

# America

AUGUST 2021

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

## THE FALLOUT

### A New 'America' Survey on Sexual Abuse

---

How the crisis has shaped  
Catholic attitudes and beliefs

Thomas P. Gaunt and Mark M. Gray

p12

**PLUS:**

Facebook Wants a  
Monopoly on Human  
Connection

p24

Why Nationalism and  
the Church Don't Mix

p30

It's Time for a U.S.  
Plenary Council

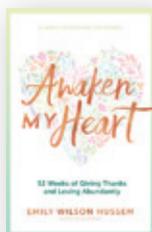
p40

# 2021 Award-Winning Books

We are proud to announce that the Catholic Media Association (CMA) and the Association of Catholic Publishers (ACP) recently honored several Ave Maria Press books. Please join us as we celebrate these award winners.



## FIRST-PLACE AWARDS

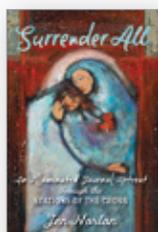


**EMILY WILSON HUSSEM**

**CMA:** First Place  
(Best Front-Cover Artwork)

**CMA:** Second Place  
(Collection of Prayers)

**ACP:** Second Place (Prayer)

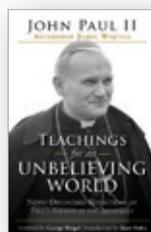


**JEN NORTON**

**ACP:** First Place (Prayer)

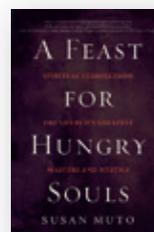
**CMA:** Honorable mention  
(Design and Production)

**CMA:** Honorable mention  
(First-Time Author)



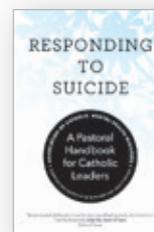
**JOHN PAUL II**

**CMA:** First Place  
(English Translation Editions)



**SUSAN MUTO**

**CMA:** First Place  
(Spirituality)



**DEACON ED SHOENER  
AND BISHOP  
JOHN P. DOLAN**

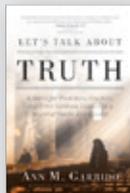
**ACP:** First Place  
(Resources for Ministry)

**CMA:** Third Place  
(Pastoral Ministry)



**MALLORY SMYTH**

**CMA:** Second Place  
(Popular Presentation  
of the Faith)



**ANN M. GARRIDO**

**CMA:** Second Place  
(Church Professional)



**DEBRA KELSEY-DAVIS  
AND KELLY JOHNSON**

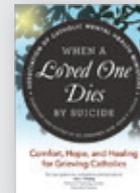
**CMA:** Second Place  
(Best Front-Cover Artwork)

**ACP:** Third Place  
(General Interest)



**DANIELLE BEAN**

**CMA:** Second Place  
(Family Life)



**DEACON ED SHOENER  
AND BISHOP  
JOHN P. DOLAN**

**ACP:** Second Place  
(General Interest)

**CMA:** Honorable mention  
(Grief and Bereavement)



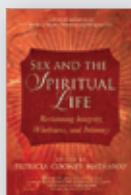
**BOB  
SCHUCHTS**

**CMA:**  
Third Place  
(Marriage and  
Family Life)



**EMILY  
JAMINET**

**CMA:**  
Third Place  
(Spirituality)



**PATRICIA COONEY  
HATHAWAY**

**CMA:** Third Place  
(Morality, Ethics,  
Christology, Mariology,  
and Redemption)



**BRANDON  
VOGT**

**CMA:** Third Place  
(Popular  
Presentation  
of the Faith)



**POPE FRANCIS**

**CMA:**  
Third Place  
(Books on  
Pope Francis)



**ROBERT M.  
HAMMA**

**ACP:**  
Third Place  
(Prayer)



**RAFAEL M.  
RAMÍREZ**

**ACP:**  
Third Place  
(Spanish Books)

Look for these titles wherever books and eBooks are sold.  
For more information, visit [avemariapress.com](http://avemariapress.com).

## This is Jeopardy!

Welcome back to “America Jeopardy!”, our annual beach-reading homage to the popular game show and everybody’s favorite Catholic magazine. The game is played like the real “Jeopardy!” except that you’ll have to log on to our website for the answers, er, questions. You can find those at [www.americamagazine.org/jeopardy2021](http://www.americamagazine.org/jeopardy2021). And while you’re there, be sure to check out all the amazing digital-only content that is included with your subscription. Good luck!

1. The 35th (and first Catholic) president of the United States, John F. Kennedy, and the grandmother of the present editor in chief of **America** were both communicants of a parish in Hyannis, Mass., whose patron saint is this great 16th-century Jesuit missionary to the East.

2. John Wynne, S.J., the founder of **America**, opened the magazine’s first office in 1909 at this famous Manhattan landmark, where the main campus of New York University is located today.

3. The late Cokie Roberts, who was an award-winning journalist and a subscriber and contributor to **America**, was a close friend of Tania Tetlow, who is the current president of this Jesuit institution located in the Deep South.

4. Joseph A. Califano Jr., a former member of the board of directors of **America**, served as the principal domestic advisor to this larger-than-life man, whose daughter converted to Catholicism and attended the Georgetown University School of Nursing.

5. Ethel Kennedy, a long-time **America** subscriber, graduated from the Convent of the Sacred Heart in New York City, whose alumnae include this famous woman, who was the

mother of CNN’s Anderson Cooper.

6. Jeannie Gaffigan, actress, producer, comedy writer, wife and mother, and occasional contributor to **America**, attended this Jesuit school in Milwaukee, Wis.

7. The father of John LaFarge, S.J., fifth editor in chief, was a famous American glass artist. His grave is located in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, not far from the grave of the first wife of this man, who served as the 26th president of the United States.

8. In 1954 Leonard Feeney, S.J., who published frequently in **America**, was excommunicated for refusing to accept the church’s more nuanced understanding of this controversial dogma regarding salvation.

9. This occasional contributor to **America** was born in Bavaria on Holy Saturday, 1927.

10. Robert Hartnett, S.J., who served as sixth editor in chief, is one of two previous editors in chief who trained as political scientists. The second is this man, who was editor in chief from 1998 to 2005.

11. Robert I. Gannon, S.J., a frequent contributor to **America** and a president of Fordham University, delivered the eulogy for this famous American prelate at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in 1967.

12. Drew Christiansen, S.J., the 13th editor in chief, received his graduate education at this institution, which also educated the 11th editor in chief, George W. Hunt, S.J., as well as the founding editor in chief of *National Review*.

13. This man, one of only two people to serve as vice president without having been elected to that office, wrote to congratulate **America** on the occasion of its 50th anniversary in 1959.

14. For 50 years, the editorial offices of **America** were located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This man, who was president of nearby Columbia University, once visited. Later, he was president of something larger.

15. **America**’s current headquarters in New York City is across the street from the headquarters of the media empire founded by this controversial figure, who was knighted by Pope John Paul II in 1998.

16. This graduate of Xavier University in Cincinnati, who served as a U.S. Representative from Ohio from 1991 to 2018, was featured in a 2019 **America** cover story.

17. This man, who represented Georgia’s Fifth Congressional District from 1987 to 2020, visited **America**’s headquarters in 1965 in order to attend an important civil rights conference on behalf of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

18. In 2007, **America** sent to the printer a cover that asked whether this former British prime minister was about to become a Catholic. When he announced the very next day that he was going to do so, **America** had to stop the presses.

19. Earlier in his career, Traug Keller, current executive vice president of **America** Media, helped to sign this famous broadcaster to the ABC Radio Network. (And now you know the rest of the story.)

20. This man, the 14th editor in chief, has a left foot that is nearly two sizes smaller than his right. Unfortunately, it’s usually the right one that he’s putting in his mouth.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Matt Malone, S.J.  
Twitter: @americaeditor.



# THE ISSUE

## GIVE AND TAKE

---

6

### YOUR TAKE

Should President Joe Biden be admitted to communion?

8

### OUR TAKE

An 'America' survey on the sexual abuse crisis; confronting the church's past treatment of Native Americans

10

### SHORT TAKE

Your pope is not a liberal! (He's not a conservative either.)

James T. Keane

## DISPATCHES

---

12

'AMERICA' SURVEY: A LOOK AT THE LINGERING HARM OF THE SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS

Joe Biden's pastor does not want to 'weaponize' Communion

How far can a Nigerian priest go in criticizing the government?

A burial site for Indigenous children was found in Canada. Could it happen here?

GoodNews: Pope Francis encourages L.G.B.T. ministry

## FEATURES

---

24

WHY CAN'T WE BE FRIENDS?  
Facebook is selling us the promise of communities it cannot build  
John W. Miller

30

RELINQUISH POWER AND EMBRACE THE POWERLESS  
A new opportunity for the Catholic Church in a globalized world  
Kamila Valenta

## FAITH & REASON

---

40

WE NEED TO TALK  
Why it's time for another plenary council  
Brian Flanagan



AP Photo/Riccardo De Luca

People from the media gather outside of the Gemelli Polyclinic in Rome, Italy, where Pope Francis was hospitalized on July 4 for intestinal surgery.

Cover: America/iStock

## FAITH IN FOCUS

---

46

A SPIRITUAL ANTIDOTE TO WHATABOUTISM

When confronted with suffering, it is always easier to change the subject

Eric A. Clayton

## JESUIT SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

---

50

'I WANT OTHERS TO HAVE WHAT I HAVE RECEIVED'

How do we teach our students to lean into love?

Brendan Coffey

## IDEAS IN REVIEW

---

52

THE FASCIST CENTURY

Fascism remains a term of abuse 100 years after the rise of Mussolini

Christopher Sandford

BOOKS

*The God Beat; Missionaries; Infinite Country; Ministry for the Future*

## POEMS

---

45

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Jeffrey Thomson

57

P.O.T.S. PRAYER

Jessica Jacobs

## THE WORD

---

66

Reflections for Sundays

August 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29

Jaime L. Waters

## LAST TAKE

---

70

DEBRA K. MOONEY

The Ignatian way to re-entry

## *Should President Joe Biden be admitted to Communion?*

At their annual meeting in June, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops voted to move ahead with drafting a new teaching document on the Eucharist. Some bishops said they supported the proposal because they take issue with Catholic politicians who support abortion rights, including President Joe Biden, receiving Communion. Here is how readers of **America** have responded to our coverage of this controversial story. These comments have been edited for length and clarity.

I wonder: If the president cannot receive Communion given his stance [on abortion], then should those that agree with him also not receive Communion? I wonder if the next step might be to include health providers who prescribe birth control for their patients. Should they receive Communion? Then it can extend to any member of the church taking birth control or using birth control. Should they not receive Communion? This is not the Catholic Church I want to belong to. We are so divided right now, this is a further division of the faith and church. I am really struggling and praying about this one.  
**Mary Komperda**

How can someone publicly deny the truth of church teaching on these issues and still claim to be a “devout Catholic”? Does supporting Catholic social teaching on some prudential issues grant a plenary indulgence? Who is actually politicizing the Eucharist by demanding it despite the obvious lack of communion with the church? For the record, I wholeheartedly support denying Communion to any politician of any party who publicly and persistently enables abortion.  
**Marcia Dorsey**

I don't agree that it is O.K. to debate whether President Biden or any other Catholic ought to be denied Communion. Who are any of us to challenge the Lord for inviting sinners to his supper? We are all sinners.  
**Joseph McGuire**

The bishops' primary responsibility is their teaching office. Assuch, the bishops are concerned with salvation of souls. The proposed teaching document on Eucharist ought to reaffirm that no one may receive Communion in a state of mortal sin.  
**Casey Patrick Augustine**

I respectfully disagree with the conclusion that “it is uncharitable to assume that those who advocate stricter

eucharistic discipline are motivated by animus toward Mr. Biden or are trying to push Catholics to support the Republican Party.” Torture is explicitly identified in the encyclical “Veritatis Splendor” as something unallowable—mentioned in the same breath as abortion, no less. Major Republican Catholic figures, including presidential candidates, have supported the use of torture. The bishops said nothing about these figures. The death penalty is barred under Catholic teaching. Did anyone miss the execution spree led by Catholic Attorney General William Barr at the end of 2020? I'm not asking for anyone to be denied Communion. Simply explain what the actual terms are. Provide a list of all the Catholic teachings we can ignore and still receive Communion. Because the trend lines there are going to be awfully telling.

**Justin H.**

These examples are among the ones I was thinking of when I said the “church should avoid teaching, whether by omission or implication, that other forms of political support for injustice [other than abortion] are somehow more acceptable.” So to that degree, yes, I agree that those examples are a solid argument for why it is likely that stricter eucharistic discipline will register as partisan. But from another standpoint, the examples you've provided basically form a list of why people on the other side are hypocrites, don't they? It's certainly possible, maybe even probable, that for some people their push for stricter eucharistic discipline involves partisan motives. But it's uncharitable to assume those bad motives because there are better motives available, which a number of people who are advocating for that position tell us they hold. We're not entitled to simply come up with a list of hypocrisies and then announce that everyone on the other side is therefore probably a hypocrite.

**Sam Sawyer, S.J.**

# FAIRFIELD PREP



## for Life

### Fairfield College Preparatory School

is a Jesuit, Catholic school of excellence forming young men of intellectual competence, who possess the conscience to make wise decisions, a compassion for others and a commitment to justice in our global society.

Fairfield Prep offers a rigorous academic program for boys in ninth through 12th grade in the Jesuit educational tradition, with an outstanding record of college acceptances and an emphasis on mission in program as well as a full slate of sports and activities. In a community of faith, our students develop their relationship with God and one another.



Fairfield College  
Preparatory School

A Jesuit, Catholic School of Excellence

1073 North Benson Rd., Fairfield, CT 06824

**FAIRFIELDPREP.ORG**

## Come visit our *renovated* seminary!



**SACRED  
HEART**  
Seminary and  
School of Theology

**YOUR SEMINARY**

- Award-winning design for communal space
- Bedrooms with **private bathrooms**
- **State-of-the-art** classrooms



Contact Deacon Steve Kramer: 414-858-4767 or [skramer@shsst.edu](mailto:skramer@shsst.edu)  
[shsst.edu](http://shsst.edu) | HALES CORNERS, WI | An apostolate of the Priests of the Sacred Heart

## How You See the Sexual Abuse Crisis

The Catholic Church still has a trust problem, as shown by the results of a comprehensive survey of U.S. Catholics commissioned by America Media and featured in this issue. (Look for more results in our September issue.) Seventy-six percent of respondents to the survey, conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate in May and June, said that the sexual abuse of minors by clergy has hurt the reputation of the church at least somewhat, and about one-third said they were “embarrassed” to tell others that they were Catholic because of the crisis.

The cloud lingers in part because of misconceptions. Only 33 percent of the respondents in our survey correctly said that instances of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests were more common before 1985 than after. This does not mean we should be talking less about the crisis—it is not surprising that only 21 percent of the Catholics in our survey said the news media’s coverage of the crisis has been “excessive”—but it is important to present any new information about cases in its proper context.

Our survey does provide some guidance for a possible road to recon-

ciliation. Notably, respondents clearly said that women, both in religious orders and in the pews, have their trust and should have more influence in the church. This represents a major opportunity to develop a new generation of moral leadership in the church. Women’s skills can no longer be overlooked or squandered as we plan for a future beyond the worst of the crisis.

We invite you to give a close read to the results of our survey (in the next issue, we will have more results about politics, church finances and other issues) and join the conversation about how to move forward.

## Church Must Be Transparent on Native American Boarding Schools

Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission has helped all Canadians and First Nations communities grapple with the sorrowful realities of their nation’s colonial past, particularly the gruesome legacy of its residential schools for Indigenous children. Those schools, many administered by Catholic religious orders and intended to be engines of assimilation, became centers of despair and brutality.

The recent discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves at two schools, and the likelihood that thousands more will be found at other residential school sites, have added to the anguish. But at least in Canada, a foundation for healing is being laid by the government-sponsored truth and reconciliation commission.

No similar process has started in the United States, though many of the same outrages likely occurred on this side of the border, in the system of more

than 350 Native American boarding schools in the 19th century that were the model for the Canadian network. And as in Canada, the Catholic Church had a significant role in the administration of this “schooling,” which stripped Native American children of their languages and cultures.

Beginning in 1819 and continuing through 1969, the U.S. government provided the resources and logistical support for the schools; and religious groups, including the Catholic Church, were among the willing recipients. According to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, by 1926 there were 357 schools in 30 states with more than 60,000 children. Catholic religious orders here in the United States conducted 84 of the schools. The Society of Jesus managed four of them.

The Department of Interior is for the first time in U.S. history being led by a Native American. Secretary of the

Interior Deb Haaland has ordered an investigation into the history of these schools and a search for graves of children who may have perished at them.

Announcing the initiative, Ms. Haaland said she hoped it would “shed light on the unspoken traumas of the past.”

“I know that this process will be long and difficult,” she said. “I know that this process will be painful. It won’t undo the heartbreak and loss that so many of us feel. But only by acknowledging the past can we work toward a future that we’re all proud to embrace.”

It will be difficult after so long to determine the cause of death for many of the children whose bodies will be found in such graves. Many of the deceased will surely be found to have perished of diseases like tuberculosis, which likewise claimed many lives among the schoolchildren at residential schools in Canada. But identifying TB and other forms of “natural” mortality among these schoolchildren will

not tell the full story.

A thorough review of surviving records will be important to help tease out individual stories and help build a broader narrative of mortality at the boarding schools. The church in the United States should make every effort now to prepare for this Department of Interior investigation and for a larger, comprehensive undertaking to unravel the complete history of the boarding schools and the church's role in the mistreatment of these Indigenous children.

For decades the people of God were anguished by obfuscation on the part of those church leaders who allowed only a trickle of incomplete document releases from diocesan and provincial archives while investigators struggled to get to the truth about the abuse of children by U.S. priests and the coverup of those crimes. The church in the United States must demonstrate that it has learned from the suffering such failures imposed on survivors, their families and Catholics everywhere.

Now is the time and here is the opportunity. As this preliminary investigation begins, the church must bring everything out into the light—completely and quickly. U.S. church officials should vigorously seek out and share the archives and materials locked away in chanceries, academic archives and the attics of religious communities. Forgiveness and healing can begin only after the most difficult part is addressed: confronting the past, speaking the truth, acknowledging the worst.

<b>President and Editor in Chief</b>	Matt Malone, S.J.
<b>Deputy Editor in Chief</b>	Maurice Timothy Reidy
<b>Executive Editors</b>	Sebastian Gomes Ashley McKinless Kerry Weber
<b>Editor at Large</b>	James Martin, S.J.
<b>Production Editor</b>	Robert C. Collins, S.J.
<b>Senior Editors</b>	Kevin Clarke James T. Keane J.D. Long-García Sam Sawyer, S.J. Robert David Sullivan Shawn Tripoli
<b>Creative Director</b>	Alison Hamilton
<b>Graphic Designer</b>	Joe Hoover, S.J.
<b>Poetry Editor</b>	Gerard O'Connell
<b>Vatican Correspondent</b>	Michael J. O'Loughlin
<b>National Correspondent</b>	Zachary Davis
<b>Associate Editors</b>	Colleen Dulle Ricardo da Silva, S.J. Maggi Van Dorn
<b>Audio Producer</b>	Deniz Demirel
<b>Video Producer &amp; Director of Photography</b>	Kevin Jackson
<b>Studio Production Operator</b>	Molly Cahill
<b>Assistant Editors</b>	Joseph McAuley Nichole M. Flores Cecilia González-Andrieu Rachel Lu Eileen Markey Jim McDermott, S.J. Kaya Oakes Nathan Schneider Eve Tushnet
<b>Contributing Writers</b>	Ellen Boegel Patrick Gilger, S.J. Maryann Cusimano Love William McCormick, S.J. Paul McNelis, S.J. Dean Dettloff (Toronto) Jan-Albert Hootsen (Mexico City)
<b>Contributing Editors</b>	Jake Martin, S.J., Sean Salai, S.J. Tucker Redding, S.J. Kevin Spinale, S.J. Douglas Girardot Keara Hanlon Sarah Vincent Grace Doerfler, Chloe Gunther, Amelia Jarecke
<b>Regional Correspondents</b>	
<b>Special Contributors</b>	
<b>Editor, The Jesuit Post</b>	
<b>Moderator, Catholic Book Club</b>	
<b>O'Hare Fellows</b>	
<b>Summer Interns</b>	
<b>Executive V.P. and Chief Operating Officer</b>	Traug Keller
<b>V.P. of Advancement and Membership</b>	James Cappabianca
<b>Advancement Strategist</b>	Heather Trotta
<b>Advancement Associate</b>	Michelle Smith
<b>Director of Advertising Services</b>	Kenneth Arko
<b>Account Manager</b>	Lindsay Chessare
<b>Advertising Services Manager</b>	Geena Di Camillo
<b>Director of Marketing</b>	Lisa Manico
<b>Special Assistant to the President &amp; Editor in Chief</b>	Nicholas D. Sawicki
<b>Business Operations Staff</b>	Glenda Castro, Jonathan Tavarez, Elena Te, Bianca C. Tucker Francis W. Turnbull, S.J. Susan S. Braddock
<b>Editor Emeritus</b>	
<b>Chair, Board of Directors</b>	

americamagazine.org 1212 Avenue of the Americas, 11th Fl.  
facebook.com/americamag New York, NY 10036  
twitter.com/americamag America Press Inc. d/b/a America Media ©2021

## Your pope is not a liberal! (He's not a conservative, either.)

*Psst!* Pope Francis is not a liberal.

He is not a conservative, either. In fact, like most of his predecessors (and many of his brother bishops), Pope Francis does not land coherently anywhere on the axes of American politics. And we should be happy about that.

But that doesn't stop most of us, including many journalists, from labeling him, in part because using the words *liberal* and *conservative* saves space and mental energy. On June 20, for example, an article in *The New York Times* began with this sentence: "Pope Francis and President Biden, both liberals, are the two most high-profile Roman Catholics in the world." I suspect both Pope Francis and Mr. Biden would be amused at the pairing.

At **America** we try (and mostly succeed) to avoid the terms *liberal* and *conservative* and even *moderate*, in accordance with a central editorial principle established by our editor in chief, Matt Malone, S.J., eight years ago. Why? Because ecclesial debate is not simply an extension of American secular politics.

Those who would call Pope Francis a liberal might note that he is vehemently opposed to legal abortion, calling it a tragic injustice and a capitulation to a "throwaway culture" in which unborn children are labeled "unnecessary." He has been a public critic of gender theory and gender reassignment surgery. He has reaffirmed the teaching of Pope John Paul II that the church has no authority to ordain women. And under his tenure, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith decreed that priests cannot bless same-sex couples.

*What is going on here?* Is Pope Francis a fan of Sean Hannity?

But Pope Francis has also relent-

lessly criticized contemporary capitalism and wrote in "Fratelli Tutti" that "the marketplace, by itself, cannot resolve every problem, however much we are asked to believe this dogma of neo-liberal faith." He is perhaps the most prominent environmental advocate in the world. Some of his first words on L.G.B.T.Q. issues after his election were shocking to many reporters: "Who am I to judge?" He sharply rebuked Donald J. Trump, calling Mr. Trump's immigration policies "cruel." He has revised the church's teaching on capital punishment, calling it inadmissible because "it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person." He opened the door (if just a crack) to the possibility of women deacons. And early in his papacy, he said that "we cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods."

*What is going on here?* Is Pope Francis the ultimate Bernie Bro?

Maybe, instead, there is a vast divide between American perceptions of papal and ecclesiastical politics and the reality of what the church teaches. Pope Francis sounds like Mr. Hannity at one moment and like Mr. Sanders in the next breath. And to him and to many other bishops, there is no contradiction there.

This is in part because the church is operating out of a legal, ethical and theological framework that has existed in more or less its current state for 17 centuries. Questions of political import tend to be interpreted by a different calculus by church leaders. Pope Francis' discernment—and that of the church as a whole—can take "the long view" instead of focusing on immediate political ramifications. To paraphrase the old Hebrew National hot dog slogan, he answers only to a

higher authority.

Another pertinent reality is that no civilization anywhere at any time has been entirely sympatico with the teachings of the Catholic Church. To do so would be impossible, and even political proposals like integralism that call for a closer alliance between church and state often seem like little more than nostalgia for a Christendom long past and often misremembered.

Further, as any historian can attest, Catholicism exists and has thrived historically in the United States not *in spite of* its lack of authority over civil society but *because of it*. The state does not appoint bishops, and the bishops do not run statehouses; Catholics are free to practice their religion, and the majority of Americans are free to ignore what the Catholic bishops say. We forget at our peril that marriages between church and state, even in the 20th century, have often resulted in a loss of faith correlative to the gain in political power. Remember Generalissimo Franco in Spain? Read anything positive about Catholicism in Ireland recently?

At the end of the day, are some popes more "liberal" than others on both the political and ecclesial level? Sure. Are some more "conservative" on political and ecclesial issues than others? Yes. Should the church be active in secular politics? Of course. But just remember when you use our political labels with regard to Pope Francis, he would likely have no earthly idea what you're talking about.

---

James T. Keane is a senior editor at **America**.  
Twitter: @jamestkeane.



At **Cristo Rey Jesuit High School** in Baltimore, investment has a great impact.

