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‘Let Us Plead God’

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save?

These are the opening lines of the book of the prophet Habakkuk. They are my prayer after reading the news of a mass shooting, ever since the Sandy Hook shootings in Newtown, Conn. I have prayed them far too often in the past 13 years, often enough that I can recite them from memory as readily as the prayers of the rosary. (We will also hear them at Mass on Oct. 5.)

I prayed them again on Aug. 27, after the shooting at Annunciation Church in Minneapolis during a school-wide Mass. That prayer, along with so many others from so many grieving, hurting and angry people, remains unanswered, and only faith assures us that it does not go unheard.

In that space between crying out and waiting for an answer that does not come, it is all too easy to hurt each other further. Speaking at the scene of the shooting, which in this case meant in front of a church, Mayor Jacob Frey said everyone in Minneapolis “needs to be wrapping their arms around these families,” adding, “And don’t just say this is about thoughts and prayers right now. These kids were literally praying.”

The next day, both Mr. Frey and others were already weaponizing these words in a culture war. Mr. Frey posted his speech to social media, introducing it with “words aren’t enough” and framing it as a call for better gun policy. He was criticized by many, including both political and religious leaders, for appearing to denigrate the importance of prayer. Others cheered him on for calling out the seeming hypocrisy of praying without moving to take any political action.

I do not think that anyone was convinced in this skirmish, either by Mr. Frey’s comments or by the response to them, of anything other than that their political opponents had proven exactly as callous and hypocritical as they thought they were.

A few days later, Pope Leo XIV spoke about the shooting after the Sunday Angelus in Rome, switching from Italian to his native American English: “Let us plead God to stop the pandemic of arms, large and small, which infects our world. May our mother Mary, the Queen of Peace, help us to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah: They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”

While I have no idea if this was his specific intention, I am struck by how the Holy Father’s words undercut the false dichotomy between praying in the aftermath of tragic violence and recognizing the evil of the means of violence. Naming the “pandemic of arms, large and small” does not dance around the need to address the ready availability of guns—but Pope Leo did not place his hope in recommending a policy, but in pleading with God to stop it.

At first, I found this turn of phrase odd. What, I wondered, did Leo hope God might do? On deeper reflection, I found this invitation to plead with God echoing for me the heartache of the opening lines from Habakkuk. The problem is that I no longer know what to hope for; I only know, 26 years after Columbine and 13 years after Sandy Hook, that we are still crying, “Violence!”

We should not despair of advocating for better and saner gun laws, starting with a ban on assault weapons. **America** has a long history, dating to not just before my missioning to the magazine but to before my birth, of calling for gun control. We also need to recognize, however, that our proven inability to respond to the particularly American scourge of gun violence and school shootings is not only a political problem but a spiritual one.

Something in our culture and our national psyche is enslaved to the logic of violence. Three years ago, writing in our pages after the Uvalde school shooting, Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago said, “The Second Amendment did not come down from Sinai. The right to bear arms will never be more important than human life.”

If it were only a matter of writing a better law, we would have done so by now. If it were only a matter of writing a better law, our regulation of guns would have been strengthened rather than weakened after Sandy Hook. Something else, something deeper, is broken.

Which is not to say that better laws cannot help. Laws are not only text and policy but symbol and teacher. It would mean something powerful to say in law, together as a society, that we have neither need of nor unfettered right to weapons that deal out death at scale. Perhaps saying that would also help, over time, defuse the twisted thinking of those who reach for such weapons.

But we need to want to say it, and we need to want to say it together, and right now we cannot. So we plead God to change in us whatever refuses to renounce such violence and to help us imagine cooperating with that change.

The opening lines of Habakkuk are not the only ones I hold onto. The prophet also reminds us that “there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay” (Hb 2:3).

Come quickly, Lord.

Sam Sawyer, S.J.

