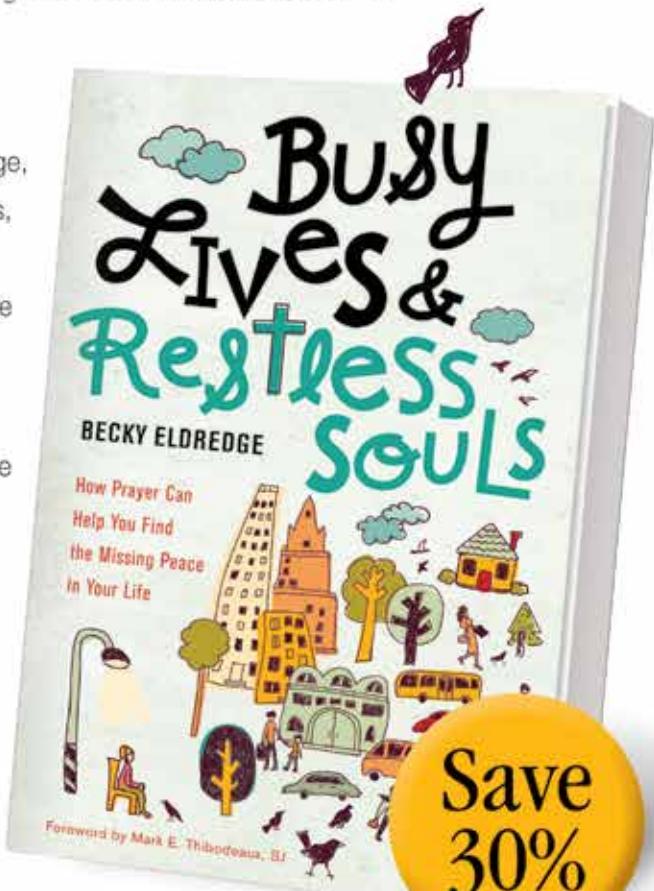
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