- **100% of our graduates** earn acceptance into at least one 2- or 4-year college.
- Students are key stakeholders in their future, **earning nearly half of their high school tuition** through our Corporate Work Study Program.
- CRJ graduates **enroll in college at an average of 85%**; significantly higher than both high- and low-income populations **and** the most competitive Baltimore City public high schools.
- CRJ Graduates complete **college degrees at rates 2x higher** than other students from low-income backgrounds.
- **More than half** of our 640+ graduates have earned a degree or are “high-probability persisters” still in the pipeline.

To learn more about how you can make an impact, go to [www.cristoreybalt.org](http://www.cristoreybalt.org) or email [development@cristoreybalt.org](mailto:development@cristoreybalt.org).



**Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Baltimore**  
*Where learning gets to work.*

# CHURCH MEETS WORLD

America

## *America's print content, reimagined*

Three years ago, a Pennsylvania Grand Jury report described in graphic detail the abuse of over 1,000 minors at the hands of more than 300 priests.

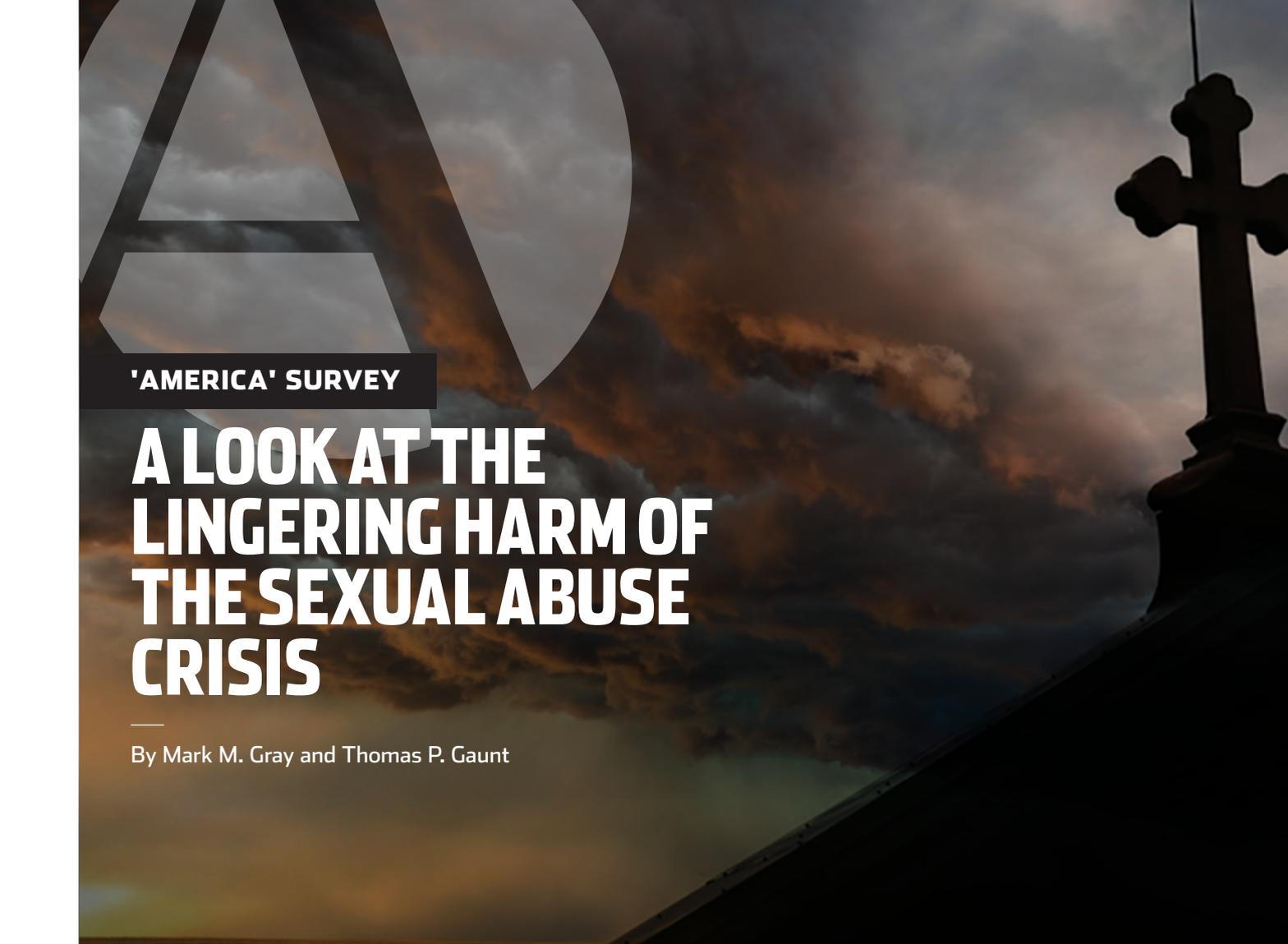
Then, Theodore McCarrick, an influential cardinal in the American Church, was found credibly accused of abusing minors and adult seminarians.

For survivors, the news was painful, yet validating. How did this second wave of scandal—the news of both abuse and cover up—affect the Catholic faithful more broadly? What do they believe caused the crisis? Did the Grand Jury Report and news about McCarrick impact their faith and affiliation with the Catholic Church?

Maggi Van Dorn, the host of the Deliver Us podcast, unpacks a new and ground-breaking survey conducted by America magazine and CARA in the latest episode of the “Church Meets World” podcast.



Listen to the podcast on your favorite app or at [americamagazine.org/churchmeetsworld](http://americamagazine.org/churchmeetsworld)



'AMERICA' SURVEY

# A LOOK AT THE LINGERING HARM OF THE SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS

By Mark M. Gray and Thomas P. Gaunt

Nearly three years after a searing report issued by a Pennsylvania grand jury detailed the sexual abuse by clergy of thousands of children and the extensive cover-up by church leaders that followed, **America** asked the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University to survey Catholics nationwide about their understanding of the crisis, its emotional impact and how it has affected their faith.

CARA asked respondents other questions about their faith, including about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Mass attendance. It also asked about financial contributions to the church, as well as the controversy over whether Catholic politicians who support legal abortion should be denied Communion. In September **America** will explore these and some of the other issues reviewed in the survey, including the blessing of same-sex relationships, women's ordination and more.

Fifty-seven percent of the Catholics surveyed by CARA said they pay "a great deal" or "quite a bit" of attention to the issue of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy,

similar to the 56 percent who said the same in a survey conducted by CARA in 2007. Fifty-one percent of adult Catholics said that they believed Pope Francis has at least "sufficiently" handled the crisis.

Forty-five percent of adult Catholics said the issue of sexual abuse has hurt the overall reputation of the church "a great deal." Thirty-one percent said it has damaged this reputation "somewhat." Twelve percent said it has hurt the reputation of the church "only a little." Five percent said it has hurt the reputation of the church "not at all." Six percent said they "don't know."

Thirty-four percent of adult Catholics said the sexual abuse crisis has affected their willingness to speak positively about faith and Catholicism outside of church circles. Thirty-one percent said the crisis has made them "embarrassed" to tell others that they are Catholic. At the same time, seven in 10 Catholics agreed "somewhat" or "strongly" that they are "proud" to be Catholic.

The retention rate for membership in the Catholic Church in the United States has been in decline in recent



## What do you consider to be the main causes of the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church?

Don't know	<b>23%</b>
Celibacy/abstinence/ priests not allowed to marry	<b>22%</b>
Church leadership decisions/ mistakes/covering up	<b>18%</b>
Bad priests	<b>15%</b>
Homosexual priests	<b>3%</b>
Trusting priests too much, leaving children alone with them	<b>3%</b>
Other	<b>19%</b>

decades. In 2016, the General Social Survey, conducted nationwide, found that 69 percent of Hispanics and 63 percent of non-Hispanic white people who had been raised Catholic still identified as Catholic as adults. (Other CARA research has found that both the retention rate and the level of “confidence” in the church has declined more precipitously among low-income households; see “The church is losing touch with working-class Catholics,” *America*, November 2020.)

Many leave the church in their teens and early 20s. We know some who leave eventually return to the faith at a later age. Eighteen percent of adult Catholics have left the Catholic Church for a time at some point in their lives before returning to the faith. Only 4 percent of that group, given the opportunity to answer however they wished, said they left because of the abuse crisis, although an additional 17 percent cited more general reasons like “distrust,” “disillusionment” and “disappointment” with the church.

Respondents were asked what they believed to be the main causes of the sexual abuse crisis. The most common

response to the question, by 23 percent of respondents, was “don’t know” or “have no idea.” The second most common response, including 22 percent of comments, referred to celibacy, sexual abstinence and the inability of priests to marry as a cause of the crisis.

Eighteen percent of comments found fault with the institutional church and its leadership. Some of the responses in this category referred to failures in screening candidates or fault seminaries. Others criticized the church for seeking to keep allegations secret.

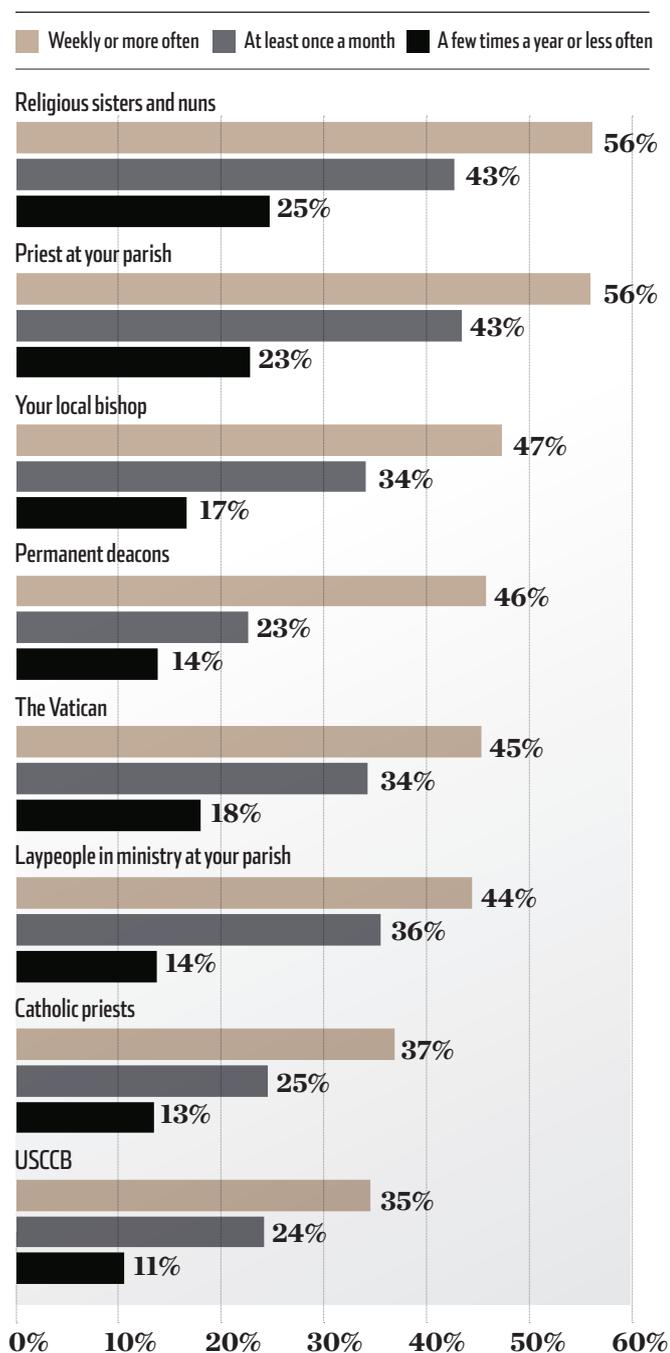
Fifteen percent of the respondents’ comments placed the blame on priests themselves, described variously as “deviants,” “flawed human beings,” “the abuser is out of his mind” or “individual degenerates.”

Three percent of responses suggested homosexuality as a cause. And 3 percent suggested that the trust placed in priests and leaving children alone with them created a situation where abuse became possible.

Twenty-one percent of adult Catholics said the news media’s coverage of accusations of sexual abuse of minors

## How trustworthy in terms of guidance on matters of faith and morals do you find the following:

Percentage responding "Very trustworthy" by frequency of Mass attendance



by clergy has been "excessive." A majority, 57 percent, said the coverage has been "about right." Twenty-two percent consider it to be "insufficient."

### Misconceptions About the Crisis

In 2007 and again this year, CARA asked a series of questions to gauge Catholics' understanding of the scope of allegations. Few adult Catholics understand these factual elements of the sexual abuse crisis, and some misconceptions have grown worse over time. Thirty-one percent of respondents in this year's survey believed that Catholic priests are more likely than men in other professions that work with children to commit acts of sexual abuse. There is no evidence to support that conclusion. Twenty-four percent believed priests are less likely to do so and 45 percent believed both groups are equally likely to do so.

Since 2007, the share believing abuse is more likely among priests has increased by 16 percentage points. (A report completed in 2011 by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, commissioned by the U.S.C.C.B., concluded that "sexual abuse in institutional settings, such as churches, schools, or child care facilities, is a serious and underestimated problem" but added that abuse by clergy has received more media attention in part because "No organization has undertaken a study of itself in the manner of the Catholic Church.")

Only 34 percent of respondents correctly said that fewer than 5 percent of priests since 1950 have had credible accusations of sexual abuse made against them. Thirty-seven percent incorrectly believed that the share has been 6 to 10 percent, and 29 percent incorrectly believed that it exceeds 10 percent. In 2007, the share who knew that fewer than 5 percent of priests have been credibly accused was 52 percent; this has since fallen by 18 percentage points.

Thirty-three percent of respondents correctly believed that instances of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests were more common before 1985 than after. Thirty-six percent incorrectly believed that instances are about the same before and after 1985, and 30 percent incorrectly believed abuse has been more common since 1985. The percentage responding correctly has increased by only 3 percentage points since 2007.

Respondents were provided with the following text: "In August 2018, a Pennsylvania Grand Jury released a report detailing allegations that 301 clergy sexually abused more than 1,000 minors in six of the eight Catholic dioceses in the state over many decades." Forty-seven percent in-

icated they recalled reading the report.

Men were more likely than women to recall the report (53 percent compared with 43 percent). Millennials (born 1982 or later) were among the most likely to recall the report (54 percent). Non-Hispanic Catholics were more likely than Hispanic Catholics to recall the grand jury findings (51 percent compared with 39 percent).

Forty-six percent of those who had heard about the Pennsylvania grand jury report were able to correctly respond that the instances of sexual abuse described there were more common before 2000. Thirty-two percent incorrectly responded that the incidence of abuse before 2000 was about the same as it has been since 2000. Twenty-two percent incorrectly believed the incidence of abuse was more common since 2000, suggesting that confusion continues about some aspects of the crisis.

There were 59 cases of clergy sexual abuse of minors reported nationally from 2015 to 2019 (approximately 12 accusations per year).

Among those who recalled the Pennsylvania cases, 44 percent said their perceptions about the progress the church has made in preventing abuse had changed. Forty-one percent said their perceptions became more negative and 59 percent said they were more positive.

Note again that the trends in the grand jury report suggest a large decline in the incidence of cases over time—especially after 2000. Thus, respondents aware of the details of the cases may have been reassured that the incidence of abuse had dropped off dramatically in more recent decades.

Nineteen percent of respondents believed sexual abuse of young people by Catholic priests happens “often” these days. Forty-four percent believed this happens “occasionally” and 33 percent “rarely.” Four percent believed this “never” happens.

Millennial respondents (born in 1982 or later) were more likely than older Catholics to believe abuse happens “often” these days. Twenty-three percent of these young Catholics responded as such, compared with 12 percent of Vatican II Catholics (born between 1943 and 1960) and 9 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics (born before 1943). Post-Vatican II generation Catholics (born between 1961 and 1981) had a response similar to millennials (22 percent).

Sixty-nine percent of all respondents believed priests are sometimes falsely accused of abuse. Among those who believed priests are falsely accused sometimes, 14 percent believed “many” are falsely accused and 53 percent believed “some” are falsely accused. About one-third of this

## Has the sex abuse crisis impacted your willingness to allow your children...?

	Yes	No
To continue being raised in the Catholic faith	36%	64%
To attend church-sponsored retreats	30%	70%
To become altar servers	30%	70%
To consider a vocation to priesthood or religious life	29%	71%
To attend religious education	29%	71%
To attend church-sponsored youth groups	28%	72%
To attend Catholic schools	27%	73%

## What has been helpful (among those who said their parish community had helped them process the crisis)?

Discussions	32%
Acknowledgement of what happened/openness	18%
Talking about abuse in support groups or therapy sessions	15%
Classes, training, background checks, guidance	12%
Holding those responsible accountable	5%
Faith and prayer	4%
Explanations on what is being done	3%
Providing news and/or data	3%
Other	34%

Because this was an open-ended question, the total sum may exceed 100.

## To the best of your knowledge, when were instances of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests in Pennsylvania more common?

Percentage of people who recalled hearing about this (if they weren't sure, they gave their best guess):

More common before 2000	46%
About the same before and after 2000	32%
More common since 2000	22%

group believed “only a few” are falsely accused.

### The McCarrick Effect

Respondents were also asked if they had heard of former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. Thirty-eight percent of respondents said they had heard of him. Men were more likely than women to have heard of him (48 percent compared with 31 percent).

All respondents were then provided with the following text: “In June 2017, the Archdiocese of New York learned of an allegation that Cardinal Theodore McCarrick had sexually abused a minor in the early 1970s. After the accusation was deemed credible, Pope Francis requested McCarrick’s resignation. As the announcement was made of a credible accusation more victims came forward accusing McCarrick of sexual abuse.”

Forty-four percent of respondents indicated they did recall these allegations. Of those who had heard of the allegations, 50 percent said these changed their perceptions about the progress the Catholic Church has made in preventing abuse. Among those who had their perceptions changed by the allegations made against Mr. McCarrick, 48 percent said their perceptions became more negative, and 52 percent said they became more positive.

Fifteen percent of adult Catholics said they know someone who was sexually abused by a priest. Twenty-four percent have heard of a priest at their parish being accused of sexual abuse. Of those who had heard of a priest at their parish being accused, 47 percent said they believed this accusation was handled appropriately. Thirty-two percent said it was not handled appropriately, and 22 percent said they do not know how well it was handled.

Among those who heard of a priest being accused at their parish, 51 percent received this news from a local newspaper or television station, compared with 39 percent hearing about this at their parish, 24 percent on their diocesan website and 18 percent in their diocesan newspaper. Nine percent heard by some other means.

Using Pope Francis’ depiction of clericalism as an attitude in which “clerics feel superior” or “distance themselves from the people,” the respondents were asked if they believed it played a role in the church’s sexual abuse crisis. Twenty-one percent said clericalism played a “major” role and 40 percent a “moderate” role. Twenty-eight percent said clericalism played a “minor” role, and 11 percent said it had a “non-existent” role.

Asked to evaluate the trustworthiness of different types of people working in the church with regard to offering guidance on matters of faith and morals, respondents were most favorable toward religious sisters and nuns—75 percent considered them “very” or “somewhat” trustworthy. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops finished the lowest among nine options on trustworthiness, but with a solid majority, 58 percent, still reporting that they consider the U.S. bishops to be at least somewhat trustworthy on these matters.

In the wake of abuse allegations, adult Catholics are most likely to believe religious sisters and nuns “need to have more influence” in the church. Forty-one percent said that bishops and cardinals need more influence, and 40 percent said laywomen need more influence in the church. Respondents were least likely to say that priests and religious brothers need more influence. Twenty-six percent said bishops and cardinals need “less influence,” and 23 percent said priests and religious brothers need less influence.

### Parents’ Progress

Seven in 10 respondents were parents. Twenty-two percent of parent-respondents have children involved in activities or ministries at their parish. Eighteen percent said their child has asked them about the sexual abuse crisis. A third have initiated a conversation with their child or children about the sexual abuse crisis in the church.

Forty-seven percent have warned their child or children to be aware of the possibility that they or another child could become a victim of abuse in a parish setting. Twenty-two percent said staff at their parish have warned their child or children of the possibility of abuse.

Catholic parents are most likely to say the abuse crisis has affected their willingness to allow their children to: continue

to be raised Catholic, 36 percent; to attend church-sponsored events, 30 percent; to become altar servers, 30 percent; to consider a vocation to priesthood or religious life, 29 percent; and to attend religious education, 29 percent.

Thirty-six percent of adult Catholics said they have attended safe environment training at a Catholic school, parish or ministry. Eighty-four percent of those who attended these said that the training prepared them to help prevent or identify sexual abuse, and 90 percent said that the training helped make their school, parish or ministry a safer place for children.

Nearly half of weekly Mass attenders said they have heard the sexual abuse crisis discussed during a homily at Mass in their parish. Those who attend Mass less often were less likely to report hearing about it. Twenty-six percent of adult Catholics said their parish has formed a listening group in response to the sexual abuse crisis. Thirty-three percent said their parish community had helped them process the crisis.

Those who indicated their parish had helped them process the crisis were asked what their parish community had done. Discussions about the crisis outside Mass—mentioned in 32 percent of comments—was the most common response. Acknowledgments about what had happened and being open about the issue were cited in 18 percent of comments. Fifteen percent of comments cited talking about the crisis in support groups and therapy sessions, and 12 percent of comments referred to classes and training.

### Returning to Normal Post-Pandemic?

With the country coming out of lockdowns and restrictions established because of the Covid-19 pandemic, self-reported Mass attendance is returning to normal. In late spring 2021, 21 percent of adult Catholics reported attending Mass at least weekly. This is the same share that reported attending Mass weekly in 2007.

Seven percent report still watching Mass on television or online because of the pandemic. Twenty-one percent attend Mass at least once a month and 26 percent a few times a year. Nearly a quarter rarely or never attend Mass. One percent report being unable to attend Mass because of their health or physical inability to attend.

Three-quarters of adult Catholics have already received a Covid-19 vaccine or plan to do so. Millennials are among the least likely to say they have gotten or plan to get a Covid-19 vaccine (60 percent). Catholic Republicans are just as likely as Democrats to say they have been vaccinated or plan to be (both at 76 percent). While 81 percent of

## Would you say this clericalism has played a \_\_\_ role in the Catholic Church’s sexual abuse crisis?

Major	21%
Moderate	40%
Minor	28%
Non-existent	11%

those with a four-year college degree said they have been vaccinated or plan to be, only 69 percent of those with only a high school education, and 60 percent of those who have not completed high school, said the same.

Twenty-three percent said statements from U.S. bishops have influenced their decision to get a Covid-19 vaccine. Thirty-two percent of weekly Mass attenders said they were influenced by statements from U.S. bishops compared to 27 percent of monthly attenders and 16 percent of those who attend Mass a few times a year or less often. Seventeen percent said their stance on abortion has influenced their decision to get a Covid-19 vaccine.

Mark M. Gray, Ph.D., is the director of CARA Catholic Polls and a senior research associate at CARA. Thomas P. Gaunt, S.J., Ph.D., is CARA’s executive director. With research assistance from Autumn Gray.

### Coming in the September issue:

*Survey results on women’s ordination, attitudes on politicians and Communion, treatment of L.G.B.T. Catholics and more.*

This survey was conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University. CARA surveyed 1,050 self-identified Catholics from May 21 to June 4. The survey was taken online and was available in English and Spanish (861 respondents took the survey in English and 189 in Spanish). The sample was provided by the management and market research firm Qualtrics from actively managed, double-opt-in survey research panels.

 The results of this CARA survey have been reimaged in the latest episode of **America’s** podcast “Church Meets World.” Listen on your podcast app and at [www.americamag.org/podcasts](http://www.americamag.org/podcasts)

## Joe Biden's pastor does not want to 'weaponize' Communion

Then President-elect Joe Biden and his wife, Jill Biden, attend Mass at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle during Inauguration Day ceremonies in Washington on Jan. 20.

In his office at Holy Trinity Church in Georgetown, Kevin Gillespie, S.J., keeps a depiction of the Gospel story of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Buffeted by wind and waves, the disciples frantically try to regain control of the boat, while doubting that Jesus even cares about them. Calming the wind and the waves, Jesus urges his followers to have faith, to believe the storms shall pass.

With U.S. bishops preparing a document on the Eucharist that could include a section about Catholic politicians and Communion, a church that counts President Joe Biden among its flock may be in for choppy seas of its own.

The image of the storm at sea was a gift to Father Gillespie from the archbishop of Washington, Cardinal Wilton Gregory. In June, Cardinal Gregory attempted to persuade his fellow bishops not to move forward with a proposal to draft a document about “eucharistic coherence” that some bishops said was aimed at President Biden because of his support for legal abortion. The cardinal, who had previously said he does not support Communion bans for pro-choice politicians, was unsuccessful. The bishops voted overwhelmingly to start the drafting process.

When Father Gillespie, the former president of Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, heard from parishioners angered by the vote, he encouraged the parish council to release a statement in support of Cardinal Gregory. “For lay parishioners to hear other laypeople from the altar making this statement, I like to believe it empowers not just the people on the parish council but tells the people in the pews that they have a voice in this controversial issue,” Father Gillespie said.

He believes church leaders have a unique opportunity to teach about the Eucharist now as Catholics begin returning to Mass after months of being away because of the coronavirus pandemic. He has heard from many parishioners who have been eager to return to Mass and who said virtual worship services did not fulfill their spiritual needs.