THE ISSUE

GIVE AND TAKE

DISPATCHES

FEATURES

Palestinians wait to receive food from a charity kitchen in Gaza City on Aug. 15.
OSV News photo/Dawoud Abu Alkas, Reuters

Cover: Armenian seminarians process around the Dome of the Ascension in Jerusalem on the Feast of the Ascension on May 29.
Stephanie Saldaña

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THE WORD

LAST TAKE

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OCTOBER 2025 VOL. 233 NO. 3 WHOLE NO. 5513

The crisis of presidential power six months into the second Trump term

In the September issue, the editors of **America** argued that President Trump's reliance on executive orders manifests a disdain for the limits of presidential power. The ongoing constitutional crisis, the editors wrote, "demands responses both of opposition to specific imprudent, immoral or illegal actions and also of deeper structural reforms to restore the balance of power in American government." Our readers had much to say in response.

It's going to take decades to dig ourselves out of the hole that man and his voters dug for us.

We can't rely only on the courts, which begs the question: What other tools do we have? Building a [political] coalition is going to take a while, and the people in positions of power (the hierarchy) ignored the warning signs.

Gwen Murtha

While agreeing with the analysis of this editorial, I can't help but wonder how we can reverse the rapid slide to the establishment of an authoritarian government. The Supreme Court has pretty much given Mr. Trump a free hand and seems almost as unconcerned about the Constitution, rule of law and separation of powers as is the Trump administration itself. Our freedoms are being rapidly eroded, and it seems that the conversion to an unfree, faux democracy like Hungary will be complete long before the midterm elections.

Anne Chapman

There are so few Republicans willing to buck Mr. Trump's control because they fear being primaried or losing the election to a Democrat. So that brings us up once again to the issue of term limits. Too many of these lawmakers consider Congress to be a lifelong occupation. If they were only eligible to serve three or four terms, the power of the president over their decisions would be limited.

Ethel Sutherland

America, as a reviewer of faith and culture, is in a good position to publish an aspirational model, a "renewed set of norms to maintain a system of limited and balanced power among the branches of government." Call it "Project 2026."

Charles Erlinger

I think the Supreme Court is doing a good job when it comes to keeping things constitutional. For the first time in a long time, most justices seem to be well prepared for the task at hand.

We must not forget, when Mr. Biden was in charge, the right cried "authoritarianism," "crisis," etc. This seems to be part and parcel of how American politics works.

Like him or not, we can't deny that Mr. Trump is the most consequential president in modern U.S. history. A day doesn't pass without some major breaking news. Catholics can be pleased with some policies (overturning Roe, seeking peace, defending religious freedom, protecting women/girls in their sports leagues, etc.) and disagree with others (I.V.F., the bombing of Iran, Gaza policies, etc.).

Bill Williams

Can the president modify the 14th Amendment merely by decree? The simple answer is no. The deeper question is whether the president's decree ought to remain in effect during the slow, probably years-long legal process of trial, appellate review, and finally briefing and argument in the Supreme Court, assuming the court agrees to hear the case. The answer is still no.

It is abhorrent that a president can devise his own interpretation to the 14th Amendment and single-handedly decree whose kids get citizenship and whose do not. The 14th Amendment resolved that.

Joseph McGuire

I don't believe taxpayer money should go to charity work. The Trump administration was able to shine a spotlight on the wasteful spending and immoral nature of many government programs. These programs should be funded with private donations. This would eliminate the rancor and division that come with publicly funding these programs, as Americans would not be forced to fund programs with which they disagree.

Birthright citizenship (which has been abused) is a fascinating question that the Supreme Court will soon resolve. It is going through the standard legal process. Let's wait and see.

Nora Alberti

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American Troops Do Not Belong on American Streets

That we live in a time of unprecedented threats to the institutions of American democracy is obvious to anyone with access to media in 2025. It is even clearer to residents in two of the nation's largest cities. In both Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., we have witnessed large-scale National Guard deployments in recent months, moves unrequested by local governors or mayors but authorized by President Trump in response to what he has called out-of-control crime and social chaos. Mr. Trump continues to float the idea of deploying the military in other major cities.