That longing for the Eucharist, combined with data showing many U.S. Catholics either do not understand or do not agree with church teaching about the sacrament, suggests to him that a teaching document from bishops would be helpful. But the politicization around the document “has thrown us off balance,” he said.

“This is a time to say, ‘Yes, let’s speak about the hunger; let’s speak about the thirst for the presence of God’... and I think the bishops want to do that,” he said. “But some of our pastoral leaders are making it difficult.”

Father Gillespie said he has witnessed the president’s reverence for the Eucharist up close. He said the president regularly genuflects toward the tabernacle before entering the pew and that he even stayed behind after Mass to congratulate a young boy who had just made his first Communion. Mr. Biden in church is treated like any other parishioner by both priests and other worshipers, he said.

While Father Gillespie said he does not agree with all the political positions of any politician, he adamantly refuses to “weaponize” the Eucharist.

Father Gillespie has already had occasion to offer Mr. Biden Communion at Holy Trinity. Would he do it again after hearing the recent objections of some bishops? “Yes,” Father Gillespie said.

“Everyone is welcome,” he continued. “He’s a man of faith, and I would give Communion to him like any other Catholic coming up for the Eucharist.”

It was not lost on Father Gillespie that the Gospel reading on the first Sunday following the bishops’ controversial vote was the story of the storm at sea. He said that story helped him proclaim the message being sent by the parish council: “Archbishop, we’re in the boat with you. And, by the way, the president’s also in this boat.”

Michael O’Loughlin, *national correspondent*.  
Twitter: @MikeOLoughlin.

## With Nigeria in distress, how far can priests go in criticizing the government?

Ashes are distributed on Ash Wednesday in the Church of the Assumption in Lagos, Nigeria, in 2020. Catholic bishops advised the citizens to use Lent to pray for peace and stability in Nigeria.

The United States is not the only nation struggling with outspoken priests becoming entangled with the partisan politics of the day. In Nigeria, the Rev. Ejike Mbaka has been leading a Catholic ministry that critics liken to a U.S.-style evangelical church, complete with merchandising, prosperity gospel appeals and a willingness to engage directly with national politics.

In recent months, Father Mbaka became personally embroiled in a confrontation with President Muhammadu Buhari over disintegrating security conditions across Nigeria. In April, he called on the president to resign and suggested, in the event that he did not, that the Nigerian legislature should impeach him. The confrontation became so heated that the bishop of the Diocese of Enugu, Callistus Onaga, ordered Father Mbaka to step away from his ministry in May. That decision led to a near riot outside the bishop's residence by Father Mbaka's followers.

The diocese has made a clear effort to rein in Father Mbaka's ministry. In a statement signed on June 3, Bishop Onaga ordered Mbaka's Adoration Ministries to be reorganized as a chaplaincy. "Christ in the Blessed Sacrament must remain at the center of worship and not [a] personality cult," he said. "There shall be no partisan politics by way of engagement or by prophetic naming of candidates for positions of power."

Father Mbaka's spat with the president raised concerns not only about where the church should draw the line in its involvement in affairs of state but also how it could most helpfully engage with politics in a country like Nigeria. "The church doesn't really get involved in politics, and priests are not encouraged to take actions that will expose them to political trouble," Bongo Adi, an assistant professor at the Lagos Business School, said. "But when it comes to speaking truth to power, canon law does not prohibit any priest from speaking against oppression or government

highhandedness or dictatorship," Dr. Adi added.

While the Buhari administration cannot be entirely blamed for Nigeria's current troubles, a national decline experienced since the present leadership was inaugurated in 2015 has been startling. Inflation and unemployment deeply trouble the economy. In 2019 and 2020, Nigeria's clergy marched in the streets to protest the government's ineffectual response to growing insecurity. Many killings have been the result of clashes between agrarian communities and the Fulani ethnic group. Others have resulted from attacks by an Islamic militant group, Boko Haram, and its internal factions.

Dr. Adi does believe there is a role for the church to engage in nonpartisan criticism of these conditions, and if the bishops do not engage in it, he supports priests like Father Mbaka who are willing to take on that role.

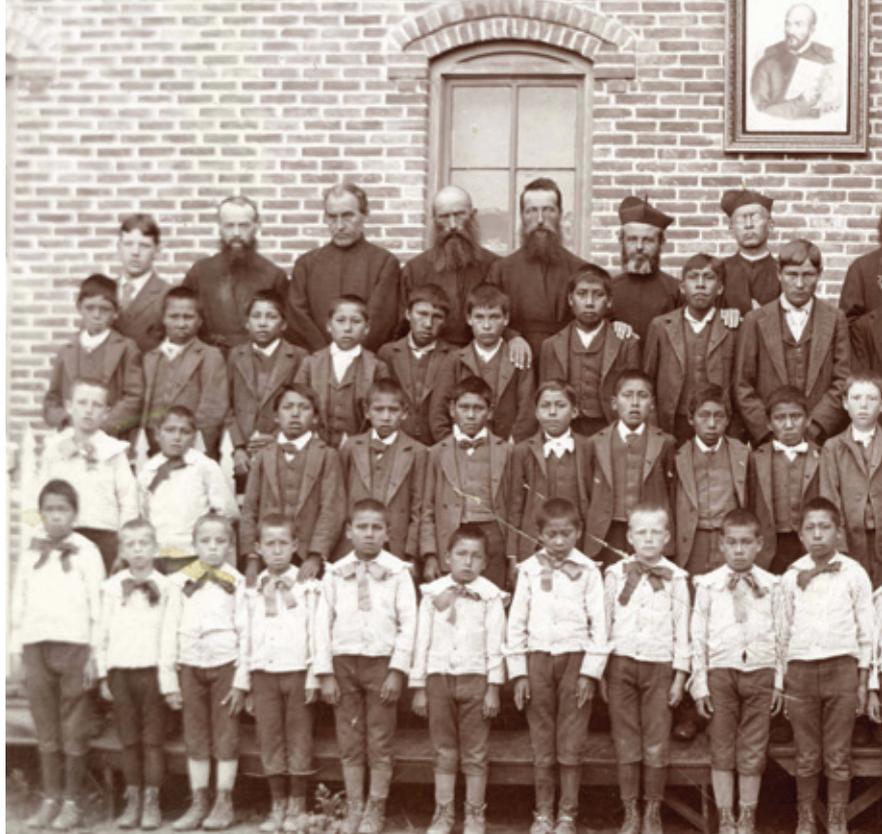
The Rev. Emmanuel Ikeri, priest-in-residence at St. Flavius Catholic Church in Oworonshoki, Lagos, told **America** that the church's role should remain educating the people about the effects of their political choices on issues like the economy or respect for human rights.

"The church cannot do anything more. She cannot suspend the politicians or tell people [who to vote for]," said Father Ikeri. "But she can and does continue to re-educate the people about what the true dividends of democracy should be."

He worries that political characters of questionable integrity have been welcomed by some church leaders, who encouraged tacitly—sometimes directly—the support of the faithful. "The church needs to step up and undo this unholy alliance with the state," he said.

Kay Ugwuode reports from Nigeria.  
Twitter: @kayugwuode.

# A burial site for Indigenous children was found in Canada. Could it happen in the United States?



Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission spent years exploring the dismal history of church-run residential schools for children of Canada's First Nation communities, concluding in 2015 that the national network represented a program of "cultural genocide." Recent discoveries of unmarked graves of schoolchildren have unleashed new sorrow and outrage.

Maka Black Elk, a chairperson of the American Indian Catholic Schools Network and the executive director for truth and healing at Red Cloud Indian School in Pine Ridge, S.D., said the continuing revelations out of Canada were "not news" to Native American people in the United States.

"We are saddened by the loss," he said. "We hurt for the ancestors in Canada who never got to know where their children were, and we want this to be an opportunity for something to be different." But, he added, "the fundamental reality of children dying at these boarding schools is not a new story."

He believes it is likely that informal and unmarked burials will also be found among the boarding schools maintained for Native American children on the U.S. side of the border.

The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition reports that "hundreds of thousands" of Indigenous children attended 367 boarding schools in 27 states between 1819 and 1969; 84 of them were run by Catholic religious orders.

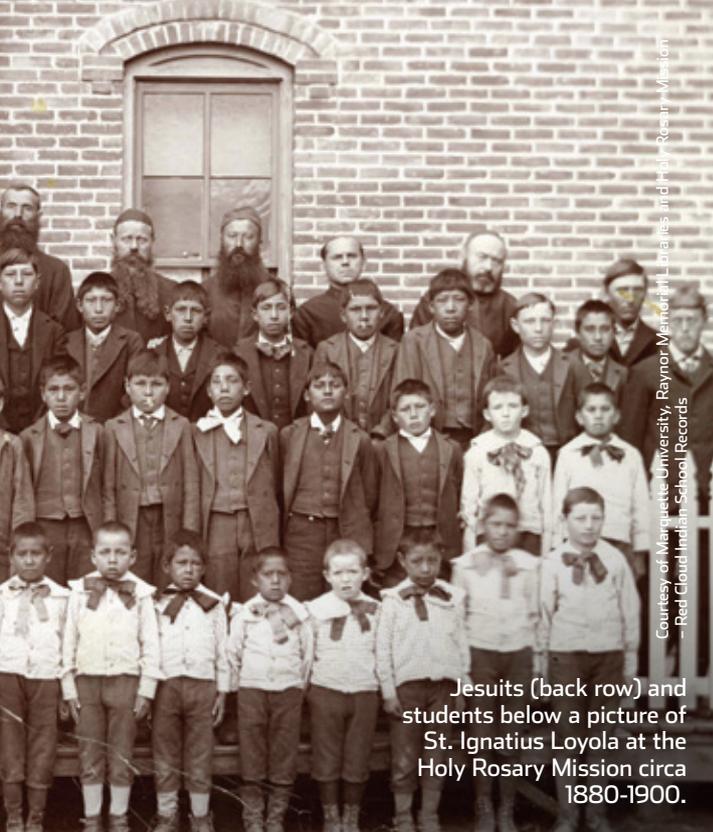
Red Cloud, where the Society of Jesus once administered a boarding school for Native American children, is among a "patchwork" of U.S. schools that have initiated their own investigations into the past. Mr. Black Elk made a presentation to representatives of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on June 9 to discuss the truth-and-healing work at Red Cloud and his hope that the Catholic Church in the United States may be finally willing to begin—and fund—its own examination of conscience. It is his hope that church leaders have learned a hard lesson from the sexual abuse crisis that has roiled the church for decades.

"The response shouldn't be to run away," he said. "It should be to confront this head on."

"You have to face this history and be transparent about it," he said. "And that includes things like the opening of, the studying of, and the communicating of what [church] records say."

The Department of Interior announced on June 22 that it would begin an investigation into the history of U.S. Native American boarding schools with a focus on finding out more about possible burial sites. The U.S.C.C.B., through its spokesperson Chieko Noguchi, issued a statement on June 28, noting that the conference would "look for ways to be of assistance" to the Interior Department's investigation:

"We are deeply saddened by the information coming



Jesuits (back row) and students below a picture of St. Ignatius Loyola at the Holy Rosary Mission circa 1880-1900.

Courtesy of Marquette University; Raynor Memorial Libraries and Holy Rosary Mission; Red Cloud Indian School Records



Pope Francis greets James Martin, S.J., during a private meeting at the Vatican in October 2019.

CNS photo/Vatican Media

## GOODNEWS: A letter from Pope Francis encourages L.G.B.T. ministry

Pope Francis has again expressed his support of the efforts of James Martin, S.J., in his ministry to L.G.B.T. persons. In a letter sent on the eve of the Outreach 2021 L.G.B.T. Catholic conference convened by Father Martin on June 26, Pope Francis wrote: “I want to thank you for your pastoral zeal and your ability to be close to people, with that closeness that Jesus had, and which reflects the closeness of God.”

He told Father Martin, “Our Heavenly Father approaches with love each one of his children.... His heart is open to each and every one. He is Father.”

Father Martin, an editor at large at America Media, had previously informed the pope about the conference, explaining its purpose. He received a handwritten letter in Spanish from Francis, dated June 21.

In his letter, Pope Francis repeats what he has said many times before: “God’s ‘style’ has three aspects: closeness, compassion and tenderness. This is how he draws closer to each one of us.”

Referring to Father Martin’s “pastoral work,” the pope remarked, “I see that you are continually seeking to imitate this style of God. You are a priest for all men and women, just as God is Father for all men and women.”

Francis encouraged him to continue this ministry. “I pray for you to continue in this way, being close, compassionate and with great tenderness,” adding, “And I pray for your faithful, your ‘parishioners,’ and all those whom the Lord places [in your way], so that you may care for them, so that you may protect them, and make them grow in the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Gerard O’Connell, *Vatican correspondent*:  
Twitter: @gerryrome.

out of two former residential boarding school sites in Canada,” Ms. Noguchi said. “We cannot even begin to imagine the deep sorrow these discoveries are causing in Native communities across North America.” She said U.S. bishops would be “following closely” the Department of Interior’s efforts.

So much attention is paid by the church to the inculturation of Native Americans, Mr. Black Elk said—“how they bring their gifts to the church, how they continue to transform themselves to be their best selves, without changing who they are.”

Mr. Black Elk suggested that the time has come for the mainstream U.S. Catholic community to begin a similar self-examination. “People failed then not just to live by today’s standards, they failed to live by Gospel standards...to live up to what the faith calls people to.”

That failure has to be acknowledged, he said.

“I think that’s an important part of healing,” Mr. Black Elk said. “It’s much bigger than individual [Native American] survivors overcoming their own trauma. Yes, that’s core and important, but healing in this case is for everyone, including those who inherit the legacy of the perpetrator.

“Healing has to happen there, too.”

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent*.  
Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.

# INSIDE AMERICA

HIGHLIGHTING WHAT IS HAPPENING INSIDE AMERICA MEDIA. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT



## America Media wins 56 awards from the Catholic Media Association

Year after year, America Media continues to be recognized and given awards for our excellence in journalism. This year was no exception, as we received the most awards in our history from the Catholic Media Association.

On June 11, America Media received 56 awards for its groundbreaking coverage of events at the intersection of the church and world across print, digital, audio and video. Recognized for both its intellectual content and spiritual resources, America Media received honors in the categories:



- Best Essay-National General Interest Magazines: *Matt Malone, S.J., An open letter to my fellow white Americans*
- Best Feature Article-2020 Election: *John W. Miller, A Road Trip Through the Swing States (Before the Coronavirus Hit)*
- Best Reporting of Social Justice Issues: Care for God's Creation: *Anna Keating, How should Catholics respond to fears of a climate change apocalypse?*
- Best Writing-In-Depth: *Kevin Clarke, The church is losing touch with working-class Catholics*
- Best Writing-Analysis: *Nathan Schneider, A Catholic Case for Open Borders*
- Best Website
- Best Freestanding Presentation of Online Video-News: *Colleen Dulle, Top 5 Takeaways from the McCarrick Report*
- Best Podcast-Social Justice Issues: *Voting Catholic*
- Best Book Review Section: *Fall Literary Review*

The awards were announced during the Catholic Media Conference. The Catholic Media Association provides professional development and networking opportunities for journalists and media specialists committed to providing a Catholic perspective.

## PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

### 'CHURCH MEETS WORLD: THE AMERICA MAGAZINE PODCAST'

CMA Awards Second Place: Best Podcast-Expression of Faith

**CHURCH  
MEETS  
WORLD**



**The Memory of God:** How residents of one New York rehabilitation center survived Covid

As the world went into lockdown, the residents at Terrance Cardinal Cooke—a Catholic nursing home and rehabilitation center run by the Archdiocese of New York—did too. Many seniors required long-term care while others had only expected to stay for a short period of recovery. The pandemic changed everyone's experience. Ricardo da Silva, S.J., an associate editor at **America**, takes us through the center to hear from the residents who not only survived Covid but persevered

through a year of extreme isolation from family, friends and loved ones. Hear their stories and where they were able to find what their chaplain, Juan Toro, calls "the memory of God."

"Church Meets World" is the best of our magazine content reimaged in podcast form. Each episode explores a different topic through immersive stories told by **America's** editors. It's not only what you read in our pages but how you hear it.

Listen on your favorite podcast app or at [americamagazine.org/podcasts](http://americamagazine.org/podcasts).

## AMERICA PERSONALITY

Meet **America's** smart, talented and dedicated contributors.

Get to know the people who make all we do for you possible every day.



**Colleen Dulle, Associate Editor**

**CMA Awards First Place:**  
Multimedia Journalist of the Year

If you listen to **America** magazine's "Inside the Vatican" podcast, you'll recognize Colleen Dulle's voice. After graduating from Loyola University New Orleans with majors in journalism and French, Colleen moved to New York as a Joseph A. O'Hare S.J., fellow at America Media, where she honed her audio and video production

skills. After the fellowship, Colleen stayed on at **America**, cohosting and producing "Inside the Vatican" and video series like "Faith in Focus with Fr. James Martin, SJ." Colleen has loved answering people's questions about the Vatican since she was in high school, so after working for the last three years on **America's** Vatican podcast, she was promoted to **America's** editorial staff, where she works on breaking news, analysis and editing stories about what's going on in the Vatican. Colleen lives in New Orleans with her husband, Simon, and dog, Vinny.

## JOIN THE DIGITAL CONVERSATION

As a subscriber to **America** magazine in print, you are entitled to unlimited digital access to America Media's website. We encourage you to link your existing print subscription to our website to enjoy all the benefits and be part of the digital conversation.

To link your existing print subscription to our website, visit [www.americamagazine.org/link-print-sub](http://www.americamagazine.org/link-print-sub) and follow the prompts there. If you are not logged in or do not yet have an account on our website, you will be asked to log in or create an account in order to link your subscription.

**IMPORTANT:** The mailing address you enter must exactly match the one printed on the label on the cover of your most recent print issue of **America**.

## SHARE THE GOOD NEWS

Commemorate a special occasion or say thank you with a gift that brings faith, justice and a sense of community into the homes of family members and friends. During times of transformation, it is important to stay informed. Share smart, balanced Jesuit journalism and invite others to join the conversation.

With a gift subscription to **America**, you give a year of in-depth news, analysis and spiritual resources. Choose your gift—digital or digital plus print—starting at \$49.99.

Order today at [americamagazine.org/giftsub](http://americamagazine.org/giftsub).



# WHY CAN'T WE BE FRIENDS?

*Facebook is selling us the promise of  
communities it cannot build*

By John W. Miller



iStock

Mark Zuckerberg loves to talk about community. His story, the founder of Facebook said in a 2017 commencement address at Harvard University, is that of a “student in a dorm room, connecting one community at a time, and keeping at it until one day we connect the whole world.” Facebook’s formal mission statement is to “give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together.” In Facebook’s latest annual filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, the word *community* appears 22 times.

But, of course, there is more to the story. Facebook is a technology story: Millennial whiz kid codes social network. It is a powerful marketing story, too, about a corporation packaging and selling data that details our lives. But it is also selling something as precious to human life as air and water; the desire for community is why the company will soon be worth a trillion dollars. No wonder Mr. Zuckerberg likes to repeat the word that’s made him one of the richest and most powerful people who’ve ever lived, as if he is saying a prayer. You can almost hear him whispering: *Community: My precious.*

Facebook has scaled, monetized and in many places even monopolized local human connection, similar to the way Walmart scaled and monetized shopping, and what Starbucks has done for coffee, McDonald’s for hamburgers and Uber for cabs. That community we all long for has become a product. “There’s no way of getting around the commodification of community in social media, especially Facebook,” said Katherine Schmidt, a Molloy College theology professor who studies technology.

Now, at the end of its second date, Facebook nears a turning point. Its future success depends in large part on whether

it can successfully continue to market a glossy image of community to users, politicians, journalists and regulators while maintaining a website whose sole purpose is to run a secret algorithm that manages what content you see to keep you coming back for more. Because Facebook’s marketing of community is only half the transaction. The second part relies on the rest of us logging on to the site every day and willingly supplying information about ourselves in exchange for free communication, information and entertainment.

But if all you want to do is scroll through posts about your friends’ pets and babies and political opinions, do the inner workings of the algorithm or the opinions of its founder really matter? They do when the company is as powerful as this one. A recent lawsuit by the Federal Trade Commission and the attorneys general of 46 states, which was dismissed in June but signals the likelihood of other legal challenges, focused on Facebook’s monopoly and how it obstructs competitors by buying them. The company snapped up Instagram in 2012 for one billion dollars and Whatsapp in 2014 for \$19 billion. Its size means it has what business types call the first-mover advantage, which makes starting a rival social network almost impossible. Why would you join another social network when everybody you love, and almost three billion other people, are all on Facebook? “Facebook’s actions to entrench and maintain its monopoly deny consumers the benefits of competition,” said Ian Conner, Director of the F.T.C.’s Bureau of Competition. Facebook, which declined to comment for this story, said in a statement that it competes “every day to earn people’s time and attention.”

A Pew Research Center study published



# In a real community, you don't get to choose who you're in the boat with.

in June 2021 found that 36 percent of Americans regularly get their news from Facebook, yet the site claims it is an online platform, not a publisher. Watchdog groups have attacked the site's permissive attitude toward hate speech, criminal organization and political propaganda, and blamed the site for facilitating the plotting of the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. The thread that runs through so many of these complaints is that, in fact, Facebook is not a safe space for the community it claims to curate.

## Trust in the Public Square

For its survival, Facebook needs to prove the opposite. That is what is behind its big investments in artificial intelligence technology to help moderate content, its hiring of more people to do the same, its creation of a Special Oversight Board that tackles some of the site's thornier decisions, and Mr. Zuckerberg's constant invocations of community. The company depends, massively, on public opinion. It needs us to think it believes in a safe, healthy version of community so that we will keep using the site as a public square.

If it can manage that, it will continue to expand powers unmatched by any private company, with influence over language, politics, religion and speech that dwarf that of any single national government. The Covid-19 pandemic, which grounded everybody at home for a year, consolidated Facebook's position as the world's premier communications platform, allowing friends to talk, churches to worship and educators to teach. As of March 31, 2021, the company reported 2.85 billion monthly active users on its main Facebook site. It also owns the picture-sharing app

Instagram and the messaging company Whatsapp.

For 2020, Facebook reported revenues of \$86 billion and profits of \$29.1 billion. It is one of the world's four essential technology companies, along with Google, Amazon and Apple. Overall, by market cap value, it is the world's sixth biggest company, behind Apple and Saudi Arabia's oil producer Aramco, but ahead of behemoths like JP Morgan Chase, the Chinese trading platform Alibaba and the car company Tesla. Facebook's capacity to expand the number of connections you can have is mind-numbing. Think about this: If you have 1,000 Facebook friends (not a crazy number) and each of them has that same number, you have a million friends of friends.

Facebook's size is hard to fathom. Taking into account that some accounts are used by more than one person, it is estimated that over three billion people use the site. That is more than the populations of North and South America and Europe put together. Mark Zuckerberg is, functionally, a head of state, protected by private body guards. When he travels to a country, his visit draws kings and presidents and dominates headlines. Pope Francis gave him an audience.

For students of Mr. Zuckerberg's life, it all makes sense. As a teenager, he loved the board game Risk and the video game Civilization, in which players compete to build powerful empires. He studied the rulers of ancient Rome. "In particular, he had a fanboy affinity with the emperor Caesar Augustus, whose legacy is a mixed one: a brilliant conqueror and empathetic ruler who also had an unseemly lust for power," writes Steven Levy in his authoritative book *Facebook: The Inside Story*. Mr. Zuckerberg even named his first-born child August.

Central to the empire is community. Even if you discount Aaron Sorkin's Hollywood account of Facebook's founding—Mark and his pals wanted an easier way to meet



Facebook's C.E.O., Mark Zuckerberg, at the 37th G8 Summit in Deauville, France, in May 2011. It is estimated that over three billion people use Facebook.

iStock/COM & O

girls—Mr. Zuckerberg himself has said it was desire for connection, for himself and others, that motivated him. Exponential growth came, and thousands, then millions of people, *then billions* signed up: humans craving community, grandparents, teammates, buddies, crushes. *Facebook me. Yes, precious.* “Helping people build communities is one of the most important things that we can do,” Mr. Zuckerberg wrote in a Facebook post earlier this year, noting that there are 600 million different Facebook groups. In 2021 he added, “We’re going to continue to focus on helping millions more people participate in healthy communities and we’re going to focus even more on being a force for bringing people closer together.”

But Facebook is selling something it can’t really build. A real community is made up of dozens of people—maybe a bit over a hundred, according to sociologists—who learn to get along over time, who endure each other’s differences because they live near each other or are related. “In a real community, you don’t get to choose who you’re in the boat with,” said Vincent Miller, a professor of theology at the University of Dayton. “You can’t block people at Thanksgiving dinner.” By offering endless opportunities to connect to people with shared interests, Facebook offers a version of community based on choice instead of place. The website amplifies disagreements and keeps people returning to the site, without any avenue for the possibility of a shared experience that might mitigate them. There is no place to go to just be together in peace, only words clashing for eternity.

### In Search of Moderation

In his latest encyclical, “Fratelli Tutti,” Pope Francis writes that digital relationships do not “demand the slow and gradual cultivation of friendships, stable interaction or the

building of a consensus that matures over time.” Even if they have “the appearance of sociability,” they “do not really build community.” Contrast that to the vision outlined by Facebook’s chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg, in recent testimony. Facebook, she said, “is helping you stay in touch with friends and family and helping you know what’s going on in a very efficient way.” For Pope Francis, digital connectivity, despite its efficiency, “is not capable of uniting humanity.”

To be sure, there is no doubt that Facebook, like Walmart and McDonald’s and Starbucks, has added something to our lives. We have reconnected with old friends. Families discovered blood relatives they had never met. Cousins and siblings on different continents can easily stay in touch. And it is a business that offers a service. As James Martin, S.J., of **America** told me in an email exchange about Facebook, “participating in an economic society” requires some compromise. “You might as well not have microphones in churches because microphone companies profit from church services,” he wrote.

But the outrageous scale the company has chosen to pursue in order to sell more ads makes it different and gives it outsize leverage. In Mr. Zuckerberg’s telling, the company is a victim of its own idealism clashing with human nature. “The big lesson from the last few years is we were too idealistic and optimistic about the ways that people would use technology for good and didn’t think enough about the ways that people would abuse it,” he told Steven Levy.

The truth, Mr. Levy and others who follow the company told me, is that Facebook has become too big to manage coherently. “In the beginning, it provided an ethical service, and now, like Frankenstein’s monster, it’s outgrown the company’s ability to control it,” said Christopher Michaelson, a professor of business at the Uni-



---

# Because of its size and libertarian ethos, Facebook sometimes allows damaging speech.

iversity of St. Thomas. Consider this: Facebook has said that 5 percent of the accounts on its site are fake. That might not sound like a lot, but that could mean as many as 140 million accounts, more than the populations of France and England combined.

Companies that figure out ways of profiting from scale often offer lower prices and convenience. They also destroy something: in the case of Walmart, thousands of department stores and small Main Street shops.

With Facebook, something similar has happened, and we are slowly figuring it out. What has been destroyed? Self-esteem, as we compare and despair; our sense of respect for people with opposing views. Facebook can also be a dangerous weapon. Exotic animal smugglers, human traffickers and other criminal groups organize themselves on the site. The 2016 presidential election was heavily influenced by lies spread on Facebook by a foreign country.

For Facebook's critics, who advocate breaking up the company, its business model is inherently destructive. The site prioritizes selling ads by driving user engagement, even though that means their algorithm favors controversial or false posts over the truth. "Facebook talks about building community," said Barry Lynn, executive director of the Open Markets Institute. "But really what they do is *extract* from community." The company's business model relies on making money by selling advertising to companies based on information it has gathered about its users.

## Facebook's Response

The growing awareness of the harm Facebook causes has put pressure on the company to come up with a way of regulating the site. This company has inserted itself into human communication and built community on a scale that dwarfs the population of the Roman, British, Soviet and American empires combined. Can it also manage to

police content well enough to maintain its attractiveness and meaning for the groups that use it?

Facebook's response is that it can maintain good oversight of its communities by employing content moderators and arming them with new artificial intelligence. With 600 million groups, that is too much content for the company's over 15,000 content moderators to handle.

The company publishes much of its artificial intelligence research on a special blog. Much of the work concerns training machines to avoid bias. "Some common statistical notions of fairness may lead to unintentional and potentially harmful consequences, especially to marginalized groups," one recent paper noted. "This could be even more important to consider in decision systems that may affect millions or even billions of people."

The company "has grown so big and so fast that artificial intelligence is the only hope they have for policing what's happening on the site," Mr. Levy told me. But as he reports in his book, even the content moderators Facebook has hired do not think it is possible for A.I. to do its work. And hiring the workforce that would be required to manage every community would defeat the company's promise to its shareholders to seek to maintain high profit margins.

## Community Leaders?

Because of Facebook's size and its libertarian ethos, the company sometimes allows damaging speech. For example, in the months before rioters attacked the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6, "Americans had been exposed to staggering amounts of sensational misinformation about the election on Facebook's platform, shunted into echo chambers by Facebook's algorithms and insulated from counter-speech by Facebook's architecture," the Knight First Amendment Institute told the company's Special Oversight Board in a statement.

Supporters have argued that the local communities that have formed on Facebook are all so different, so distinct that they cannot be monitored by artificial intelligence, and hiring content moderators for every group would cost Facebook too much money. But critics say something must be done. "Facebook doesn't want to address this because it's a threat to their business model," said Katie Paul, director of the Washington, D.C.-based Tech Transparency Project, a watchdog group. "We're talking about a trillion-dollar company not being held to the same standards as other companies."

Ms. Paul has campaigned to force Facebook to monitor criminal behavior more diligently, especially in the domain of trafficking antiquities. “The content moderators rely on users to report, but if you join a group for smuggling antiquities, you’re not going to report your clients,” she noted. “And they’ve refused to set up simple algorithms that might deter smugglers.”

The Catholic Church is not beyond the site’s influence. Take a recent community dispute over the closure of a Catholic school in Crafton, Pa. Parents started a Facebook group called “Save St Philip School in Crafton, PA”. But it’s gotten ugly, with parishioners hurling insults at local church leaders and calling people “evil.” It’s the kind of conversation that deserves a more engaged moderator to keep things respectful. Local Facebook groups often have volunteer moderators, a role that anybody interested in civil dialogue could consider pursuing. But the role can be difficult and thankless and often draining and depressing. And Facebook will not pay to hire professional moderators for every group on the site. “The problem of social media, especially Facebook, is how easy anger, resentment and re-primination spread,” said Rev. David Poecking, a priest in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The angry words linger in the discussion thread, poisoning the rest of the dialogue.

Facebook has facilitated communication in communities of faith as well. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many churches, synagogues and mosques depended on Facebook to broadcast services online. Like many other preachers, the Rev. Joseph Satish, a priest in Dayton, Ohio, said he enjoys the reach that Facebook offers. When he celebrated Mass on Facebook during Covid, over 1,000 people tuned in each week. But when he communicates with his constituents, some people inevitably write mean or spiteful things, he said. “I’ve learned simply never to respond,” he said. “And it would be nice if there were a different social network to choose, but there’s not.”

In 2020, Facebook launched its Special Oversight Board, a group of 20 senior executives, politicians and experts from around the world. Initial members included the human rights activist and former Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger and the Nobel Peace Prize-winner Tawakkol Karman. The supreme court of Facebook is a unique institution, charged with policing speech for the entire world. It made global news when it upheld Facebook’s ban on former President Donald Trump, a showcase of the company’s power, and ordered the company to reassess the

prohibition within six months. Another early decision was to overrule the company’s removal of a post about breast cancer because it featured a nipple, which is easy for an A.I. system to detect and delete. That decision suggested that Facebook is overly reliant on computers instead of humans to police content, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, a former prime minister of Denmark who is a member of the board, told The Wall Street Journal.

Tae Wan Kim, an artificial intelligence ethicist at Carnegie Mellon University, tells me he credits Facebook for taking steps to try to enforce community standards, but says it is very difficult for artificial intelligence to make nuanced decisions. “It’s basically impossible for a machine to pick up on nuanced conversation,” he said. For example, Facebook wrestled with its decision to take down a piece of feminist satire that said: “Kill all men.”

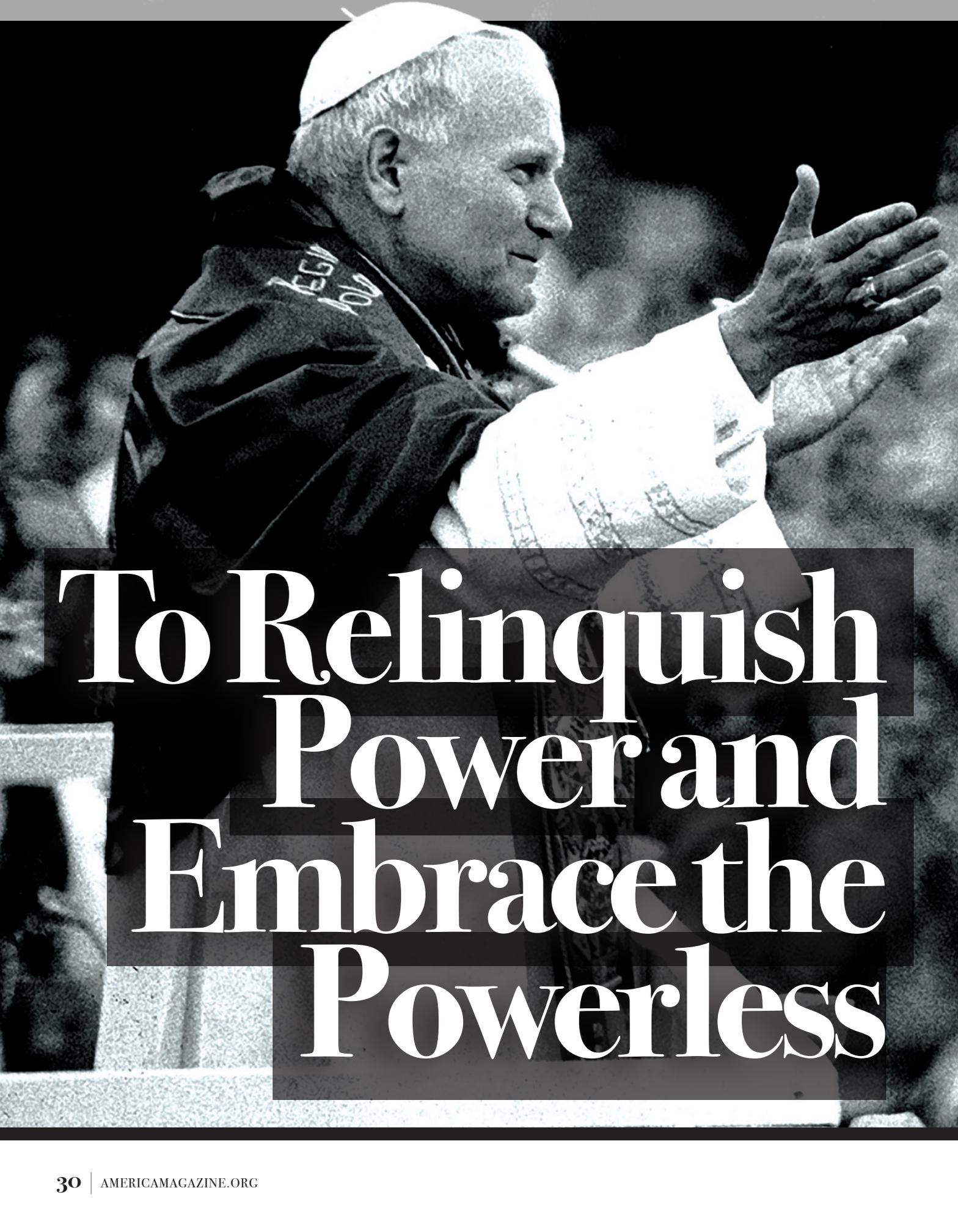
But what should we do when engaging in social media? What is our responsibility? Is there a way to fight Facebook’s monopoly? Katherine Schmidt, the Molloy College theologian, argues Catholics should engage on Facebook and other social media platforms in a way that eventually moves conversations offline and intentionally fosters real-world community. “You can also argue that we should be setting up a rival Christian social network, but that tends to be a more Protestant logic,” she said.

In a post in February, Mr. Zuckerberg wrote that “we’re building the community infrastructure to support the diversity of communities needed for everyone in the world to join ones that are meaningful in their lives.” Whether or not Facebook can continue to profit and grow, its founder has always been right about community: It is precious.

---

*John W. Miller is a Pittsburgh-based former Wall Street Journal staff reporter and co-director of the PBS film “Moundsville.”*





# To Relinquish Power and Embrace the Powerless

# *A new opportunity for the Catholic Church in a globalized world*

By Kamila Valenta

I was 17 years old when I heard the Lord's Prayer spoken in public for the first time. It was in November 1989 during the Velvet Revolution, which brought freedom to Communist Czechoslovakia. The crowd of almost 500,000 people chanted and cheered while the dissidents spoke. But when the Rev. Václav Malý started praying the Our Father, it grew quiet.

After two generations of religious suppression and intense Communist indoctrination, few people could recite the prayer by heart. Many had never heard of it. But everyone understood it was a solemn moment.

Father Malý, a Czech priest who had been previously imprisoned and persecuted, led peaceful meetings in Prague with Václav Havel and other prominent dissidents of the underground anti-Communist movement. The police could have arrested the priest at any moment for public preaching, but he remained calm.

That cold and snowy day marked for many their first encounter with public worship, spirituality and prayer. The Catholic Church that Father Malý represented was very different from the church that I knew. I knew of the church from textbooks that passed through the government censorship and presented a very biased interpretation of history.

Father Malý's church also felt different from the artistic and architectural wonders of silent, empty buildings that I somehow knew I belonged to, but whose mystery was far beyond my reach. As if coming out of the shadows of its cathedrals, the Catholic Church came alive in the humanity and vulnerability of Father Malý. He encouraged and comforted everyone, baptized or not. He was there for us whether or not we had found the courage to

defy 40 years of official atheistic teaching and openly contemplated the possibility of God's existence.

The fall of Communism ushered the world into a new era of unprecedented technological progress, interconnectedness and acceleration of political developments. The church finds itself now in a similar place. It can be a transformative force—politically, economically and spiritually—by standing with the powerless and vulnerable today as it did during the fall of Communism. The church has also demonstrated it can be an amazing force of change in Africa and China. But its alignment with government establishment or nationalism is problematic in Hungary and other countries, where religious leaders, appealing to a Christian national heritage, struggle to pass laws that would bring their secularizing societies back to their Christian roots. This top-down approach is not effective or sustainable in our current globalized world, and it overlooks the tremendous opportunities for revival and transformation from the ground up.

## **St. John Paul II's Groundwork**

Throughout history, Christianity was frequently spread by the ruling elites, who introduced it and maintained it among their subjects. The conversion of Emperor Constantine in A.D. 312 was a pivotal point for the Christianization of Europe; and from then on, Christianity usually spread through the conversion or arrival of rulers, who built churches, invited missionaries and established laws favorable to Christianity. The system of political elites sustaining the religious values and order in their countries was definitively reaffirmed and codified in the

---

St. John Paul II demonstrated the potential for the Catholic Church to be a transformative force for dismantling authoritarian regimes.



---

# Christianity needs to present itself foremost as a religion of conversion rather than an attribute of ethnic or racial identity.

1648 Peace of Westphalia treaties, which ended 30 years of religious conflicts in Europe, established the modern international system of nation-states and made a clear distinction between domestic and international politics.

But this distinction has become blurred in recent decades, when information and ideas travel freely across borders. As most Western countries gradually embraced liberal democracy, freedom of religion and free access to information, religious control and influence of governments over their domestic populations has steadily diminished, and the Westphalian principle of “*cuius regio, eius religio*” has lost its significance.

Gradually, younger generations have grown accustomed to question societal norms and values and to put emphasis on personal spiritual experience rather than to reflectively adopt the religious values of political or parental authority. Thus, the transmission of faith from generation to generation is no longer automatic; and our current era has been marked by a significant decline in established forms of Christianity, particularly in countries with a historically strong alliance between Christianity and governmental authority.

St. John Paul II understood the opportunity to reach out particularly to those outside of government authority. His famous words, “Do not be afraid!” addressed to all the oppressed peoples in Communist regimes somehow penetrated even the most stringent authoritarian censorships and reached the hearts of the powerless all over Eastern Europe. The impact of this saint on the liberation of the entire continent is recognized and well documented by prominent non-Catholic scholars of the Cold War, like the British historian Timothy Garton Ash and the American Cold War expert John Lewis Gaddis, who wrote: “When John Paul II kissed the ground at the Warsaw Airport on June 2, 1979, he began the process by which communism in Poland—and ultimately everywhere—would come to an end.”

The pope’s kiss was not merely a symbolic gesture; he

literally worked to dismantle Poland’s authoritarian regime from the ground up. By celebrating Mass in the public square in Warsaw and in a shipyard in the port city of Gdansk, he was able to engage directly with the common people, who suffered the most.

The late pope also contributed to the unusually peaceful character of most of the democratic transitions in Europe by promoting the ideology of peaceful resistance and by befriending and encouraging the notorious dissident peacemakers Lech Walesa and Václav Havel.

## **The Church’s Fight Against Authoritarianism**

But St. John Paul II did not limit his influence and support for anti-authoritarian grassroots movements to his native country or continent. He was also critical of Latin American right-wing authoritarian regimes. His visits to Chile, Paraguay and Haiti, and his particular attention and encouragement of the oppressed dissidents are often cited as catalysts to the eventual demise of the regimes of Pinochet, Stroessner and Duvalier. A particularly moving incident revealed to the Chilean people that the pope was unequivocally on their side: when he publicly kissed and embraced a young student protester, Carmen Gloria Quintana, who was scarred as a result of brutal beatings and an incineration attempt by dictator Pinochet’s soldiers.

St. John Paul II demonstrated the potential for the Catholic Church to be a transformative force for dismantling authoritarian regimes when it engaged with the grassroots movements of the oppressed. The recent spread of Christianity in many countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East shows that the connection with the poor and marginalized is still crucial.

These vibrant churches, in countries where Christianity has not been a part of the political establishment and especially in places where believers have to overcome tremendous hurdles and persecution, prove that Christianity does not need favorable political conditions to flourish. The rapid growth of both Catholic and Protestant churches in sub-Saharan Africa has been widely reported. Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya have ranked as having record numbers of Christian conversions.

Different from the church in Europe, the African church is not so deeply entwined with the power of historically established political structures. Many may first see the work of the church alive in the dedicated effort of numerous missionaries and organizations like Unbound, Cross-Catholic Outreach and Catholic Relief Services, which work side by side with local people in construction, agricultural advancements, vaccinations, basic medical



A man prays in Beijing in September 2018. Christians experienced serious challenges to religious freedom around the world this year.

CNS photo/ Jason Lee, Reuters

care and education. Direct evangelization work by other charities has also borne much fruit.

Because of increased economic partnership between China and Africa, Chinese workers encounter hospitable and vibrant Christian communities, which often leads to their conversion, as Christopher Rhodes of Boston University reported last year for UnHerd. The American management consulting firm McKinsey & Company reported in 2017 that there were more than 10,000 Chinese-owned operating firms in Africa and approximately one million Chinese workers living mostly in Algeria, Angola, Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia.

When they return to China, they not only bring their newly found faith with them but also continue practicing it and spreading it through underground networks, despite a persistent and intensified government persecution. The estimated number of active Christians there, which most research institutes put between 40 million and 70 million, has already exceeded the number of practicing Christians in France and Great Britain, and it is predicted that by 2030 China will be the largest Christian country in the world, surpassing Brazil and the United States.

### **A Church Free From Nationalism**

In order to be a truly vibrant and transformative force in our globalized world, Christianity needs to detach itself not only from dominating power establishments but also from nationalism and ethnic sentiments, presenting itself foremost as a religion of conversion rather than an attribute of an inborn ethnic or racial identity. Connecting Christianity to nationalism leads to the rise of extremism and reduces one's capacity to see the potential for conversion

among people of different ethnic or national affiliation. The recent trend of conversion among immigrants is well documented in Darren Carlson's 2020 book *Christianity and Conversion Among Migrants*, for example, and their potential for future growth and renewal of Christianity in Western societies has been underestimated among politicians in the United States as well as in Europe, where the question of accepting refugees from non-Christian countries has been particularly pertinent and where many politicians pursue anti-immigration policies, arguing for the preservation of Christian culture.

Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, himself a Calvinist convert from atheism, wrote in 2015 that the acceptance of Muslim refugees should be limited because "Europe and European culture have Christian roots." Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of Poland likewise argued in a 2017 interview for accepting only Christian refugees to "reshape Europe and re-Christianize it."

Matteo Salvini, the former minister of the interior and deputy prime minister of Italy, used Catholic symbols as campaign props. But he is known for denying asylum to hundreds of refugees and for turning away the rescue ship Aquarius from Libya, with 600 people. He justifies his actions in the name of protecting Europe's Christian heritage.

These arguments are based on the erroneous assumption that a secularized European is closer to converting to an active Christian faith than a Muslim immigrant. The opposite is true, and evidence shows that Muslim immigrants are converting to Christianity at much higher rates than native Europeans. They have revitalized declining churches in several European countries.

Both Protestant and Catholic charities throughout



---

## The greatest potential for the future of Christianity may be among those who practice their faith despite oppression.

Europe have reached out to impoverished and homeless migrants from conflict zones in the Middle East, especially Syria and Iraq. Having experienced an extremist and distorted version of Islam, some of them were already inclined toward Christianity but could not pursue the faith in their home country because of the risk of death, mutilation, imprisonment or social ostracism. Bishop George Saliba of Beirut, Lebanon, recently reported to Public Radio International that he personally baptized more than 100 such refugees since the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011. Other immigrants encountered Christianity for the first time when they found protection in churches temporarily converted into makeshift refugee homeless shelters. Pope Francis' directive for every Catholic parish in Europe to host at least one refugee family enabled many impoverished immigrants to find hospitable homes in a Christian environment.

Some Muslim immigrants and refugees voluntarily convert to Christianity when seeking asylum, even though there are no advantages in most European countries for doing so. They convert despite facing a tremendous risk if their asylum application is denied. According to *The Guardian*, the archbishop of Vienna received over 300 requests for adult baptism in the year 2016, three quarters of whom were Muslim refugees. Protestant churches in Hamburg and Berlin had so many former Muslims seeking baptism that they reserved municipal swimming pools to celebrate the sacrament.

Pastor Gottfried Martens testified that in his church alone, Trinity Church in Berlin, the congregation has grown from 150 to almost 700 because of converts from Islam. The curate of Liverpool Cathedral, Mohammad Eghtedarian, who is a convert from Islam and a refugee from Iran, conducts weekly services in Farsi to accommodate the growing number of newly converted Christians from Iran and Afghanistan.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, a strong advocate for greater acceptance of Muslim refugees in Germany, said that Europe's problem is not too many Muslims but too few

Christians. Europe needs a Christianity that is capable of sharing the political space with moderate Islam and other minority faiths and still continuing to be a transformative force that remains close to the poor and marginalized. Europe desperately needs a church that equally embraces all people regardless of their previous affiliation, their social status, the color of their skin or whether their ancestors built the cathedrals.

These trends unequivocally show that Christianity is more likely to penetrate secular Western societies when it is aligned with immigrants and the powerless than when Christian values are promoted and legislated from a position of power. Fortunately, Pope Francis is already leading the way in this direction by reaching out to the poor and marginalized, by his relentless advocacy for immigrants and refugees and by his astounding peacemaking efforts, especially with the Muslim world.

### Francis and a Church of the Poor

Following in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi, who penetrated enemy lines during the fifth crusade to engage in a three-day dialogue with the Sultan Al-Kamil, the pope likewise reaches out to the Muslim world. In February 2019, he celebrated the first papal Mass on the Arabian Peninsula. However, his most remarkable acts of Christian leadership are his engagement with the powerless, such as his efforts to ameliorate the situation of the impoverished and often forgotten tribes of the Amazon and his relentless advocacy for the refugees who end up on the European shores.

He is known to wash and kiss the feet of Muslim immigrants and to welcome and offer a new home to non-Christian refugee families within the Vatican residence. He is not afraid to openly criticize cruel and inhumane decisions of powerful politicians, such as the mistreatment of refugees, the building of border walls, family separations, the death penalty and policies that foster further economic inequality, but he manages to stay away from specific political endorsements as he declines to tell his American flock which candidate they should vote for in presidential elections.

The globalized world needs to encounter a Catholic Church that is not entangled with power politics and nationalism and that will follow the leadership of Pope Francis. The church needs the examples of leaders like St. John Paul II, who kissed the ground of Communist countries and the scarred faces of victims of oppression, and Father Malý, who risked arrest to pray with an overwhelmingly atheist crowd. To be a truly relevant and transformative force, the Catholic Church of the 21st century needs to be willing to relinquish political power and meet the suffering

A woman reads the Bible in Mbale, Uganda.



CNS photo/Tommy Onyulo

and marginalized in their humble and vulnerable position.

Embracing those with a strong Christian upbringing as well as those who have not yet heard the Gospel, the church needs to recognize that the greatest potential for the future of Christianity may be among those who practice their faith despite oppression. In Western societies, there is hope that revival may come from the least powerful, especially the immigrants and refugees, who often end up on our shores untouched by the waters of baptism. The newly found faith of those who convert and their powerful testimonies may inspire those who have taken their religion for granted.

The Catholic Church of my childhood in Prague was stripped of all its former worldly power and glory. The contradiction between the dazzling beauty of Catholic art and architecture on every corner of Prague, and a widespread lack of knowledge of even the most basic tenets of Christianity during Communist times was an absurdity that only Franz Kafka would have been able to describe adequately. Tall gothic spires and baroque domes form the skyline of the city and witness to the former political, ideological and cultural influence that the church enjoyed throughout centuries of Czech history. Yet the role of the Catholic clergy was often reduced to the upkeep of the church building and limited service to the elderly and foreign tourists.

Lured by the serene beauty of the interior, sublime organ music and perhaps the spiritual effects of my infant baptism I did not yet know about, I was occasionally able to witness Masses celebrated in languages that I could not understand and to walk around beautifully ornate fonts filled with holy water, which I was not permitted to touch. Silent priests, who

could face severe repercussions for engaging with the young, never acknowledged my presence as I tried to piece together the basic tenets of the Gospel story, partially preserved in ancient paintings, Latin inscriptions and Christmas carols, which could not be sung outside our homes.