How did we get here? And is there a way back?

Using the National Guard for law enforcement is not just another instance of the overreach that has characterized every month of the second Trump administration. It is an even clearer break with one of the basic norms that safeguard our liberty: that American troops should not be patrolling American streets.

While reports from both cities suggest an emphasis on political theater—at this writing, in neither place have Guard troops found much to do—Mr. Trump's rhetoric has been close to demagogic. His intention in sending the Guard into Los Angeles was to "liberate" the city from protesters against ICE raids, he said; in Washington, it was to prevent further "crime, bloodshed, bedlam and squalor."

In both cases, facts on the ground did not support his claims. Protests in Los Angeles had been largely peaceful and confined to a tiny area of the center city. Meanwhile, the Department of Justice reported in January of this year that Washington, D.C., has seen a 35 percent drop in violent crime since 2023. While its homicide rate is still higher than that of most major U.S. cities, the city is safer than it had been in over three decades.

But even if Mr. Trump had accurately described the degree of criminal activity in the capital, his use of the military to supercharge day-to-day domestic law enforcement would still be imprudent and alien to the best of the American political tradition.

In the Declaration of Independence's long litany of complaints against the British crown, the misuse of the military is a repeated theme. King George III was accused of having "kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures," of "affect[ing] to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power," and "Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us." The signers of the Declaration realized that the regular presence of armed soldiers, answerable to their ultimate commander rather than to the people's representatives, was incompatible with the self-governance of a free people.

While the second section of the Constitution makes the president the commander in chief of the armed forces, including the militia when called into actual national service, the first section assigns to Congress the power "to provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions." Mr. Trump, in contrast, said in a cabinet meeting while speculating about sending the Guard into Chicago: "I have the right to do anything I want to do. I'm the president of the United States. If I think our country is in danger, and it is in danger in these cities, I can do it."

As a constitutional federal republic, the United States usually relies in governance on a principle with roots in the Catholic tradition from Thomas Aquinas on, and clearly present today in Catholic social teaching: subsidiarity. As a governing principle, subsidiarity holds that competency and authority in governance or decision-making should generally devolve to the smallest unit whose concerns are tied up with that governance.

In the case of civil governance in the United States, this principle is most often seen in the historic tendency to privilege states' rights over federal authority. Even the clearest example of federal authority superseding states' rights—the Civil War—sparked much of our contemporary jurisprudence around the use of federal military force in local jurisdictions.

Mr. Trump is not the first president to assert federal control of the National Guard over the objection of state leaders, and his administration argues that he is acting within the bounds of his legal authority and according to Congress's delegation of power to him. Perhaps the most famous prior examples in American history of the use of the National Guard were the deployments commanded by Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson during the civil rights era.

Few would argue today that such interventions were unjust. But those temporary actions, responding to the refusal of institutions to follow court orders to desegregate or to attacks on civil rights protesters, were clear responses to prevailing injustices. Segregation is not only bad policy, but, in the terms of Catholic moral theology, it relies on the constant violation of human dignity for the purposes of perpetuating injustice—a structural sin.

Mr. Trump's deployment of the

Guard for general police duty lacks such moral clarity. The legality of the interventions in both Los Angeles and Washington is being challenged in the courts, but as the editors of **America** argued only last month, "Americans who are alarmed about assaults on democratic norms need to recognize that the courts alone are not a sufficient bulwark for the rule of law." The most significant problem with these military deployments is not their questionable legality but that they are profoundly unwise, unlikely to achieve their nominal goals and dangerous to liberty. They should be resisted not only with lawsuits, not only by protesters demonstrating against them, but also by clear moral argument.