The public prayer by Father Václav Malý in front of half a million people in November 1989 was thus a stunning event and a sure sign of change. Although the spirit of freedom was already in the air, there were still lingering fears of military suppression, as older generations recalled their vivid memories of the brutal invasion by troops of the Warsaw Pact that snuffed out the 1968 Prague Spring freedom movement 21 years before.

Despite these well-founded fears of possible repression and despite the fact that most dissidents and the majority of the public were not believers, many Catholic priests as well as other Christian leaders embraced all the risks and vulnerability and joined the humble and spiritually impoverished crowd in the public square. Under the cold grey skies of those pivotal days, their prayers and encouragement helped change the course of history and opened the gates of freedom for millions of people, whose lives would never be the same.

---

*Kamila Valenta is an adjunct professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in the Global Studies Department and in the Department of Government and Political Philosophy at Belmont Abbey College. She is originally from Prague, Czech Republic.*

## AMERICA'S VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

When I wrapped up my undergraduate studies almost two years ago, I had a choice between two general career options: make money, or don't. Why on earth would I, or anyone, pick the latter?

Our culture convinces us that the only way to be successful is to hop on the corporate fast track at a young age, work relentlessly for several years and then comfortably reap the benefits of financial stability later in life. I think our faith gives us a different definition of success. "Love one another, as I have loved you." The volunteer opportunities in this brochure are invitations to fulfill that commandment in some particular way. Where is God calling us to love as he loves?

I chose to accept a year-long fellowship at America Media in New York City. No, it was not the most financially profitable path I could have taken, but for me, it was the right one. God invites me to love, to learn, to explore each day. That's enough for me.

Kevin Jackson, 2019-2020 O'Hare Fellow



### **Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry**

Ph: (410) 442-3230; Email: [volunteer@bshsi.org](mailto:volunteer@bshsi.org)  
Website: [www.bonsecours.us/volunteers](http://www.bonsecours.us/volunteers)

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry provides the opportunity to live the charism of the Sisters of Bon Secours and receive this charism from those you serve. Serve in the fields of education, social service, and healthcare in Baltimore, MD and Richmond, VA. Grow spiritually by learning through service with others, developing community, living simply, and practicing God's Justice.



### **Carmelite Sisters for the Aged & Infirm**

600 Woods Road, Germantown, NY 12526  
Ph: (845) 768-2303; Email: [srmaryod@stmhcs.org](mailto:srmaryod@stmhcs.org)  
Website: [www.salt-carmelite.org](http://www.salt-carmelite.org)

We are members of a religious congregation founded by Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa McCrory, O. Carm. We minister to Christ in the person of the elderly. Join us for an experience of a lifetime by participating in the SALT Missionary Program.



### **Catholic Medical Mission Board**

100 Wall Street, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10005  
Ph: (800) 678-5659; Email: [volunteer@cmmb.org](mailto:volunteer@cmmb.org)  
Website: [www.cmmb.org/volunteer](http://www.cmmb.org/volunteer)

Rooted in the Jesuit tradition, CMMB improves the lives of women and children by increasing access to healthcare in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America and building effective and sustainable community health systems. Put your skills and love into action volunteering virtually or on-site. Learn more at [cmmb.org/volunteer](http://cmmb.org/volunteer) and find the service opportunity for you. Apply now.



### **Change A Heart Franciscan Volunteer Program**

830 Western Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15233  
Ph: (412) 334-4746; Email: [volunteers@sosf.org](mailto:volunteers@sosf.org)  
Website: [www.changeaheartvolunteers.org](http://www.changeaheartvolunteers.org)

Be the Change you Want to See in the World! Change A Heart is an 11 month Franciscan volunteer program inviting young adults ages 21-30 to serve the marginalized in Pittsburgh, PA. With 42 non-profit partners, our volunteers can choose the type of work and population they seek to serve.



### **Franciscan Sisters of Pastoral Adoration**

912 Market Street, La Crosse, WI 54601  
Ph: (608) 791-5292; Email: [discerning@fspa.org](mailto:discerning@fspa.org)  
Website: [www.fspa.org](http://www.fspa.org)

We are a community of vowed Franciscan women centered in Eucharist, committed to be loving presence through prayer, witness and service. We serve in a variety of ministries, collaborating in areas of greatest need, living the Gospel through contemplation and action. Join us in mission.



### **Franciscan Volunteer Ministry**

P.O. Box 29276, Philadelphia, PA 19125  
Ph: (215) 427-3070; Email: [info@franciscanvolunteerministry.org](mailto:info@franciscanvolunteerministry.org)  
Website: [www.franciscanvolunteerministry.org](http://www.franciscanvolunteerministry.org)

Seeking to grow in faith and act in service? We are looking for you! Join Franciscan Volunteer Ministry, a year long volunteer and faith formation program in collaboration with Franciscan Friars. Live and pray with other volunteers, work in established communities, and engage in a life of social justice.

## From Mission to Mission



### From Mission to Mission

200 5th Ave NW #120696, St. Paul, MN 55112  
 Ph: (612) 504-2588; Email: info@missiontomission.org  
 Website: www.missiontomission.org

From Mission to Mission offers programming to support volunteers, missionaries, and their sending programs before, during and after their experiences. Its workshops and retreats have been celebrated for over 40 years and inspire those who do service to be open to the transformation the experience invites, and to keep that spirit alive upon their return home.

## Catholic Volunteers Serving in Rural America



### Glenmary Volunteer Program

P.O. Box 69, Rutledge, TN 37861  
 Ph: (606) 202-3658; Email: volunteer@glenmary.org  
 Website: www.glenmary.org

The Glenmary Home Missioners give volunteers a firsthand experience of missionary service. We blend service, prayer, and community in an environment of simple living. Our hope is to find Christ in others and to put ourselves last and those in need first. We accept both weeklong and year-round volunteers.



### Jesuit Volunteer Corps

801 Saint Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202  
 Ph: (410) 244-1733; Email: info@jesuitvolunteers.org  
 Website: www.jesuitvolunteers.org

Jesuit Volunteer Corps matches young leaders in roles providing vital service for one to two years with an organization serving communities in the U.S and internationally. Jesuit Volunteers live in intentional community together, build deep relationships, and gain valuable professional experience while fostering personal growth as leaders committed to faith in action.



### L'Arche USA

310 SW 4th Ave, Suite 840, Portland, Oregon 97204  
 Ph: (503) 282-6231; Email: info@larcheusa.org  
 Website: www.larcheusa.org

L'Arche USA fosters communities of friendship and belonging where people with and without intellectual disabilities share life together. There is a place for everyone at L'Arche. Join us in building a more inclusive world and discover the place for you!



### Marist Brothers Vocations

70-20 Juno Street, Forest Hills, NY 11375  
 Ph: (214) 934-9740; Email: vocations@maristbr.com  
 Website: www.maristbr.com

The Marist Brothers make Jesus known and loved through our global mission to young people, especially those most neglected. We minister in schools, in camp and retreat settings, and in social outreach. We welcome inquiries from men looking to discern a religious vocation and from anybody seeking a volunteer experience.



### Olancho Aid Foundation

P.O. Box 204, Accord, MA 02018  
 Ph: (781) 423-3701; Email: volunteers@olanchoaid.org  
 Website: www.olanchoaid.org

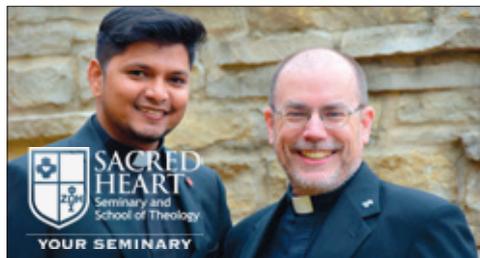
OAF volunteers have come to Honduras for twenty-five years, sharing their expertise in construction, education, finance, and engineering. Put your faith into action with in-person or remote service projects in partnership with the Diocese of Juticalpa to help Honduran families stay together, stay healthy and have an option to stay home.



**Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ Volunteer Program**

P.O. Box 1, Donaldson, IN 46513  
 Ph: (574) 340-6409; Email: cbach@poorhandmaids.org  
 Website: www.phjcvolprogram.org

The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ Volunteer Program offers baptized Christian women opportunities to partner alongside Sisters and coworkers in domestic and international ministries. We serve the poor, the disenfranchised, and Earth. Volunteers are inspired by openness to the Spirit, simplicity, community, and dignity and respect for all.



**Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology**

7335 S. Hwy. 100, P.O. Box 429, Hales Corners, WI 53130  
 Ph: (414) 858-4767; Email: skramer@shsst.edu  
 Website: www.shsst.edu/vocation

Discerning a vocation to the priesthood, but over 30 years old? Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology has helped form later vocations for over 40 years. Need help with English? We have a premier English and Culture Studies Program. Advanced? We have a dual MDiv/MA track. Call us!



**Vincentian Mission Corps**

4300 Olive Street, St. Louis, MO 63108  
 Ph: (314) 561-4600; Email: info@vincentianmissioncorps.net  
 Website: www.vincentianmissioncorps.net

Vincentian Mission Corps Volunteers live in intentional community in St. Louis, MO, and San Francisco, CA, while working to build a more just society. Volunteers work in an area of direct service and receive anti-racism/oppression training. Join us for 10 months of action, reflection, prayer, and find yourself transformed!

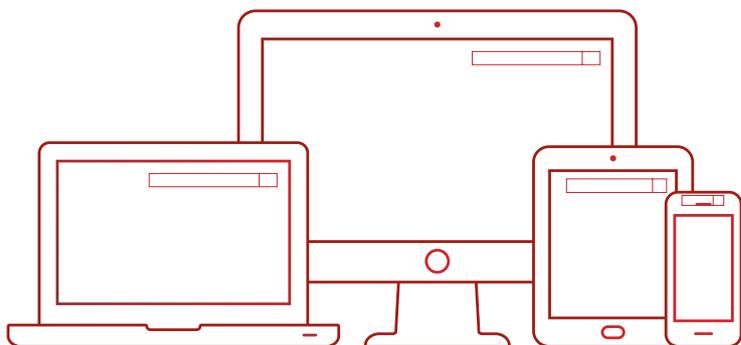


**White Violet Center for Eco-Justice**

1 Sisters of Providence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, IN 47876  
 Ph: (812) 535-2932; Email: internswwc@spsmw.org  
 Website: www.internships.whiteviolet.org

Caring, teaching, and inspiring for all creation is the mission of White Violet Center for Eco-Justice, a ministry of the Sisters of Providence. Learn about sustainability and environmental justice through a hands-on internship experience on our certified organic farm. Grow food and work with animals. Applications are considered year round.

**VISIT THE AMERICA CLASSIFIEDS MARKETPLACE**



Bring us your retreats, books, job postings and all missions! We will support all we can.  
[www.marketplace.americamagazine.org](http://www.marketplace.americamagazine.org)

**CONTACT**  
 Ken Arko  
 Director of Advertising Services  
 (212) 515-0126  
 karko@americamedia.org



# We Need to Talk

By Brian Flanagan

*Why the American church needs another plenary council*

The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore concluded in December 1884. Among its results was the standardized catechism known to generations of Catholics as the *Baltimore Catechism*. This meeting was the last of 13 councils of different kinds that took place in Baltimore between 1829 and 1884. These 13 councils made the United States one of the most conciliar places in the Catholic Church during that time—rooted, in part, in the country’s own democratic experiment.

Given all the challenges facing the Catholic Church in our country, we are far overdue for a moment in which the bishops, clergy, religious and lay faithful of our country can discern together how to be the people of God in our time and place. It is time that we as a church convoke a Fourth Plenary Council of Baltimore. Given the work of practical preparation and spiritual conversion needed for such an event, it should be held in 2029, the 200th anniversary of the First Council of Baltimore in 1829. That will allow us to walk together in dialogue about the pastoral needs of our church.

The most prominent of the many challenges before the church in the coming decades is the issue of clerical sexual abuse of minors and the enabling of that abuse by bishops, religious superiors and other church leaders. We have yet to acknowledge fully and address these sins, both past and present. Nor have we appropriately addressed the ongoing responses to survivors of clerical sexual abuse and other forms of sexual harassment and misconduct.

In recent years, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks and too many other African Americans at the hands of police officers have finally begun conversations and raised people’s awareness of how deeply the institutions of the United States, including the church, are formed by histories of white supremacy and racial injustice. We have yet as a church to address collectively the structures of systemic racism and its effects upon all people of color, who either are or soon will be the majority of Roman Catholic Christians in the United States. Many of us have had our eyes opened to how white

The Third Plenary Council in Baltimore in 1884, the last plenary council of its kind in the United States, was attended by 14 U.S. archbishops and 61 U.S. bishops.

Catholics, who predominate in the leadership of dioceses, Catholic universities, parishes and other Catholic institutions (I include myself here as a white Catholic theologian), control major conversations and narratives, neglecting to listen to the voices of Black, Latino, Native American, Middle Eastern and Asian-Pacific Islander Catholics in our country.

The church is also encountering significant demographic changes, met so far with haphazard responses or paralyzed inaction in many places. Institutions rooted in the Euro-American immigrant communities of the Northeast and Midwest are declining, and the growing voice and size of Catholic populations in the South and West offer challenges and opportunities for the church. Related to this is the broader question of how to evangelize, how to organize and structure our ministries and how to move forward in service to the Gospel of the reign of God in a United States whose politics, economy, social structures and norms are very different from the time of the last plenary council in 1884.

A third issue calling for attention is the status and treatment of women in the church. Catholics in the United States are divided on questions regarding women's ordination to the presbyterate and episcopate. But the questions of women's ordination to the diaconate and the lack of women's voices at the level of decision-making in our church urgently need to be addressed. A plenary council could open space for Catholic women to talk to each other, and to the church as a whole, about their hopes and fears for the future of the U.S. church and their involvement.

A fourth issue, implicit in the other three, is the way in which we are divided as Catholics. We sorely lack the space to discuss, with charity and generosity, the major issues and experiences that divide us. We need to voice our disagreements regarding gender, sexuality, politics, economics and environmental responsibility. We need a space wide enough to include Catholics often living on the margins of the church, from divorced and remarried Catholics and L.G.B.T. Catholics on one side to the self-identified "traditional" Catholics on the other. We need to hear from former Catholics why they chose to go elsewhere, and from

new Catholics why they chose to join us. And we need to think through—with members of other Christian churches, members of other religious traditions and with all people of good will—how we can contribute to the common good of the church and of our common home.

### Why a Council?

Why have this conversation through a plenary council, rather than through some other institution? After all, we already have the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which regularly brings together the leaders of our church to determine ecclesiastical policy and pastoral plans. How would this be any different and not just another form of clerical body?

Even longer than we have had popes and primates in the church, we have had councils, or meetings of Christians for common discernment, dialogue and decision-making. Theology names the principle of this form of collective discernment "synodality." While the clunkiness and unfamiliarity of the term suggest how little a role it has played in our church in recent centuries, a recent Vatican document stated that "synodality is an essential dimension of the church," and Pope Francis has suggested that synodality is "what God expects of the Church of the third millennium." And while many Catholics are aware of the "ecumenical" or "worldwide" councils of the church like Nicaea and Chalcedon, Trent, and the Second Vatican Council, fewer are aware of the practices of diocesan, regional and national councils that have marked our history.

As defined in the 1983 Code of Canon Law, a plenary council provides some advantages that other institutions, like the episcopal conference, do not. First, just as at the Second Vatican Council, bishops form the nucleus of the council, and they alone possess the right to a deliberative vote upon its final decrees. This makes the teachings of the council an official exercise of their collective teaching magisterium—unlike statements of the episcopal conference, which under current law are nonbinding on any particular bishop in his diocese.

Second, unlike the meetings of the U.S.C.C.B., a plenary council is a much wider gathering of people concerned with church issues in a particular region. Some members of the church must by law be invited to participate in the council: vicars from all the dioceses; representatives of the major superiors of religious communities, both male and female;



Wikimedia Commons

# We sorely lack the space to discuss, with charity and generosity, the major issues and experiences that divide us. 🙏🙏

heads of Catholic universities and faculties of theology and canon law; representatives of the heads of seminaries; and representatives of the presbyteral councils and pastoral councils of every diocese. In addition to these required participants, other invited members of the church—priests, deacons, religious, theologians and the lay faithful—may also be invited to join in the work of the council, as well as observers, like ecumenical and interreligious guests (Code of Canon Law, Canon 443).

It is true, though, that those who are not bishops do not have a “deliberative” vote, meaning that they do not vote to approve or reject particular documents; it would be difficult within current Catholic ecclesiology for the decrees to have the teaching authority they do without this limitation. But what canon law defines as the “consultative” vote or, better, “voice” of the other invitees gives them the ability to share their experiences and their knowledge with the council as a whole. Such participation potentially exceeds even that at Vatican II, when non-bishop speakers were generally few and far between. A gathering in which representatives of the breadth and depth of the Catholic clergy, religious and laity of the United States are present would be a unique opportunity for discerning the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faithful, together with our bishops on the past, present and future of our church.

Finally, and perhaps most important, councils, whether local or ecumenical, differ from other ecclesiastical and

secular meetings in that they are first and foremost acts of prayer. The primary verb used of a council is not *organized* or *convened* or *held*, but *celebrated*. Decrees, decisions and documents have always been issued from councils, but unlike episcopal conference meetings or meetings of secular legislatures, councils are first and foremost a sacramental reality—they establish the communion of the church in a particular place and in real time. Rather than being a deliberative body at which some prayer occurs, they are a prayerful body at which some deliberating happens.

## How Would a Council Work?

It is obvious just from the list of potential participants that such a meeting would not be an easy undertaking, as councils rarely have been in the history of the church. First, the council must not be an empty exercise in approving a set of outcomes predetermined before the participants arrive in Baltimore. Rather, if it is to be a real moment of collective discernment of the Catholics in the United States, it will need to begin with preparatory processes of dialogue and discernment within the dioceses, parishes and other communities of the United States.

In ecclesiological terms, the authority of the bishops teaching together in a council comes not only from their wisdom as individuals, with their own ideas and priorities, but as embodiments of the faith, life and witness of the Catholics in their own local church, their diocese. As the theologian Richard Gaillardetz has argued, embodying that faith requires bishops to be not only teachers but learners, who listen to the faith, experiences and questions of their own people. Doing this will require time, organization, episcopal and clerical commitments to a renewed way of exercising their ministry and, most of all, patience on all sides.

A pre-conciliar synodal process, done well, has catechetical potential for the faithful and for their pastors to learn how to talk to each other and to learn from each other. It might provide a chance for the renewal in form and function of diocesan presbyteral and pastoral councils, as well as parish pastoral councils, with more democratic engagement. If conducted with transparency and fairness, treating all the members of the church as stakeholders rather than consumers, as coworkers rather than children, preparation for a national plenary council could be a moment of growth and mature co-responsibility throughout the U.S. church.

Another set of challenges involves the execution of the council. Councils have always operated with the expectation of consensus (or virtual consensus) rather than of a simple majority vote. While we may be less likely to see the eruptions of spontaneous unanimity described in the records of the early councils of the church, historians of Vatican II have noted how hard the church fathers worked to craft documents that would be acceptable to the vast majority of the members, and they usually made their decisions with the expectation of a two-thirds vote. Unfortunately, finding consensus through dialogue is not a skill set particularly well exercised currently in the United States, in or outside of our church. Sad evidence of this was just given at this June's meeting of the U.S.C.C.B. Preparatory processes, including diocesan synods or regional councils, might help us start relearning synodal habits and practicing conciliar dialogue in the years leading up to the plenary council.

We also can look to other experiences of synodality, both positive and negative, for wisdom. The theologian Bradford Hinze, in his work on dialogue in the church, highlights the successes and failures of the most recent attempt at something like nationwide Catholic discernment, the Catholic Call to Action meeting of 1976, as well as the postconciliar experiences in collective discernment and decision-making pioneered by women's religious communities. The five Encuentro processes of U.S. Hispanic Catholics since 1972 provide perhaps the most robust example of a national conversation begun at the local level, gathered together at the national level, and then returned for reception in local parishes, ministries and dioceses. Women's religious communities in the United States have longstanding, hard-earned wisdom on consensus-based methods for leadership and collective discernment.

In addition, national Catholic churches have experience in meeting together; German Catholics are meeting in synodal processes and the Australian Catholic Church will soon hold its own plenary council. Protestant communities that meet regularly in conferences or conventions, despite differences in structure and theology, provide helpful resources and longstanding experience for best practices in collective discernment. Learning from the successes and the failures of all these various experiences would assist in the plenary council's execution.

Consensus-based synodal processes need open space to hear the voices of all, including the young and those

whose voices have been less heard for a variety of reasons. A key safeguard here would be the selection of the invited participants of the council. On the one hand, many should be representative of the faith, life and witness of their local churches. At the same time, careful selection of invited participants from current and historically marginalized identities and from distinct communities of experience, including those most potentially challenging to the status quo, will be integral in preventing slippage from a pursuit of consensus to the feeble ratification of the status quo. Perhaps most important, given the predominance of male, white voices in the assembly led by our current bishops, the preferential selection of women and of Catholics of color as attendees would seem to be a requirement for the credibility and authenticity of a council.

Finally, the execution of a national council will require time for consideration, judgment and reception. While a plenary council is meant to be an event rather than a standing body or legislature, there is no law that requires that its business all be completed in one week or one weekend. Like Vatican II and the recent deliberations of the universal Synod of Bishops, meeting in several sessions, separated by a year for reception and feedback back in the local dioceses, might increase the value, authenticity and effectiveness of the council's final results.

### **Why Baltimore? Why 2029?**

One reason for holding a council in Baltimore in 2029 is the obvious symbolic resonance of returning to the place of the first plenary council two hundred years later to restart our life together as a synodal church. But while such symbolism might be important, that alone is not a sufficient reason.

Baltimore itself would provide an ideal crossroads of some of the major issues we need to talk about. It is not only the historical "first see" of the U.S. Catholic Church, it has also been historically a center for Black Catholics in the United States—in part because of the large numbers of their ancestors enslaved by Catholic laypeople, clergy and institutions. Baltimore is where Freddie Gray died in police custody in 2015, and the intersection there of race, class and poverty make it a place where the church's participation in systemic racism cannot be ignored. Baltimore is also a city facing many of the challenges found in Catholic dioceses in the Northeast and Midwest—challenges and opportunities for new ministries in the face of changing demographics, decreasing numbers of priests and semi-

narians, increasingly expensive infrastructure, increasing wealth inequality and financial hardship, and all the other realities of being a Catholic Church in a secular age.

But the plenary council need not take place only in Baltimore. In addition to all of the preparatory work that would take place around the country, a council that had multiple sessions might continue the following year in another part of the country. One possibility might be to move to the often-forgotten original home of Roman Catholicism in what is now the United States, the American Southwest, where Spanish-speaking Catholics were already living and handing on the faith in the early 17th century. It would place our conversations with Hispanic and Native American Catholics in a wider perspective beyond the Euro-American story of U.S. Catholicism.

One might ask: If these issues are so pressing and the need so obvious, why wait until 2029? The answer, beyond the symbolism of the anniversary, is that we simply are not yet ready for such a meeting. Like an injured athlete who has been in recovery, we have not exercised our synodal muscles in a long time, and are likely to further injure ourselves and others without a bit more intense, graduated ecclesial therapy. A plenary council held before its time could lead to superficial, ineffective responses, to deeper conflict without consensus, to a clericalist rubber-stamping of proposals disconnected from the realities of Catholics in this country, or, if Twitter is any guide, to simply a whole lot of yelling at one another.

Beyond the need for much practical preparation, the deepest need for a successful council is a conversion of minds and hearts to synodality. If we simply import our political motivations of majority rule and power plays into a council or, conversely, maintain an entirely hierarchical conversation closed off from the input of the entire people of God, the council will fail, and fail spectacularly.

“Synodality,” the Theological Commission wrote, “is not simply a working procedure, but the particular form in which the Church lives and operates,” as well as “a method of communitarian and apostolic discernment which is an expression of the very nature of the Church.” Growing spiritually into a recovery of that vision will take as much time and effort as practical considerations.

## Why Not?

There are of course many reasons not to have a plenary council: the expense of the undertaking, the dangers of

further division and schism, the potential for a failed council causing further damage to the life of the church, the risk of a poorly run process further marginalizing or disempowering laypeople or already marginalized stakeholders in our church. More arguments could probably be adduced. It could all go wrong so easily.

On the other hand, the challenges themselves are not going to go away, and addressing them collectively and synodally, with input from the widest possible range of the faithful and with the particular advantages that the mechanism of a plenary council provides, seems a better way of addressing them than ignoring them entirely or continuing to address them only within the structures currently in use.

Most fundamentally, the calling of a plenary council is to remember that every council is an act of faith, hope and love: faith in the God whose people we are; hope in the Holy Spirit’s guidance; and love of Christ and of those who Christ has made our sisters and brothers. It is also an act of faith in, hope in and love for the church and for one another, in this time and in this place. Councils are rarely called when things are going well. As in past times of ecclesial malaise and uncertainty, the risk of a council of this sort might be worth taking because of the possibility of a new outpouring of grace for U.S. Catholics, now and for our future. It is time to celebrate another Council of Baltimore.