In the case of Mr. Trump's interventions, the militarization of our cities is taking place without a clear justification—a *casus belli*, since these are indeed soldiers—other than rhetoric around crime and livability that seems aimed more at urban centers themselves rather than the protection of their residents. Soldiers may be able to offer humanitarian assistance after a national disaster; they may be able to force recalcitrant politicians to obey the law or a violent mob to disperse. But they cannot, over the long term, police a city into livability, and the attempt to have them do so is dangerous in itself.

Bring the troops home—even when home is just a day away. Allow our civil institutions that seek justice the room to do so without cribbing from authoritarian playbooks that Americans have rejected for 250 years. The president's actions in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., may have been mostly political theater—but that does not mean they are not a real threat to our American political tradition and to the common good.

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In a San Diego courthouse: Accompanying immigrants in trust and hope

It could be seen as naïve what over 200 residents of San Diego are doing.

On Aug. 11, the Diocese of San Diego, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish and San Diego Organizing Project launched a new ministry called FAITH: Faithful Accompaniment in Trust & Hope. Some 200 people of faith, including the three Catholic bishops of San Diego and members of seven different religious communities and congregations, have signed up to simply stand with people as they go to immigration court to comply with their notices to appear.

This pilot program is a follow-up to a very effective gathering of clergy and faith leaders on June 20, World Refugee Day, when we first accompanied migrants to court. The people we feel called to accompany are migrants of mixed variety: Many are new arrivals making a case for asylum, but others have been in the United States for decades, and their cases had been considered administratively closed. Now they are being called to court, and their status in the United States is in jeopardy.

Our purpose is to be present to our immigrant brothers and sisters, and to give witness to the dignity of these people, whose lives hang in the balance. This is perhaps not a new place for most of the people coming to court. They have known how it feels to live at the low end of the power scale ever since they made their decision to leave their homelands. But to feel powerless is a new experience for many of us in this new ministry.

In truth, when we consider the obstacles we volunteers face as we begin this ministry, our actions feel almost futile. What good do we really think we can do? And when we consider that the size of Goliath will grow, with a budget increase of over $45 billion to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to build new detention centers and hire some 10,000 additional officers, our task seems all the more formidable. So why do we do this?

We do it because this is what our ancestors in the faith have done since the beginning of time. Against all odds, people of faith have been invited to believe in and work for the impossible. With faith, somehow but not always, the impossible has been transformed into the possible and the real.

When we began our new ministry a few weeks ago, various stories in Scripture came to mind. In one, Jesus and his disciples are faced with over 5,000 hungry people. When his disciples say, "All we have are five loaves and two fishes," he says, "Bring them to me." The disciples trusted Jesus and, somehow, people got fed. In another, Jesus invites Peter to walk on water. Impossible! And yet Peter trusted Jesus; he stepped out of the boat, and behold! He was walking.

We think of the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In 1531 the Mother of God appeared to an Indigenous man, in a form similar to him, with dark skin, speaking his native language. She asked of him the impossible: Go to the bishop and build her a basilica. Impossible! And yet Juan Diego trusted. He presented to the bishop the required proof, eventuating the enshrinement of her image in one of the most visited basilicas in the world.

On the fourth floor of the Edward Schwartz Federal Building in downtown San Diego, where eight immigration courtrooms are found, we often find ICE agents lining the hallways. They are playing their part in the current drama of migrant deportations, waiting for the next person whose case is dismissed so they can arrest them immediately and place them in expedited removal proceedings. We enter and walk through the gauntlet of those agents so we can stand with people: with mothers, with fathers, some younger, some older. In my brief experience, all of them appear fearful or at least nervous, wondering what their fate will be that day.

We can change no outcomes. We enable no results. We are powerless. Why do we do this?

We do this because we trust. We do this because we hope. We do this to remind all of us—migrants, volunteers, judges, even the ICE agents—of the truth: that regardless of what happens in any courtroom or detention center or deportation, God made us all the good and dignified sons and daughters that we are. We stand with migrants because we believe that. We do this because we feel the Spirit is in this ministry, calling more and more volunteers each week to show up and bear witness with us.