---

*Brian Flanagan is an associate professor of theology at Marymount University in Arlington, Va., and the president of the College Theology Society. He is the author of *Stumbling in Holiness: Sin and Sanctity in the Church*, and is currently working on a book about synods and synodality to be published by Paulist Press next year.*

# Cause and Effect

By Jeffrey Thomson

*Sanctuary of Monteluco in the holy grove, Spoleto*

Because five small cells of the convent survive,  
because their doors rise to my shoulder—  
planks and wooden pillows, because pain  
is a dutiful tutor—a shelf and an urn for water,  
because simplicity is the sign of faith and water  
is its symbol. Because tears.

Because Francis demanded poverty,  
after all, because once when he had been ill  
he ate chicken—just bone-broth scented with sage  
from this hillside of cypress and clover  
to recover his strength and shamed himself  
so thoroughly that as he entered Assisi  
he demanded his brother rope his neck  
and drag him through the gate, shouting,  
*Come, look at the glutton who has been fattening  
on poultry when you did not know.*  
Because many flocked to see so strange a sight,  
because they wept together and heaved  
repeated sighs.

Because they wept for their pain, which is the same  
as all of ours, after all, because they wept not  
for Francis in his chapel, threadbare Francis  
who spoke to the birds on the hillside  
in this grove of holm oaks. Because here  
in this church coil the chains he scoured  
across his back, washing himself clean  
of craving, because here the rock is carved out  
where he retreated to hide his soul  
from the world. Because they all surely wept  
for their own souls that wander lost  
among the trees, for their thirsts  
that cannot be sated, because Francis

released water from the rock here to chase  
the thirst of his brothers away: tiny men  
with wooden clogs and bodies made of scars.  
Because it flows still—this thin coil of water  
in the convent beside the tiny cells, rough beds,  
and austerity—and their wounds are like ours,  
after all, what they hold onto most dearly.

---

*Jeffrey Thomson is a poet, memoirist, translator and editor, and is the author of 10 books, including *Museum of Objects Burned by the Souls in Purgatory* (Alice James Books 2022). He is a professor of creative writing at the University of Maine, Farmington.*



# A SPIRITUAL ANTIDOTE TO WHATABOUTISM

By Eric A. Clayton

*When we are confronted with suffering, it is always going to be easier to change the subject.*

This morning, like most mornings lately, I sit at the breakfast table staring into my Cheerios, exhausted. “Doc McStuffins” plays in the living room, distracting both of my daughters and providing, if not quiet, then something in quiet’s extended family tree.

My 9-month-old was up again at all hours of the night, and my 3-year-old filled in the gaps. Wailing from one room, sobs from the other, and me in my battered blue slippers

stumbling back and forth between the two. “It’s your turn,” I mumble to my wife, night after night, collapsing back into bed, defeated. “I’m on it,” she mumbles back. I don’t think she even bothers with the slippers.

The days start early. There is little hope of recovering from the weeks-long lack of sleep. Babies are tough: They summon forth new cells to make teeth, grow hair and, somehow, get taller in those shadowy pre-dawn hours.



Prayer, and a bit of sleep, may help parents stay focused on meeting the demands of the moment.

Jordan, visiting the Jesuit Center and the refugee community it served. I had heard so many stories of violence and abuse, war and death, dashed dreams and uncertain futures. One young man from South Sudan—his English newly learned and very rusty—seared into me the words *raped* and *killed*, his eyes meeting mine to be sure I had not missed his meaning. He had been talking about his family, his flight from his homeland.

Reflecting on that encounter sitting at my breakfast table at home, Cheerios gone and seeing no reflection in what was now a bowl of milk, I thought: *What about him?* Were my Covid-19 challenges able to measure up to those of a South Sudanese refugee?

And I only have two kids; what about those parents with three or four or more? What about single parents? Those who have lost their jobs, their income, their homes?

It is a dangerous journey for one's thoughts to take, this harrowing trek to find someone whose plight is worse than my own. It is tempting to set aside my own sadness, my own struggle, because I deem it insignificant by comparison.

The sad, hard truth of it is, there are always going to be people who have it worse than I do—much worse. That does not invalidate my suffering; nor does it take anything away from theirs. If anything, that reality should only remind us of our shared responsibility, as people, to look out for one another.

Bad things, traumatic things, happen to us every day, no matter who we are, where we live or our status in society. Sometimes we just do not want to deal with those hurts. And so we cast about elsewhere—in the past, in someone else's life, in our imagination, searching for any rationale, flimsy as it may be, to justify not dealing with the problem in front of us.

In practice, this means I forgo a simple method of taking care of my own frazzled mental health, namely a daily workout. Instead of asking my wife to manage the kids for me while I go for a 30-minute run, I think, *What about her?* I think. *The girls are driving her crazy, too.* This line of thought prevents me from taking action to take care of myself.

Granted, it is not a bad impulse, to think of one's spouse. The end result, though, is a father and husband that much closer to the edge of impatience and anger. I should have said to my wife: "I need 30 minutes. And then you get 30 minutes. And that hour will make all the difference in our

While they do that, I battle grogginess compounded by ongoing pandemic stress, plus tripping over that Elsa doll again and the Doc McStuffins toys all over the living room and remembering the baby's plate still caked with banana gunk and the dirty wine glasses mixed in with the dirty baby bottles in the very dirty sink and weighing the cost-benefit analysis of going for a quick morning run versus getting a head start on the day's email backlog, plus that new writing project and remembering that I still have to be a half-decent parent.

All of it always means the day will be long and tiring and frustrating. I chase after that last Cheerio with my spoon. My thoughts wander.

Mere weeks before Covid-19 slammed the door on the world's hopes for the year 2020, I had been in Amman,



IT IS TEMPTING  
TO SET ASIDE MY  
OWN SADNESS  
BECAUSE I DEEM  
IT INSIGNIFICANT  
BY COMPARISON.

relationship, in our home.”

That kind of adjustment in my thinking is good advice for our personal lives—and good advice for our nation.

Too often, political leaders, news anchors, pundits and social media influencers default to the disingenuous tactics of *whataboutism*. It is a rhetorical trick with roots in the former Soviet Union that mirrors, in many ways, interpersonal *whataboutism*. Something bad happens—traumatic, perhaps—within society. Rather than deal with it, rather than uncover and meet the needs of the moment, we do nothing. The aggrieved side declares, “That’s not the real problem.” The argument goes, “What about this...?”

We saw it in a stunning, shocking way in the wake of the Capitol insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021. Afterward, there was a scramble by some Trump supporters to deflect blame and judgment rather than do the hard work of repentance and reconciliation. “But what about the looting done during the Black Lives Matter protests last summer?”

Potentially fruitful conversations and reckonings shrivel and die as one group hurls *whataboutisms* at the other until some new disaster emerges.

When we are confronted with suffering, pain, injustice it is always going to be easier to change the subject and say, “What about...?” When Jesus learned that his friend Lazarus was sick and dying, he diverted from the hard fact

of Lazarus’s suffering: “This illness is for...the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (Jn 11:4). It is almost as though Jesus is saying, “Yeah, he’s sick, but what about...?”

Then, after arriving in Bethany, Jesus is taken to where Lazarus has been laid to rest. As John writes: “Jesus wept” (Jn 11:35). He is not thinking about all the other people who died that day. He is thinking about the people right there in front of him; their suffering, their pain. The tears of Christ are a challenge. *Don’t change the subject*, they say. Stay with this challenging moment.

For me, this isn’t an abstract spiritual practice. It starts at that breakfast table. It’s as practical as catching myself—in those moments of parenting struggle—saying “What about so-and-so with the three kids? I bet he wouldn’t be struggling with just two, struggling like I am.” This spirituality is as practical as saying, *God, I am the dad you’ve given these two girls. Help me meet the demands of this moment. Keep me focused on the here and now. Amen.*

---

Eric A. Clayton is the deputy director of communications for the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States and the author of a forthcoming book on Ignatian spirituality and storytelling (Loyola Press). He lives in Baltimore with his wife and two daughters.

## Master of Arts in Sacred Scripture

*Are you longing for deeper knowledge of Sacred Scripture?*

- The Master of Arts in Sacred Scripture from Oblate School of Theology provides a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of all the books of the Bible.
- Fully online or face to face, this program is for those seeking to serve the mission of the Church from an ecumenical perspective.
- Students will become competent facilitators of Bible-based practices such as Scripture study groups, retreats and Lectio Divina.

*Our deepest unconscious hunger is a hunger for God's Word. This program will bring us God's Word. An MA in Sacred Scripture has been needed for a long time. It is here!*

*We promise you a first-rate faculty and a first-rate program.*

Ron Rolheiser OMI, President Emeritus, Oblate School of Theology

FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
WWW.OST.EDU/MA-SACRED-SCRIPTURE  
REGISTRAR@OST.EDU  
(210) 341-1366 EXT 240



### **Revelation and Healing: A Father and Son Reunion**

recounts the author's slow journey from an adoption that left him longing for his biological mother and wondering about his biological father. Discovering, while in high school, his mother's identity, years later he found that of his biological father, Lionel Durand (1920-1961), a Black man born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Suddenly the author realized the source of his own immediate empathy as a boy with Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement he led. The author shares the often-shocking details of his adoption, and the therapies that brought him healing, therapies helpful not only to adoptees but to all who need healing from emotional suffering and losses of all kinds. With filial admiration, the author traces the life of his beloved father, Lionel Durand, an internationally acclaimed newsman and journalist, who fought in the French Resistance during World War II, twice imprisoned, twice escaped, and whose struggles for peace and justice mirror those of our own day. Welcome to this reading journey and its wondrous surprises.



Morgan Zo Callahan graduated from a Jesuit high school and then served nine years as a Jesuit scholastic. Through networking with other former Jesuits, Morgan discovered the support he needed to discover his biological father after a years-long search, and the help he needed to tell his story of trauma, loss and healing in this book.

Paperback and Kindle editions available at [www.amazon.com/Revelation-Healing-Father-Son-Reunion/dp/B0976276FC](http://www.amazon.com/Revelation-Healing-Father-Son-Reunion/dp/B0976276FC)

## The St. Catherine of Siena Center

at DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY

REV. JAMES MARTIN, SJ

September 16

SHANNEN DEE WILLIAMS, PhD

October 27

PATRICK REYES, PhD

November 4

REV. ROGER HAIGHT, SJ, PhD

November 16



event information  
and tickets at  
[events.dom.edu](http://events.dom.edu)





## ‘I Want Students to Have What I Have Received’

*A Jesuit education invites students to love themselves and the world anew*

By Brendan Coffey

I often return to a memory that conveys everything I have come to love about Jesuit education.

The time was this past October—one of those stunningly beautiful New England fall days. It was my second season as an assistant cross country coach at Fairfield Prep in Connecticut, and the boys had just come in from a long run. They were sweaty and tired and ready to drop so we sent them onto the soccer field for a cooldown and stretch.

Our captains knew the drill. One of them would lead the team in a sort of call-and-answer stretching routine that everyone knew by heart. But on this particular day, as the boys sprawled out on the grass, one of our captains looked down at our smallest freshman, smiled and told him that today *he* would be leading the team.

For a moment, it was as though the spirit of some generous giver had come alive in their midst. I can still see the joy in that senior’s eye, and I can still summon the memory of our little hero at the center of a cheering circle, uncontainable excitement in his every expression. Each man came alive to himself that day; in the process, they expressed something deeply true about who we are as a community.

I have been at Fairfield Prep for nearly two years now,

and I can attest that it is true to a proud tradition of academic rigor and achievement. We are every bit the hub of innovative learning that would make our Jesuit forebears proud. But to me, what makes Jesuit education truly distinct is the way we orient that knowledge in the service of the heart. What makes our school a place revered and cherished and loved is that kind of big-hearted generosity that I experienced with our cross country team on that idyllic October afternoon.

“Only the one who loves fully realizes himself or herself as a person,” wrote Pedro Arrupe, S.J., in his transformative speech “Men and Women for Others.” To me *this* is what makes Jesuit education something wholly different. For while a great education moves students to know themselves and the world anew, a great Jesuit education goes a step further, inviting students to *love* themselves and the world anew.

How do we do that? How do we teach our students to love? We love first by being loved. Our freshman hero felt it that day, and so too did all those who cheered him on. In words unspoken, they heard: *This is the joy we are meant for; this is what it feels like to belong.*

Brendan Coffey, S.J., with his students at Fairfield Prep.

Photo courtesy of Fairfield Prep

And when we feel that, when we are full of such blessings, then, like that gracious captain, we feel moved by gratitude to give it away—to say deep in the heart, *I have been given so much; I want others to have what I have received.*

To our boys, the truth of this dynamic can be summed up in a single word: brotherhood. And it is a beautiful summation, for it echoes the very language we Jesuits use when speaking of fellow Jesuits: *fratres*, brothers. Each case speaks from a desire to live out of a commandment Jesus gifted his disciples: “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

What this commandment implies is that love is a choice. And that choice involves letting go of control—an act of faith. It means letting go of power—an act of vulnerability. Only then can love come alive within us. Curiously, what we discover is not a loss of freedom, but freedom gained; not a loss of self, but a self revealed. In the words of Father Arrupe, we begin to truly realize who we are. And that is because underneath every choice to love is the voice of our one true source, speaking deep into the heart and saying: *as I have loved you.*

A hundred times a day at Fairfield Prep we nudge one another to choose to live out of the love that shapes our lives. When we do, strange and wonderful things start to happen. Seniors start to cheer on the freshmen. The team starts to reign over the individual. Joy becomes the pattern by which we live. What emerges is a community built on the strength of humility, compassion, kindness and generosity. Given the fruits of our work, we ask: What could be more important than an education that teaches our boys to lean into love?

We know that it is only through encounters of love that we can truly seek, find and fulfill the meaning of our lives. For when we embrace the love we receive, we grow up, becoming alive to ourselves and alive to one another. And then our hearts become full—full enough to spill out into a world yearning for our joyful, generous, brotherly love.

---

Brendan Coffey, S.J., recently completed his Jesuit regency at Fairfield College Preparatory School in Connecticut. This essay has been adapted from an article in *Prep Today*, a school publication.

*Jesuit School Spotlight* is a new monthly feature focusing on Jesuit middle and secondary schools from around the country. It is underwritten in part by Jesuit high schools of the USA East Province of the Society of Jesus.



## Who said Money Doesn't Grow on Trees?

The 300-leaf Tree of Life pictured above is a classic design that allows for a wide range of presentation shapes and accommodates a large number of donor names. This carefully crafted Tree of Life can provide the perfect way to:

- Recognize contributors to a building fund or fund-raising campaign
- Honor contributors to an endowment fund
- Salute individuals or groups for outstanding service or achievements
- Create a tasteful memorial
- The Tree of Life is so successful because the donor's personalized message will be on display forever

The Tree of Life's trunk is magnificent cast bronze. Its leaves are miniature brass plaques that we custom engrave for mounting on sculpted plexiglass backgrounds. The result is elegant and economical.



**Sell 200 memorial leaves at \$500 each and earn \$100,000 for your parish.**



CONTACT  
Gregory Cave  
caveco33@aol.com

**516-456-3663**  
[www.churchgoods.net](http://www.churchgoods.net)

# A Fascist Century

By Christopher Sandford

On the warm Monday evening of April 4, 1921, in the grand hall of the Piatto della Marfisa in the northern Italian town of Ferrara, a 37-year-old, one-time schoolteacher-turned-political journalist and former Socialist Party activist named Benito Mussolini addressed an audience of 15,000 men, women and children on the subject of their nation's future as it was to be determined in the following month's general election.

"People of Ferrara!" Mussolini began, turning to cast his blowtorch black eyes over his audience, arms folded across his ill-fitting wartime army tunic. "We Fascists have a great love for the working classes.... That love does not lie in burning incense or in creating new idols and gods. It consists in telling upon every occasion and in every place the plain truth, and

the more this truth is unpalatable the greater the need to speak it.

"How does it come about that we Fascists are said to be sold to the bourgeoisie, capitalism, and the government?" Mussolini inquired. "Even our enemies know it to be ridiculous. This impressive meeting would move a heart harder than mine, and proves that we shall vanquish the calumnies of our opponents, who wrongly believe in the eternity of their fortunes, while in reality they have barricaded themselves in a castle that will fall with the first puff of breath of a Fascist revolt.

"And this Fascist revolt—we might even use the more sacred and serious word revolution—this Fascist revolution is inspired by indestructible moral values that transcend the merely material.... We Fascists say that above all the competition and the differenc-

es which divide men, there is a single reality common to all, and it is the reality of the nation and of the land to which we are bound, as the tree is bound by its roots to the soil which nourishes it."

Mussolini's audience was spellbound. He had clearly mastered the orator's art of pausing at strategic points, stepping back for a moment from the podium, and of varying the effect of his words by dropping his voice. Basking in the applause, he turned to snap out a series of stiff-armed Roman salutes, having at one time remarked that he considered both the traditional wave and the handshake to be "unmanly" and "fey."

Then Mussolini reached the climactic summation of his speech:

People of Italy! We are



Shawshots / Alamy

Benito Mussolin waves to the crowds in Rome in the 1930s. At least as Mussolini envisioned it, fascism was a distinctly modernist concept.

confident that our flags, after having saluted the dead, will smile on us, because we have found the true path that had once been forgotten. We have cast off all those craven politicians who have filled our heads with their lying fables. We, oh Italians of Ferrara, have no need to go beyond our borders, beyond the seas, in order to find the promised world of wisdom and of life.... We have no need to imitate others, because all the brilliant original minds of all branches of civilization and of all doctrines are to be found in Italy.

The crowd, which by then had hoisted dozens of patriotic banners, gave the

speaker a long standing ovation.

Encouraged, Mussolini's voice rose as he announced:

Here, O people, is your history! Here, O people of Ferrara, is your life! Here, O people of Italy, is your future! And we, who have undertaken this hard battle, which has cost us tens and hundreds of lives, we do not ask you for your treasure, we do not ask for your blood. [Another roar of approval erupted.] We only ask you for one thing, namely that you shall shout out with us "Long Live Italy!"

The speech at Ferrara represented the first of many delirious mass rallies by Mussolini and his nascent

party over the next few years, and as such can be said to mark the true origin of the modern fascist movement. Mussolini's remarks were notable, too, for deploying many of the themes and oratorical techniques that came to characterize the cause as a whole. There was the vainglorious appeal to the audience's morals; the selective reminder of their nation's illustrious past, with a concomitant warning about the future; the denunciation of her perceived enemies from within and without; the speaker's identification with the "common man" in his eternal struggle with the political elites; the resulting desire for cultural regeneration and unity of purpose; and, above all, an agenda long in its broad espousal of a radical nationalism transcending class lines but short on specific policy proposals.

In Italy's general election that followed on May 15, 1921, the Socialists won 122 parliamentary seats, while the newly-formed Fascists took 35. As often happened in the Italian legislatures of the time, no single party commanded a working majority, leading to a year of failed political alliances and worsening levels of street violence. Out of the chaos, some 20,000 Fascists marched on Rome on the night of Oct. 27, 1922, to demand the resignation of the ineffective Liberal prime minister Luigi Facta. The following morning, the Italian King, Victor Emmanuel III, bowed to the inevitable and appointed Mussolini, who wore a richly tasseled fez for the occasion, as the head of a new, Fascist administration.

### Early Manifestations

Although a defining moment, this was far from the first manifestation

# ‘Fascism’ has been used as a term of abuse across the political spectrum. ●●

of fascism as a legitimate political entity. The Jacobin movement in late 18th-century France could be seen as a foreshadowing of the fascist state with its totalitarian approach to government and ruthless suppression of opposition. According to the British historian David Thomson, the Risorgimento of 1871, with its violent annexation of outlying provinces into the Kingdom of Italy, similarly provided a logical, chronological link to “the nemesis of Mussolini’s Fascism.” William L. Shirer wrote of a continuity of views of Kant and Hegel, through Bismarck, to the likes of Mussolini and Hitler. In 1909, the Italian poet-turned-political agitator Filippo Marinetti published his *Futurist Manifesto*, in which he denounced the “entrenched mediocrity” of successive governments that he believed had corrupted his nation’s public institutions. Marinetti advocated for a new, forward-looking Italian society that would “glorify war—the world’s only hygiene,” and in general exalted patriotism, dynamism and constant change while denigrating hidebound tradition, complacency, unearned privilege and stagnation—what some might now refer to as “the swamp.”

After front-line service in the Great War, Marinetti founded the Partito Politico Futurista, which in 1920 merged with Mussolini’s still loosely defined party. The involvement of the playwright-warrior Ga-

brielle D’Annunzio and the conductor Arturo Toscanini gave the Italian fascist movement a veneer of artistic sophistication. A significant number of ex-soldiers, unable or unwilling to readjust to civilian life, furnished the cause with a well-deserved reputation for violence. According to the historian Nicholas Farrell, “Many wore black shirts at meetings, and carried clubs, knuckle-dusters, riding crops, and black flags.... They were united by the war and the *vittoria mutilata*; by nationalism; by the new; by anti-clericalism (not God necessarily); and by a hatred of both socialism and privilege.”

Since then, the word *fascism* has proved sufficiently elastic to be used as a term of abuse across the political spectrum. It has been applied equally to the Marxist-Leninist regimes in Cuba under Fidel Castro and Ho Chi Minh’s rule of Vietnam. The term has also been used to disparage Western leaders from Winston Churchill to Donald Trump. In 1944, George Orwell reflected on the definition of *fascism*: “The word ‘Fascism’ is almost entirely meaningless.... Those who recklessly fling the word in every direction attach at any rate an emotional significance to it. By ‘Fascism’ they mean, roughly speaking, something cruel, unscrupulous, arrogant, obscurantist, anti-liberal, and anti-working class. Except for the relatively small number of Fascist sympathisers, almost any English person would accept

‘bully’ as a synonym for ‘Fascist.’”

At least as Mussolini envisioned it, fascism was a distinctly modernist concept. It was born in the trenches of the Great War, and it took as its particular foe the ranks of the established, patrician political class and its allies in the church, whom they blamed for the Italian state’s steady decline almost from the moment of its formation in 1871. Like communism, fascism regarded violence as morally justified, if not imperative, in the interests of national survival. It was militaristic, nationalistic, spiritualistic (as opposed to narrowly Christian, or Roman Catholic), and it believed that what was important was not the pursuit of material wealth but of moral fiber.

The clearest statement of fascism’s core principles, the *Dottrina del Fascismo*, co-authored by Mussolini in 1932, wrote that “Our ideal man is an individual insofar as he is [of the] nation and *patria*, and that moral law which clasps together individuals and generations in a tradition and a mission which suppresses the instinct for the limited life of a short-term pleasure to establish as a duty a superior life free of limits and space; a life in which the individual, by means of the abnegation of self, the sacrifice of his own interests, even of his own life, achieves that wholly spiritual existence in which lies his value as a man....”

The movement took its name from the classic Roman symbol of unity—an ax bound in rods, or *fasces*—and Mussolini himself frequently applied the word to reflect a sense of individual citizens coming together in like-minded alliance. He exalted

the communal quality of the state, not merely its entrenched or vociferous right wing, as we might conceive it today. One of the Italian Fascist Party's guiding principles lay in its belief that the central government should use its powers of taxation to curb the excesses of capitalism, a proposition more suggestive of a Bernie Sanders than of a Donald Trump.

In fact, fascism, as Mussolini applied the word, was not "right-wing" or "far right," at all. It was nationalist, certainly, in the sense that it extolled the values of ancient Rome, while simultaneously demanding a social and cultural renaissance that would be largely agrarian and populist, not bourgeois and intellectual. It favored a distinctly Italian art, music, literature and language. But it was not specifically racist. In 1932, Mussolini told the German journalist Emil Ludwig: "Naturally there is no such thing as a pure race, not even a Jewish one.... Race: It is a sentiment, not a reality; it is 95 percent emotion. I don't believe that it is possible to prove biologically that a race is more or less pure...."

The *Dottrina del Fascismo* added that "a race does not exist, but only a people and an Italian nation. There does not exist a Jewish race or nation, but a Jewish people. There does not exist, the gravest error of all, an Aryan race."

### Mussolini and the Church

The rise to power of the Fascist Party under Mussolini, known in his youth as a *mangiaprete*—priest-eater—did not, perhaps, bode well for the Roman Catholic Church. But again, we should be wary of accepting the received wisdom that sees the Italian state of

1922-45 as a radically secular, right-wing dictatorship. Once in power, Mussolini's first education reforms made provision of a copy of the Bible and a crucifix compulsory in every classroom and revived the long-abandoned teaching of Scripture in primary schools. When Emil Ludwig inquired in 1932 if Mussolini believed in God, he replied: "In my youth I did not believe at all.... But in recent years the belief has gathered strength in me that there may well be a divine force in the universe."

His differences with the state church were political, not spiritual. Mussolini came to see the diplomatically active Pope Pius XI as the head of a sort of shadow Italian government, writing that the church should be left free in "all that concerns the salvation of souls," but warning, "We shall fight them...the moment they try to trespass in the political, social and artistic fields." In an attempt to regulate this division of power, Mussolini advanced the three agreements that collectively became known as the Lateran Accords of February 1929. As a result, the Vatican became an independent state that recognized and was recognized by secular Italy—1.75 billion lire changed hands by way of compensation for the loss of the pope's temporal power—while Mussolini decreed Catholicism "the religion of the land" but agreed that other faiths were "tolerated."

Although *fascism* has come to be used as a uniform pejorative term for both the Mussolini and Hitler regimes, the German version of the movement was quite distinct from the Italian.

Whatever else can be said of them, the Nazis were not modernists. Their party's essential philosophy, if it could be so dignified, lay in its seemingly paradoxical marriage of political and cultural conservatism, underpinned by a highly selective reading of Germanic folklore, with convenient technological innovation. At bottom, Hitler and his singularly unappealing henchmen aspired to recreate the mythical Aryan race.

Both the German and Italian strains of mid-20th-century fascism did, it's true, come to espouse an odious and ultimately genocidal anti-Semitism as an instrument of state policy. For Hitler, the justification—if it may be called that—of his regime's systematic extermination of his nation's ethnic minorities lay in his preoccupation with sex and the adulteration of German blood.

While it scarcely mitigates the horror of the resulting policy, Mussolini's own gradual embrace of anti-Semitism was of a less pseudo-biological and more politically cynical nature. Following the Anschluss of March 1938 and Hitler's triumphant visit to Rome, the Italian leader seems to have accepted the wisdom of bringing his state's fundamental domestic policies into alignment with those of his principal ally. It was the price of friendship with Germany. Italy's first anti-Semitic laws were soon in place.

Despite the 1938 laws and the subsequent exclusion of about 7,000 "Israelites [and] other undesirables" from the armed forces, along with a small number expelled from Italian schools and universities, Italy remained a place of comparative safety for both local Jews and European

Jewish refugees until Mussolini's abrupt fall from power in July 1943. Subsequently installed as a puppet dictator under German supervision, Mussolini conspired in the deaths of an estimated 7,680 of Italy's 44,000 Jews, the majority of them deported to Auschwitz.

### Flirting With Fascism

In time, the blueprint of Italian Fascism was emulated to one degree or another by the Yugoslav Radical Union, the Russian Fascist Organization, the National Romanian Movement and Francisco Franco's Falangist Party, which dominated Spanish politics from 1937 to 1977.

The Italian constitution enacted in December 1947 formally outlawed the fascist movement as organized by Mussolini, although a number of successor groups have emerged to carry on its legacy. The regimes of Augusto Pinochet's Chile, Alfredo Stroessner's Paraguay and Luis García Meza Tejada's Bolivia have all, in their way, flirted with variants of Mussolini-like fascism, united not so much by racial theory as by an extreme—and on occasion brutally violent—distaste for the spread of Soviet-style communism. At various times, the British National Party, the National Front and today's United Kingdom Independence Party have all been accused of pandering to a broadly populist, authoritarian, xenophobic and, at base, anti-immigrant sentiment.

It is hard to apply the term *fascist* with any reasonable degree of historical accuracy to the late U.S. administration of Donald Trump, who seems not so much to have been distinguished by a quasi-mystical ide-

ology of the sort embraced by Hitler and Mussolini as to have been simply making it all up as he went along. Trump was once a Democrat, then a Republican, and then, in time, a president with a policy agenda dominated by economic nationalism, unfettered capitalism, the merits of a strong military and greatly enhanced border controls, and above all by the self-aggrandizement of the president himself.

Today, a century after Mussolini galvanized the masses in his speech at Ferrara, there are extremists at work on both the left and right whom we may be tempted to stigmatize as “fascist.” But within that term of opprobrium there lies an unusually wide range of opinion: wide in the surrounding political context, and wide in the comparative extremism of the views expressed. *Fascism* and *fascist* have been promiscuously applied as terms of abuse for those whom we regard as moral pariahs. The danger is that we cheapen the insult by constant repetition and reckless misuse. The danger, in the end, is that the word *fascist* will lose its power to shock.

The “religious conception of life, which aims to create a truly spiritual society,” as Mussolini once defined the movement, may no longer be a serious contender in our modern Western politics. The very word *fascism* cannot be used without reflexive scorn in most civilized conversation. But traces of its original incarnation still survive.

In April 1945, Mussolini was executed by Italian partisans and strung up by his feet to be abused by a mob in the main square of Milan. Less well known is the fact that in 1957 the centrist Christian Democrat administra-

tion of Adone Zoli returned Mussolini's body to his widow Rachele, who reinterred her husband in a splendid marble tomb in Predappio, the small central Italian town where he was born in 1883.

Between 100,000 and 150,000 tourists make the pilgrimage to his tomb each year, and often leave effusive remarks in the visitors' book on the nearby lectern. A friend recently sent me the wording of one such tribute that appeared in January 2021, the beginning of the centenary year of the movement Mussolini made notorious the world over. “Fascism is the only remedy for the madness of humanity,” it read.

I am told that many of these visitors have no qualms about standing at attention in front of the mausoleum's entrance, often dressed in black shirts, and snapping out a fascist salute.

---

Christopher Sandford is the author of many books, including most recently *Zeebrugge: The Greatest Raid of All* (Casemate).

*Before cellular service, the official designation for voice-grade communication was “Plain Old Telephone Service”*

## P.O.T.S. Prayer

By Jessica Jacobs

Blessed art Thou, Lord of the Landline,  
whose cables root in the tight-held earth  
and stream from pole to pole—tangible

covenants of connection. God of our fathers,  
like Abraham, who declared himself ashes and dust  
while bargaining with You in the shade

of his tent. You, who used to be  
so accessible, Your number not yet  
unlisted, You were obvious

as an antenna. God of our mothers, like Sarah,  
whose womb was a dusty storage room  
until her laughter cracked a window

just wide enough for a single ray  
of life to enter. Of Isaac, unblemished  
as a burnt offering, reticent as high noon,

who walked the fields, moving his lips—  
no buzz in his pocket to distract him, no itch  
to click a message far from prayer. No, a phone,

like an altar, was a site to approach only  
when ready, its cord a means of tethering  
you to a place. God of Rebekah, who

leaned over a well and the water rose up  
to meet her, I too want that force of connection,  
with no other demands patching in. On good days,

I can hear these ancestors breathing, each offering  
a new way to pray. Other days, like this day,  
when every breath brings another

diversion, the best I can hope for  
is some divine dial tone, the stressed/unstressed  
hum, reassuring that the line is open,

that when I’m ready, I can make a call.

---

*Jessica Jacobs is the author of Pelvis With Distance, a biography-in-poems of Georgia O’Keeffe, and the collection Take Me With You, Wherever You’re Going. She is chapbook editor for the Beloit Poetry Journal.*

# Reporting in a Wintry Season

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, former president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, answers questions from reporters after celebrating Mass, Feb. 3, 2014.

When people asked me why I chose to be a religion reporter, they usually got one of two answers. One was my official response; the other was the truth.

The official response ran something like this: Religion is a force that moves billions of people, for better or worse. You can't really understand our world without understanding religion.

That's true, but it is not why I became a religion reporter. The real answer was more personal. I was on a quest for the truth and saw journalism as the means to a free or at least modestly subsidized education. I think this idea was stolen from Pete Hamill, who advised young writers in New York to apprentice in one of two story-rich fields: driving a taxi or journalism.

My plan worked at first. During my nearly 16 years as a religion reporter, including the last eight at CNN, I learned more than I could have hoped. But over time, the stories

other religion reporters and I tackled grew darker: religious violence, racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism; the lies, crimes and casual cruelties of the Trump administration; the rise of QAnon and demise of truth; the Catholic sexual abuse crisis; and, of course, the pandemic. People's pain and anger and confusion seemed fathomless, institutions hopelessly self-involved and religious leaders wilfully blind and enthralled by politics or fame. In any other era, such a beat would be challenging. For me, in our relentlessly online culture, it was deflating. By the end of my time at CNN, I was a beat reporter.

I thought about all of this while reading *The God Beat: What Journalism Says About Faith and Why It Matters*. The anthology of 26 essays is edited by Costica Bradatan, a religion editor for The Los Angeles Review of Books and a professor of humanities

at Texas Tech University, and Ed Simon, a staff writer for the literary site The Millions and author of several books about religion and morality.

In their introduction, Bradatan and Simon say they are most interested in what Simon dubs New Religion Journalism, a literary movement that they argue was given life by *Killing the Buddha*, an online journal of religion writing for "people made uncomfortable by church."

Like New Journalism, the movement heralded by wizard-suited Tom Wolfe in the 1970s (and before him, by Matthew Arnold in the 1880s), New Religion Journalism prioritizes the personal, including the reporter's subjective experience in the story. More importantly, argues Simon, New Religion Journalism questions the "theism/atheism" binary and displays the "full ambiguity and ambivalence of belief."

That ambiguity is explored in

The God Beat  
What Journalism Says About Faith and Why It Matters

By Costica Bradatan and Ed Simon

Broadleaf Books

225p \$26.99

Leigh Eric Schmidt's deeply researched essay, "Monuments to Unbelief," which guides readers on a short jaunt through 19th-century atheism and introduces characters like the miraculously named Octavius Frothingham.

In "Amma's Cosmic Squeeze," Erik Davis muses on the title character's trademark gesture—a hug—as a "quietly subversive transformation of traditional South Asian worship" as he stands in a Disneyland-worthy line awaiting his sacred embrace. But Amma, who has hugged more than 26 million people, is not only about silent subversion, Davis reports: "During her massive fiftieth birthday celebration in 2003, which was inaugurated by Indian president Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, Amma cranked through a stadium full of devotees for twenty-one hours straight while a scoreboard racked up numbers well into the five figures."

Cool scene. But, as I said, these are dark times, and many writers in *The God Beat* address topics like death, hatred, abuse and decay.

In "Will Anyone Remember Eleven Dead Jews?" Emma Green ponders the paradoxical satisfactions of an archivist in Pittsburgh charged with collecting artifacts from the worst anti-Semitic attack in American history. Likewise, Shira Telushkin's essay, "Their Bloods Cry Out from the Ground," is a powerful meditation on the murders in 2018 of those 11 people while they were worshipping and the task of those left behind. Telushkin explores the work of the *chevra kadisha*, the Jewish burial society charged with collecting different kinds of remains.

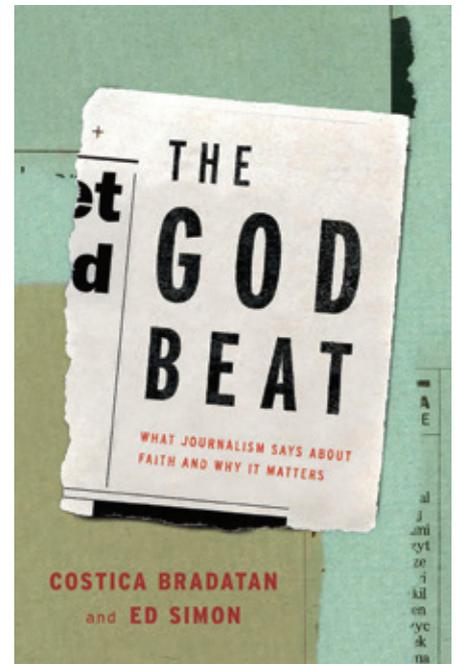
They slipped quietly into the crime scene, scraping blood from walls and floors, burying their martyrs just as Jews have done for millennia.

The best essays in *The God Beat* are like this—quietly reflective, deeply informed, subjective but not solipsistic. They combine an insider's knowledge with an outsider's practiced observation, transcending the limitations of both third- and first-person writing.

As a one-time Catholic, Patrick Blanchfield brings an insider-outsider perspective to his essay on the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal, written in 2018, a few weeks after a grand jury report in Pennsylvania described in detail decades of soul-crushing sexual abuse committed by priests against children. Blanchfield raises a question that perhaps only an ex-Catholic would voice. Namely, is there something inherently Catholic about the Catholic abuse scandal?

"Whatever the problems of 'society' more broadly, it is impossible not to see in these horrors a very particular Catholic feature: tropes, however twisted, of penance, mortification, and punishment, concepts and ritual items wielded as tools of abuse," Blanchfield writes. "These priests, in other words, did not just rape children using their hands, mouths and genitals. They also raped them using their faith."

Behind this rhetoric lies the force of truth. I have heard many victims of sexual abuse by clergymen recount how their abuse and lost innocence amounted to "soul murder," as Blanchfield titles his powerful piece.



The essay reminded me of another, coincidentally published on the same day in **America**. Kerry Weber, an executive editor at **America**, wrote of the questions she pondered as she read the Pennsylvania grand jury report while her children napped. "I have found myself truly afraid of what it means to ask and to allow my children to be part of the church," Weber wrote.

Reporting for CNN, I had been chasing the "hard news"—counting the victims, tracking down perpetrator priests, trying (and mostly failing) to hold bishops accountable. Weber's voice—singular, plaintive, coming from within the fold—whipped my head around. Behind all the hard news, this is what the scandal has wrought, I realized: a mother afraid to raise her children in the church she loves. And that is a story that needs to be told.

---

Daniel Burke is a contributing editor at *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. He previously covered religion for *Religion News Service* and *CNN*.

# What happens to a world, a nation, a society constantly engaged in forever-war? 💧💧

## The Violent Still Bear It Away

When the precedent of the Supreme Court is invoked in a criminal trial, it is usually not by a mass murderer explaining why he killed 168 people on an Oklahoma City morning. But that is exactly what Timothy McVeigh did when asked if he had anything to say prior to his sentencing. “I wish to use the words of Justice Brandeis dissenting in *Olmstead* to speak for me. He wrote, ‘Our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or ill, it teaches the whole people by its example.’”

McVeigh, a Catholic veteran who fought in the first Gulf War, explained to the essayist Gore Vidal in a letter that he felt his bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was justified because he had seen the United States bomb government buildings in Serbia, Iraq and other nations: “Based on observations of the policies of my own government, I viewed this action as an acceptable option.”

Vidal controversially explained that McVeigh had “an exaggerated sense of justice.”

Vidal was pilloried, not just for his phrasing of McVeigh’s motivations, but for attempting to understand him at all. Violence is senseless, meaningless, we often tell ourselves following a tragedy, a shooting, a bombing. This

is a rhetorical pacifier for a citizenry who would rather not get involved: If violence is senseless, then we do not have to make sense of it. But violence often also has a cold, calculated logic behind it. And we are incredulous when faced with the suggestion that the violence our country has inflicted on some other part of the planet can come back around to us.

It is a dizzying endeavor to try to grasp just how many places in the world we carry out that violence. The confusion only grows when one considers the number of weapons we push out and the number of non-American combatants we train.

Elliot Ackerman has astutely pointed out that the Second World War remains our cultural model for war: “We still expect to be the good guys; we expect there to be a beginning, a middle and an end; and we expect that the war is over when the troops come home.”

That, of course, is no longer how the game is played. Contrast that understanding with the following description, taken from Phil Klay’s debut novel, *Missionaries*:

He wondered if the men who were about to die were capable of appreciating everything that went into their deaths. An American mercenary was aiming a laser at the instruction of an American pilot operating a

Chinese drone. They were communicating over an encrypted frequency routed through a Canadian aircraft mounted with Swedish surveillance technology, bounced from repeater hub to repeater hub to the main air-ground tower at their air base in the Empty Quarter. The drone pilot, in turn, was communicating with an Emirati fighter pilot in an American aircraft armed with a laser-guided bomb capable of being launched from nine miles away and forty thousand feet up and still detonating within ten feet of its target.

This new way of waging war, without clear beginnings, middles or ends, without clear moral goods and evils, is the perfect setting for a daring, ambitious novel. With *Missionaries*, Klay has pulled it off.

Klay is a recipient of the National Book Award for his 2014 collection of short stories, *Redeployment*, and the 2018 winner of the George W. Hunt, S.J. Prize, co-sponsored by The Catholic Chapel & Center at Yale University and America Media. Klay belongs to a chorus of talented veteran-writers who are helping to unravel decades of near-collective indifference to military action around the world. He is also part of a new generation of authors who are putting to rest the overwrought claims about the death of modern Catholic fiction.

What happens to a world, a nation, a society constantly engaged in forever-war? It is an enormous question that Klay understands can be answered only by engaging the lives



### Missionaries

By Phil Klay  
Penguin Press  
416p \$28

of individuals, and especially the forgotten ones: a war correspondent in search of a better war; a military general's daughter looking to bring justice to the world; a former army medic-turned U.S.-Colombian military liaison; a poor, rural-born Colombian roped into a civil war after it decimates his family and home.

Klay's intimate portraits all come together in a parallel narrative in a remote region on the Colombian-Venezuelan border. It is an urgent and suspenseful final sequence, but the convergence is not simply a plot device: It is a stake in the ground that claims there is no such thing as an isolated war or violent action. In this way, Klay's work can be seen as a companion novel to Pope Francis' encyclical "Fratelli Tutti," also released last year. Francis noted that "with increased

globalization, what might appear as an immediate or practical solution for one part of the world initiates a chain of violent and often latent effects that end up harming the entire planet and opening the way to new and worse wars in the future." The result, he wrote, is a "world war fought piecemeal."

To say that all violence and warfare is connected is not just a foreign policy claim—it is a moral one. The work of literature is the same as that of religion in this area: to remind us that we are all our brothers' keepers, and to show what happens when we fail. For a number of the characters in *Missionaries*, their encounters with violence function as a sort of baptism that leaves another kind of indelible mark on their souls.

Valencia heard nothing, saw nothing but the body, the broken, distorted body lying in the clinic. And God, if there was a God, reached into Valencia's body, and squeezed her lungs with His large hands, and ran His fingers down her nerves, and breathed hot breath over her eyes, and He tapped her heart once, then twice, as the blood rushed and drained and rushed and drained through her, and then He drew back, leaving a hole behind where the air rushed in.

God and violence intermingle in the novel in a way that only a writer worthy of claiming a Catholic imagination could accomplish. A staple of the Catholic literary tradition, from St. Paul's description of baptism as death to Flannery O'Connor's gory moments of grace, is that conver-

sion is an act of violence. We are only just beginning to come to grips with the cultural violence that Christian missionaries, sometimes armed only with a Roman Missal and lacking any modern sense of inculturation, waged on Indigenous peoples all over the world. It is hard to know whether Klay's military service or all the time he spent in front of a bloodied, crucified God contributed more to his understanding of violence.

Though the war in Afghanistan is putatively over, the U.S. military becomes more enmeshed in violent conflicts around the world with each passing year. If we want to survive, and if the church wants to be a voice for peace in the new millennium, it will need to understand the new ways war is waged. And to do that, we need more books like *Missionaries* to help us make sense of the violence we are all too ready to excuse as senseless.

---

Zac Davis is an associate editor and the director of audience engagement and analytics at *America*. He also co-hosts the podcast "Jesuitical."

---

## A Fractured Family's Quest

The Colombian-American novelist Patricia Engel's gripping fourth book, *Infinite Country*, begins with an arresting line: "It was her idea to tie up the nun." Fifteen-year-old Talia is responsible for this plan, the initial step in her plot to escape a youth prison school in the Andes, north of her hometown, Bogotá. Talia is a first-time offender who witnessed a young man burn a kitten alive and

reacted by throwing hot oil in his face. “Talia,” Engel writes, “was impatient as thunder.”

At this state facility, “the lay staff reminded the sisters to aim for secular-ity, but on those missioned mountains, the nuns ran things as they pleased.” The nuns believe Talia’s “desire for justice” provoked her crime, and they consider her reformable. “The nuns were always scavenging for remorse,” Talia thinks. Although Talia will soon complete her sentence, she is determined to fly to the United States in one week on a ticket her mother Elena had purchased. Because she lacked child care, Elena had sent Talia to Colombia as a baby. Talia hasn’t seen her mother or older siblings since and hasn’t disclosed her crime to them. Talia’s father Mauro, who was deported from the United States and raised Talia in Bogotá, is complicit. Talia is an American citizen, and the promise of her status lures her to take brash risks as she breaks out of prison, journeys through the hills and hitchhikes south.

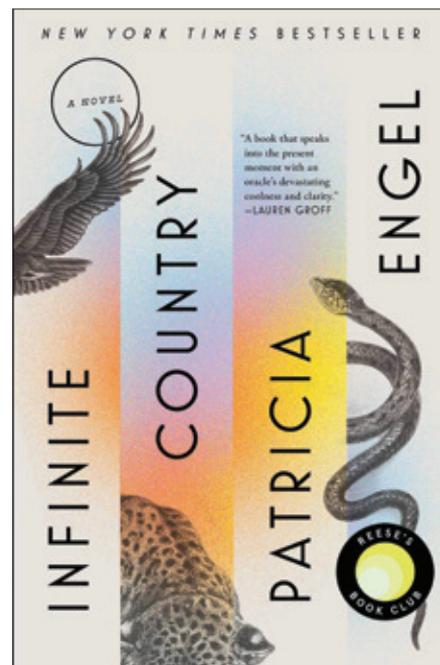
While Talia makes her getaway, Engel unwinds her family’s story and depicts in distilled, propulsive prose how they ended up scattered across nations. The American dream exerts a magnetic pull in this novel. When Mauro and Elena have their first daughter, Karina, they decide to leave the violence and low-paying jobs of Bogotá and apply for tourist visas to the United States. Elena, less enthusiastic about the move, often longs to return home. “What was it about this country that kept everyone hostage to its fantasy?” Elena wonders. After their third child is born, Mauro is caught in a raid and deported. “With the apparent logic that removing fathers is the most efficient method for undoing a fami-

ly,” Engel writes, “the officers targeted men more often than women.”

Elena is a devout Catholic, but as her miseries—including a nurse’s encouragement to undergo sterilization and a boss who rapes her, knowing she can’t report the crime—as a single, undocumented mother are compounded, her faith wavers. “Elena,” Engel writes, “was uneasy with how the nurse spoke of her babies as burdens. She never thought of them that way. In Colombia people said a baby arrives with a loaf of bread under its arm. Where four eat, so can five.”

Meanwhile, Karina grows up a brilliant student, becoming embittered about opportunities that her legal status denies her. She is her mother’s interpreter, and she shields Elena from upsetting calls from school. As high school draws to a close, Karina nears the limits of what she can achieve without U.S. citizenship, but she rejects the labels that are applied to her legally and socially. “I’ve had borders drawn around me all my life,” she says, “but I refuse to live as a bordered person.”

Engel writes in third-person limited voice, with the perspective in each chapter attached to one character. This seems an apt choice for this novel about a fractured family whose members never exactly know what the others are experiencing, thinking and feeling. Early in the book, the perspective rotates between Talia, Mauro and Elena; later in the book, Karina and the middle child, Fernando, have a say. Because of the family’s separation, different citizenship statuses and varied locations, no character can fully understand the others, and they keep secrets from each other as they gauge what the others can handle knowing. Different members of the family suffer



### Infinite Country

By Patricia Engel  
Avid Reader Press  
208p \$26

beatings, panic attacks, racist taunts, abuse and imprisonment, but don’t feel they can reach out to each other for help; their loved ones’ burdens are already so great.

Engel depicts how the vicissitudes of the immigration system don’t just separate members of a family physically; they also create an emotional rift. This narrative structure puts the reader in the position of being the characters’ confessor. The reader alone knows all their secrets and dreams. As the characters in Colombia yearn for the United States and the characters in the United States long for Colombia, the benefits and failings of both countries are revealed.

Elena, who has struggled so much as an undocumented person in America, has a beautiful insight about the

nature of happiness in the two countries: “There was an *alegría* inherent to Colombians, optimism even through tears, but never the kind of self-interrogation of ‘happiness’ she observed in the north, the way people constantly asked themselves if they were content as if it were their main occupation in life. And what was happiness? Not selfish fulfillment, of this she was certain. That seemed like a recipe for the opposite. Joy was in the loving and caring of others.”

Engel suggests that an itch for the American style of happiness keeps the characters in this novel roving and restless, always seeking the next best place to be as each becomes “infected” by the American dream that, in her eyes, “was more like a sickness.”

This book is full of migration, as various members of the family move from Colombia to the United States and back again, and from place to place within the United States. Talia pursues her wild escape toward Bogotá, and Mauro, the one character who has been caught by immigration authorities so many times that he is compelled into stasis, drinks to forget his sorrows.

As Engel’s stylish, heartfelt novel takes as many swift turns as Talia does on the back of a motorcycle she’s talked her way onto, the idea that this family could ever be safely reunited begins to look improbable. But in the end, Engel chooses to bestow on her characters several miracles, perhaps betraying her own glimmer of belief in the tarnished American dream.

---

Jenny Shank’s story collection *Mixed Company* won the George Garrett Fiction Prize and will be published by Texas Review Press in October 2021. She teaches in the Mile High MFA program at Regis University in Denver.

## Future Shock

---

Each fall, I teach a course on vocation to a talented and enthusiastic group of students in my university’s intensive humanities core program. I struggle with how to address what will be the defining reality of their lives: climate change. How do I communicate—without crushing their spirits—how dire our situation is and how much will be demanded of them? While scientific studies reveal our predicament, technology and policy analyses show that a response is still possible. But possibilities are cold comfort in the world of denial and dithering in which my students are coming of age. It is difficult to imagine a path forward.