Naïve? Maybe. But it is where and who we are called to be. All people of faith are at some point called to believe in the impossible. Will you trust and hope along with us?

Michael Pham *has been the bishop of the Diocese of San Diego since July 2025. He was the first U.S. bishop appointed by Pope Leo XIV.*

Dinora Reyna *has been the executive director of the San Diego Organizing Project for six years.*

Scott Santarosa, S.J., *has been the pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, in San Diego, since July 2022.*

AMERICA'S RETREAT DIRECTORY

Planning a retreat can feel overwhelming, especially when it comes to choosing the right place. That's why we've put together this list of retreat houses to help guide your search. But before you begin, let's start with the essentials.

What is a retreat, and why consider one? At its core, a retreat is dedicated time for prayer and reflection. It often includes silence, personal meditation and sometimes faith-sharing. Retreat houses typically offer access to spiritual directors or speakers who can help deepen your connection with God.

Which type of retreat is right for me? There are several kinds to choose from, depending on your spiritual needs. Directed retreats include daily one-on-one meetings with a spiritual director to reflect on your prayer journey. Guided retreats focus on specific themes, like women's spirituality or healing, and often include talks and optional spiritual direction. Preached retreats involve listening to spiritual talks, followed by personal prayer or group sharing.

How do I find the right retreat? The retreat houses in this guide are a great place to start. Their experienced staff can help you find a retreat that fits your needs or can even connect you with a regular spiritual director.

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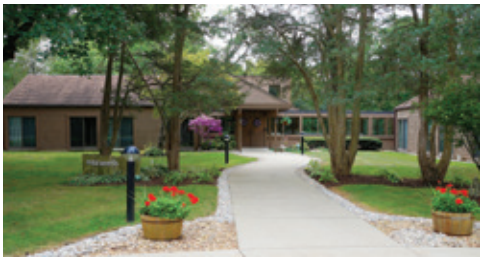

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AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes

‘Our people are living in fear’: U.S. bishops stand up for immigrants amid Trump crackdown

By Kevin Clarke

Rows of heavily armed federal agents, some on horseback, others dismounting from armored military vehicles, fanned out across Los Angeles’s MacArthur Park in early July. Park visitors fled before the advancing agents and others watched in shock as the show of force processed before them.

That militaristic display is part of a national “campaign of intimidation,” J. Kevin Appleby, a senior fellow at the Center for Migration Studies in New York, says. Masked federal agents, “acting like a secret police,” intend “to intimidate us all, to scare people, to get them to self-deport.”

In the coming months, many undocumented U.S. residents may indeed accept the self-deportation urged by the Trump administration as a vast machinery of detention and deportation spearheaded by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency moves into higher gear. For others who have been in the United States for years or even decades, many with U.S.-born children, the decision to self-deport will be much harder to make.

And many immigrants, Mr. Appleby says, have no option but to take their chances and remain, even if it means going into a kind of hiding, because conditions in their home countries represent a greater threat to their lives and well-being than a knock at the door from ICE agents.

Under the provisions of President Trump’s One Big Beautiful Bill, an additional $165 billion over the next decade has been set aside for the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is on the verge of a vast expansion that will include the construction of detention facilities across the country and the hiring of thousands of new agents.

Mr. Appleby fears that the sharp increase in resources

means ICE is on the verge of an indiscriminate enforcement campaign. "They're already deporting people and arresting people at a record rate," he says. With an additional $16 billion to $20 billion a year to spend, "It'll be deportation on steroids."

"You're going to see more detention centers being constructed like the one in the Everglades"—a facility that was quickly dubbed Alligator Alcatraz—and "you're going to have family detention centers being built."

A rapid increase in personnel may also lead to declining professionalism and to more constitutional violations, Mr. Appleby says.