Kim Stanley Robinson’s latest novel, *The Ministry for the Future*, offers just that: a vision of the coming century honest to the scale of the crisis that offers a plausible path to addressing it. The ministry referred to in the title is a group created according to existing provisions of the Paris Climate Agreement, with the mandate to “advocate for the world’s future generations of citizens” and defend “all living creatures present and future... by promoting their legal standing and physical protection.” The composition of the ministry staff maps the dimensions of the crises we face and the means to address them. The staff includes professionals adept in law, economics, ecology, earth, ocean and atmospheric sciences; disaster and refugee specialists; and an expert in artificial intelligence.

*The Ministry for the Future* is a hopeful novel, despite opening with a harrowing account of a severe heat

wave in India. In this crisis, the over-taxed power grid fails, leaving a vast population with neither air conditioning nor water. Tens of millions die. These events take place...in the next five years.

Robinson is an accomplished author of “hard” science fiction—writing that attempts to imagine the future in light of realistic constraints and technological possibilities. He is best known for his 1990s Mars trilogy, which imagined the terraforming of the red planet and, somewhat infamously, inspired the dreams of planetary escape by Silicon Valley billionaires. Alas, the trilogy’s use of St. Hildegard of Bingen’s notion of the Holy Spirit’s work of *viriditas*, or “greenness,” as the guiding vision for a biologist character devoted to bringing life to the barren planet has had less impact.

Robinson’s 2015 novel *Aurora*—published within months of the release of the papal encyclical “Laudato Si”—offers a very different take on our planetary destiny, perhaps intentionally challenging the uses to which his Mars series has been put. The novel flips the well-worn science fiction plot of interstellar colonization. After a multigenerational expedition arrives at the Tau Ceti star system, the colonists discover the inseparability of Homo sapiens’s connection to Earth, and struggle to return to the planet upon which we evolved. As he wrote in an essay published with the release of the book: “There is no Planet B.”

Robinson studied with the American Marxist literary theorist Fredric Jameson, and his fiction has long wrestled with Jameson’s observation that “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of

capitalism.” (Try it and see.) This insight about literary imagination threatens to become the reality we bequeath to our children as we career ever deeper into climate disruption and ecological collapse.

*The Ministry for the Future* portrays in great detail how economic and financial systems both contribute to the climate crisis and obstruct solutions. Economic doctrines can obscure reality. As one character says about a demanding plan to slow glacial melt: “Look, if you have to do something, you have to do it. Don’t keep talking about cost as if that’s a real thing. Money isn’t real. Work is real.”

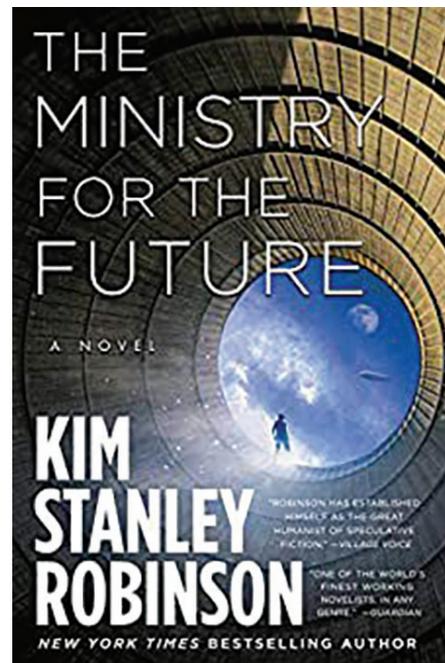
Central to the novel is one of the most daunting economic obstacles to addressing climate change: “stranded assets.” We can burn only a fraction of the current proven reserves of oil, gas and coal to stay below global warming of 1.5 or even 2 degrees Celsius. The owners of these trillions of dollars in assets have fought and will continue to fight policies that will render them worthless. Robinson explores the idea (put forward by the geo-hydrologist and civil engineer Delton Chen) of a “carbon coin” as a solution. This proposes an alternative reserve currency, coined in payment for foregone profits from carbon extraction. Such a solution would convert these trillions of dollars in losses into potential profits and also provide a way of reimbursing countless smaller actors, such as farmers in developing nations managing their fields, for carbon drawdown. This would require a coordinated reorientation of the entire global financial system. The crises and negotiations that bring this reorientation about are central drivers of the book’s plot.

The book is not only about policy; it attentively portrays the lives of climate migrants, enslaved persons and the technocrats who run the ministry. Survivors of the story’s heat wave in India demonstrate the role climate trauma will play in the culture and politics of this century. Key among the survivors are The Children of Kali, a militant group born of India’s grim knowledge that rich nations care little for the suffering their emissions cause poorer ones. With meticulous planning and untiring tenacity, they fight to end high-emission industries and consumption—usually with violence, often with genius. “Kali sees all. And the Children of Kali are not going away until the guilty are gone. Be advised.”

The work accomplished by sabotage and terror is challenging. It forces us to reckon morally with the scale of violence our indifference and indecision will cause. Future generations will suffer from our inaction on a scale that far eclipses the 20th century’s mass genocides. What level of action and sacrifice on our part would be required to prevent such a turn to violence for the sake of our victims yet unborn?

One chapter stands out as luminous. It portrays the roll call of a future international conference on ecological restoration. Page after page is filled with nothing but the introductions of organizations from every corner of the world working to save and restore their lands and ecologies. Robinson leaves unspoken that all of these groups actually exist and are already undertaking this great work.

In an influential article entitled “Beyond Hope,” the radical environmentalist Derrick Jensen argues



### **The Ministry for the Future**

By Kim Stanley Robinson

Orbit

576p \$28

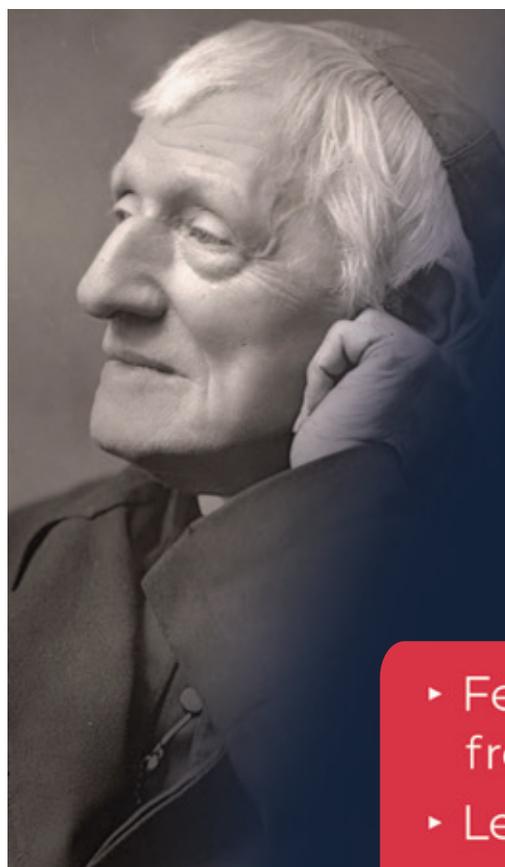
against hope in the face of environmental destruction: “Hope is what keeps us chained to the system.” For him, hope is the opposite of action—the sort of thing we do when seated in the passenger seat, not when we are behind the wheel. Thomas Aquinas’s definition of hope, in contrast, is intrinsically connected to action. Hope is patient expectation and work for a “*bonum futurum arduum*”: a difficult future good. Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* is a work of hope in precisely this sense.

Vincent Miller is the Gudorf Chair in Catholic Theology and Culture at the University of Dayton. He is editor of *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato Si’: Everything Is Connected*.



**LOYOLA  
SCHOOL**

Open House on October 7 & 27 | [loyolanyc.org](http://loyolanyc.org)



**NINS**

Join us **Sept. 20-22**  
for our online Conference

**John Henry Newman:  
Scholar, Sage, Saint**

- ▶ Featuring **30+ speakers**  
from around the world
- ▶ Learn more at **[newmanstudies.org](http://newmanstudies.org)**

## Nourishment

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), AUG. 1, 2021

READINGS: EX 16:2-15; PS 78; EPH 4:17-24; JN 6:24-35

In today's Gospel, Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life." Jesus often speaks in symbolic ways, especially in John. The symbol of the bread of life, the bread from heaven, would resonate with John's audience, who were familiar with the tradition of the Exodus and manna in the desert. The expression offers us, too, much food for thought.

Last Sunday, we heard the story of Jesus feeding thousands of people with five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus demonstrated his care and concern for the physical needs of his community, and he did not let hardship or limitations stifle his ability to help others. In today's Gospel, we see Jesus tending to the spiritual needs of the community, offering himself as spiritual nourishment. Jesus affirms that belief in him will cure spiritual hunger and thirst, and he makes a clear reference to the story of the manna sent from heaven in today's first reading.

The first reading is set soon after the Exodus, in which God's saving and liberating power is revealed. Despite

the deliverance, the Israelites complain to Moses, lamenting their journey through the desert and even wishing to return to Egypt. God hears their frustration and sends quails and bread from heaven to nourish them, giving instructions for how they should collect, manage and share the food. Like the story of Jesus sharing the loaves and fish, the manna from heaven was abundant, and it served the people's needs. Tradition holds that the Israelites ate manna from heaven for 40 years while traveling through the wilderness to the promised land (Ex 16:35).

Jesus compares himself to this manna from heaven, calling himself the bread from heaven, sent by the Father to sustain and nourish: "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Belief in Jesus offers spiritual fullness. Symbolic teachings like this occur throughout John. Two chapters earlier, Jesus encountered the woman of Samaria at a well and called himself "living water" that quenches thirst and

*'Whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.' (Jn 6:35)*

### Praying With Scripture

What can you do to meet the spiritual needs of your community?

How can you increase your faith?

What can you do to be more like Christ?

leads to eternal life (Jn 4:13-14). As the bread of life, Jesus proclaims that he fulfills the spiritual needs of everyone.

When Jesus offered bread and fish to the multitudes, he modeled behavior that we are called to emulate, attending to the physical needs of others. In affirming that faith in him fills spiritual hunger, today's Gospel invites us to think of ways we can tend to the spiritual needs of ourselves and others. To be nourished by faith in Christ, we are called to be like Christ.

## Encounter and Imitate

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), AUG. 8, 2021

READINGS: 1 KGS 19:4-8; PS 34; EPH 4:30-5:2; JN 6:41-51

Both the first reading and the Gospel today remind us to look for ways to encounter God. The second reading speaks of ways to imitate God, fostering our connection to God and one another.

In the first reading from 1 Kings, the prophet Elijah finds safety in the wilderness during the reigns of Queen Jezebel and King Ahab. These leaders were hostile toward the prophets of Israel, especially Je-

zebel, as she promoted worship of Canaanite gods. While fleeing for safety, Elijah bemoans his circumstances and wishes for death, but an angel urges him to care for himself and prepare to continue his journey. Elijah's dire circumstances and the divine response offer us an example of how to deal with hostility in our lives, seek refuge and also resist persecution. Ultimately, Elijah's journey takes him away from his moment of

distress and leads him to a dramatic encounter with God at Horeb.

The Gospel, too, speaks about divine encounter. Jesus again speaks of himself as the bread that nourishes and sustains life. With parallels to the story of the Israelites complaining in the wilderness to Moses, today we hear the community complaining and murmuring because of Jesus. Jesus reminds them that he was sent from the Father in heaven and an encounter

with him leads to eternal life.

The second reading reminds us to be like God in our thoughts and actions. This principle is often referred to as imitation of God (*imitatio Dei*), and it instructs believers to see God as an example for how to live. This concept builds on the idea of humanity created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). Ephesians offers examples of actions to avoid and to embrace. “All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.”

As the passage continues, believ-

ers are reminded that the love that God gives humanity is a model for how we should love one another. This text is vitally important, today and always. In particular, it requires that we look at Christ’s sacrificial death not only as a saving act for us but as an example to us. Love and sacrifice are exemplified in Christ on the cross, and we are challenged to embrace and embody this teaching in our lives. How can we live selflessly and sacrificially for one another? The simple answer is by treating one another with dignity and respect while condemning hate. These are the conditions of an authentic imitation of God, recognizing that in encounter

*So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself over for us. (Eph 4:1-2)*

### *Praying With Scripture*

What actions can you do to imitate God?

Do you encounter God in your interactions with others?

How can you increase love in the world?

with one another, we encounter the image of God.

## Praying with Mary

**ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, AUG. 15, 2021**

READINGS: RV 11:19-12:10; PS 45; 1 COR 15:20-27; LK 1:39-56

Today is the feast of the Assumption of Mary, the commemoration of Mary being “taken up body and soul to the glory of heaven” (“Munificentissimus Deus,” No. 40). In the Gospel reading from Luke, we hear the story of the visit of Mary to Elizabeth, the second of the joyful mysteries of the Rosary. Today’s Gospel contains the Magnificat and a part of the Hail Mary. The Magnificat, also called the Song or Canticle of Mary, shares similarities in form and content with the psalms, and it builds on the biblical tradition of canticles attributed to women in the Bible.

The Gospel according to Luke offers unique traditions about Mary and her family. Luke includes background information about Mary’s cousin, Elizabeth, and her husband, Zechariah, the parents of John the Baptist.

After the angel Gabriel announces Jesus’ forthcoming birth, Mary visits Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John. At Mary’s greeting, “the infant leaped in her [Elizabeth’s] womb,” and Elizabeth exclaims: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” John’s reaction in the womb signals Mary’s and Jesus’ significance, as John seems almost to herald Jesus while in utero. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaims that Mary is the mother of God, even without Mary informing her, and she affirms Mary is blessed because of her belief in the annunciation.

Mary’s song of praise follows her interaction with Elizabeth. Mary reacts to her selection to be the mother

of God, saying her soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and her spirit rejoices at this calling. She also sings praises for God’s protection of the lowly and God’s power of salvation. Like many of the psalmists of the Old Testament, Mary recounts the historical connection between Abraham and his descendants and God’s unending mercy. The song has many of the hallmarks of ancient poems of thanksgiving highlighting God’s ability to overcome obstacles. Both Mary and Elizabeth are examples of this, as they are with child although Elizabeth has been unable to conceive, and Mary is a virgin.

The Old Testament features notable canticles of women that are echoed in today’s Gospel, such as Miriam’s song (Ex 15:20-21), Deborah’s song

(Jgs 5:1-31) and Hannah's song (1 Sam 2:1-10). The prophet Miriam sang in celebration of God's defeat of the Egyptians in the Exodus. The prophet and military leader Deborah sang of God's power during military victories, highlighting men and women who were instruments of God. The context of Hannah's song offers the closest parallels to Mary, as she sings following the birth of her son, the prophet Samuel, after a prolonged period without bearing a child. Like Mary, Hannah begins her song with joy: "My heart exults in the Lord, my horn is exalted by my God" (1 Sm 2:1). Also like Mary, Han-

nah highlights divine care for the poor and lowly, and she reflects on divine punishment for those who abuse power and resources. Both women, in their moments of selection to be mothers of leaders, rejoice at their calling and celebrate God's strength and saving power.

Fitting within the biblical traditions of songs and prayers, Mary's song offers us a model for how to pray, as she expresses joy, reflects on her life, praises God and recognizes God's impact on history. On this feast of the Assumption of Mary, we honor Mary's selection, essential role, life and assumption into heaven. We can also be

*'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.'* (Lk 1:46-47)

### *Praying With Scripture*

How can Scripture inspire your prayer life?

What is your favorite prayer?

What significance does Mary hold in your life?

inspired by prayers associated with Mary and can find a good prayer partner in Mary.

## Difficult Decisions

**TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), AUG. 22, 2021**

READINGS: JOS 24:1-18; PS 34; EPH 5:21-32; JN 6:60-69

Today's readings are somewhat disconnected in content, theme and style, yet the Lectionary encourages us to read them side-by-side to find potential connections. Each reading broaches a difficult topic with a group and then offers an opportunity for personal acceptance and affirmation.

In the first reading, Joshua, the Israelite leader after Moses, calls on the community to affirm their commitment to God. Joshua recounts ways that God intervened in their lives and in the lives of their ancestors, and he reprimands the people for their continued service to other gods. Joshua declares, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." His declaration inspires the Israelites to affirm the same, renew their covenant with God and agree to keep the statutes and ordinances that are required.

The Joshua reading may be paired

with Ephesians based on Joshua's speaking on behalf of his household. The second reading offers guidance for establishing a Christian household, beginning with a call for couples to "be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ." The writer hopes to inspire people to submit themselves to each other as a sign that God should lead the household. While there may be some value in this premise, terms like "subordinate," "subject" and "submit" can have damaging effects, especially for women, who are more often on the receiving end of dishonorable and abusive actions. Moreover, although the passage begins with a mutual subordination, it becomes clear that wives are especially charged with this duty while husbands are instructed to love. As has been addressed previously when discussing similar rhetoric in Colossians (see

*'We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.'* (Jn 6:69)

### *Praying With Scripture*

What do you do when confronted with difficult choices?

How do you approach problematic biblical texts?

How can you strengthen your relationship with God?

12/23/19), passages with a potential for misuse and abuse should be avoided, especially when shorter options are available that eliminate some of the problematic language.

As for the Gospel, we continue to hear reactions to Jesus calling himself the bread of life and comparing himself to manna from heaven. To-

day, his followers complain and question Jesus' demanding and complex statements. Jesus states that people who believe in him are called by the Father in heaven, but not everyone is called. Perhaps surprisingly, the Gospel concedes this point, saying, "Many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no lon-

ger accompanied him." Jesus recognizes the difficulty and complexity of the Gospel, as he challenges how people think, live and believe. Many people, when confronted with these difficulties, opt out. At the end of today's reading, we hear the apostles' responses to these events; they affirm their desire to continue to follow Je-

sus, recognizing that his words lead to eternal life.

Today's readings offer us an opportunity to think about how we react to complex and difficult statements, texts and choices. They remind us to take ownership of our lives and decisions and remain committed to ourselves, our community and to God.

## Live Well

**TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), AUG. 29, 2021**

READINGS: DT 4:1-8; PS 15; JAS 1:17-27; MK 7:1-23

Less talk and more action! Today's readings remind us not only to preach the Gospel but to live it. The readings encourage us to prioritize care of vulnerable groups and to avoid corruption, which damages relationships with one another and with God.

The Letter of James addresses a Christian community, offering guidance on how to live out their faith. James states that generous acts done by people are a way that God works in the world: "All good giving and every perfect gift is from above." When we help others, we facilitate divine care and love in the world.

James speaks of what Christian faith and practice require, emphasizing care for orphans and widows. In the Bible, orphans and widows are often mentioned in tandem as groups afforded intentional human and divine care because of their financial, emotional and legal challenges. Orphans and widows are associated with vulnerable, disenfranchised and oppressed peoples. Isaiah, for instance, criticizes his community for its dis-

regard of people in need, stating that they should "learn to do good; make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow" (Is 1:17). The Letter of James challenges us to reflect and act. Who are the orphans and widows of today? What groups in our society are vulnerable and most in need? Scripture is clear in calling on us to fight for and alongside them.

The Gospel of Mark also speaks to how people live and engage in the world. Jesus interacts with Jewish leaders who are critical of his followers for not following prescribed laws and customs. Jesus is critical of the leaders and their intentions and shifts the discussion to preach on broader human behavior, not just formal religious observance. Jesus condemns acts that corrupt people and inflict harm, such as theft, murder, malice, greed and arrogance. These types of actions, and sin more generally, not only defile the individual and the human-divine relationship but also damage the community.

As the world is filled with much suffering, we are called to action. We

*Be doers of the word and not hearers only. (Jas 1:22)*

---

*Praying With Scripture*

What can you do to care for the most vulnerable in society?

How can you encourage others to be more mindful of their actions?

How do you live out the Gospel in your daily life?

should ask ourselves the Vincentian question, "What must be done?" How do we put faith in Christ into practice? Scripture requires support of people who are most in need, offering resources and advocating for changes that will help all people to thrive. Likewise, Jesus' emphasis on morality reminds us to be mindful and intentional about our actions, doing good and avoiding evil.

---

Jaime L. Waters teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies.

# Coming Out of Retreat

## *The Ignatian way to re-entry*

By Debra K. Mooney



I vividly recall returning from an Ignatian silent retreat almost 20 years ago. It was a 25-minute drive from the Jesuit retreat center to my house in suburban Cincinnati, and halfway home I was overwhelmed with the traffic, noise and crowding. It was a staggering sensory overload, but my transition experience is not uncommon for retreatants.

Thanks to the Covid-19 vaccines, many of us feel excited for our return to the ordinary. But there will be unanticipated reactions during the transition from sheltering in place and working from home, similar to the re-entry process after a retreat. Noises will be louder, colors brighter, touch more tactile. All the options re-opening before us (literally) may cause cognitive exhaustion.

What can be done to ease the transition? The answer may lie in the guidance offered to Ignatian retreatants. Within this framework, here are some suggestions for post-pandemic wellness.

*Identify the positives during the pandemic.* I have noticed people talking about the extreme stresses they have been coping with during the pandemic. But when asked about moments of gratitude amid lockdown, people offer many profound responses, such as appreciating dinners with the entire family, making home improvements and visiting local parks. Beginning with St. Ignatius Loyola,

the Jesuits have shared a way of praying, called an examen, to notice God's presence and goodness in our life. We are invited to pause and review meaningful moments and recognize the Spirit in the experiences. Anyone can use this model to find healing graces from the past year and a half.

*Recognize that you have been transformed.* Living through Covid has changed each of us in ways that are important to notice. Consider the experiences of gratitude that you can include in your new normal, such as taking regular hikes or wearing comfortable clothes. Conversely, drop actions that were helpful for coping through the pandemic but that you do not want to continue. These might include excessive exercise (or a lack of exercise) or indulging a sweet tooth.

*Pinpoint emotions and desires.* A meme that spread early in the pandemic was the word *coronacoaster*, describing the extreme ups and downs felt during social distancing and isolation. The lockdown may have also revealed powerful yearnings related to relationships, vocations or other mindsets. For example, a friend of mine recently took a leave of absence from her job to consider a change to more socially purposeful work. Prayerful discernment can help us interpret the thoughts and feelings behind these desires: Are they superficial or will they genuinely produce feelings of consolation if acted upon?

*Focus on those you love.* One difference between transitioning after a spiritual retreat and after Covid is that everyone around us has also experienced the pandemic. Talking to family, friends and co-workers about their reactions builds companionship and provides opportunities to be a supportive person for others.

*Rejuvenate.* In the same way that we feel tired after sitting for hours in a car or on a plane, sheltering in place was not restful. Instead, it made us restless. As we spend more time outside the home again, anticipate mental and physical fatigue, and engage in activities that will restore your vitality.

Early in the pandemic, Brendan McManus, S.J., wrote how he was living through Covid-19 as if it were an Ignatian retreat, relying on his "Jesuit training to be able to read [his] feelings, respond well, and act in a compassionate way." We are now coming to the end of a once-in-a-lifetime experience: transitioning back to a routine life following a global pandemic. With continued attention and awareness—an Ignatian way of proceeding—re-engagement will not only be a healing experience but one of mental, physical and spiritual thriving.

---

**Debra K. Mooney is the chief mission officer at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, and a licensed clinical psychologist.**



# Canisius High School...

Pursues excellence

Focuses on the person

Transforms lives

Connects friends who become brothers



**Jesuit education for college...for life.**

Canisius High School • Buffalo, NY  
canisiushigh.org • 716.882.0466



1863

# BC HIGH

*Men for and with Others*

[www.bchigh.edu](http://www.bchigh.edu)

150 Morrissey Blvd. Boston, MA



Sacred Heart  
UNIVERSITY

VIRTUAL  
EVENT

## YOUNG ADULTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A Conversation on Faith, Religion & Culture: September 9-11, 2021

Register now: \$25 to attend

The Y21 Center and the office of mission integration, ministry & multicultural affairs at Sacred Heart University invite you to a virtual multigenerational, transdisciplinary gathering to prayerfully ask questions about, and with, young adults on a 21st century journey of faith.

### KEYNOTE PRESENTERS



**Thursday, September 9, 2021 – 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. (EDT)**

Father Dan Horan, OFM, Chicago Theological Union  
*"The Future Church is Now: Exploring the Joys and Hopes, Grievs and Anxieties of Young Adult Catholics Today"*



**Friday, September 10, 2021 – 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. (EDT)**

Kaya Oakes, University of California, Berkeley  
*"Beyond the Boundaries: How the Pandemic and Online Life are Changing Our Spiritual Lives"*



**Friday, September 10, 2021 – 9:00 - 10:30 a.m. (EDT)**

Kerry A. Robinson, National Leadership Roundtable  
*"Co-Responsibility: Toward a New Culture of Leadership in the Church"*



**Saturday, September 11, 2021 – 9:00 - 10:30 a.m. (EDT)**

Sebastian Gomes, America Magazine  
*"I Can't Believe It! How Contemporary Catholicism Repels and Attracts"*



**Friday, September 10, 2021 – 1:30 - 3:00 p.m. (EDT)**

Christine Gebhardt, PhD, University of Notre Dame  
*"Intergenerational Dialogue in, and Moral Development with, Young Adults"*

#### Additional workshops include:

- Evangelization to Young Adults
- What the Top Campuses Know about Reaching College Students
- The State of Religion and Young People 2021: Navigating Uncertain Times
- New Education Models for Reaching College-Age Students
- Tweeting for Jesus: How Parish Communities Can Utilize Social Media to Reach the Faithful
- How can Parishes Engage with the Young Adult Community? What Comes Next?

To register and learn more visit: [www.sacredheart.edu/youngadults](http://www.sacredheart.edu/youngadults)