"Inevitably, it's going to affect not only undocumented immigrants but legal immigrants and U.S. citizens as well. Anyone who's not born here and, frankly, of a certain race is in danger," he says. New citizens are especially likely to be caught up in the campaign. "I think if [the Trump administration] had their druthers, they would denaturalize them and deport them as well."

Some may dismiss such concerns as hyperbole or paranoia, but over the summer temporary protected status has been abruptly revoked for hundreds of thousands of immigrants, who instantly became vulnerable to deportation; and White House officials have expressed a desire to reassess not only birthright citizenship but the legitimacy of the naturalization of thousands of new citizens. The simple truth is that these worst-case scenarios are not only possible outcomes; they have happened before in the United States.

In 1931, as the Great Depression first began to bite, President Herbert Hoover initiated a policy of "American jobs for Americans," urging "Mexican repatriation" in a bid to reserve collapsing job opportunities for the native-born. Raids began across the country but were conducted with the greatest intensity around Los Angeles.

Under the Eisenhower administration in 1954, the odiously designated Operation Wetback similarly began a haphazard campaign of raids that in the end meant the deportation of hundreds of thousands of immigrants—among them an unknown number of U.S. citizens. Mr. Trump has suggested the Eisenhower program as a model for the militarized nationwide deportation offensive he envisions.

"It could get really ugly," Mr. Appleby says, "and the church won't be immune to it."

On Mr. Trump's first day back in office, his administration rescinded the Department of Homeland Security policy that prohibited enforcement acts at sensitive locations like schools, hospitals and churches. Under new instructions, ICE agents can use their own discretion about conducting operations at previously off-limit sites.

"They might tread more carefully around places of worship, but that doesn't mean they're not going to take enforcement actions around churches," Mr. Appleby says. And that will mean that "people don't go to church, they don't go to Mass, they don't take the sacraments because they're worried that there'll be an enforcement raid of some sort or that ICE vehicles will be outside the parish door."

'Our People Are Living in Fear'

That phenomenon appears to already be in motion. In May, the Diocese of Nashville experienced a significant drop in church attendance because of large-scale ICE operations in the area. A statement was issued to Nashville parishes acknowledging the aggressive ICE presence and reminding parishioners that "no Catholic is obligated to attend Mass on Sunday if doing so puts their safety at risk."

On July 8, Bishop Alberto Rojas of the Diocese of San Bernardino issued a dispensation from weekly Mass attendance altogether to Catholics in his community because of immigration enforcement.

"There is a real fear gripping many in our parish communities that if they venture out into any kind of public setting they will be arrested by immigration officers," the bishop wrote in a statement on July 9. "Sadly, that includes attending Mass."

In Santa Fe, N.M., many immigrant residents are already afraid to leave their homes for Mass or to visit frequently targeted Home Depots, according to Archbishop John Wester of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. "Our people are living in fear," he says.

Noting that many agents refuse to identify themselves, arriving masked and heavily armed, he asks: "How do you know you're not being kidnapped by some terrorist group or some rogue group that's imitating ICE?"

Deportations "are being carried out in a very callous way," Archbishop Wester says. "It's kind of a feeling of living in a police state."

That generalized fear, the archbishop says, surely amounts to an infringement of First Amendment guarantees of religious freedom.

A number of Catholic leaders sit on the Trump administration's Religious Liberty Commission, including Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, Bishop Robert Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minn., and Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone of San Francisco. Archbishop Wester says they should "absolutely" raise the issue with the Trump administration.

"Governments have the right to control their borders," he says, "but it's not a supreme right. It's not an absolute right. The government also has to take into account other

A coming ICE storm?

$165 billion: The amount of new funding that the Big Beautiful Bill secures for the Department of Homeland Security over **four years,** a historic high

$75 billion: Additional funding over four years for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

$28.7 billion: Estimated new annual spending for ICE, up from **$10 billion** previously allocated, making ICE the highest funded law enforcement agency in the federal government

30,000: The number of ICE agents expected by 2029, up from the current **20,000**

$50,000: Maximum signing bonus for new ICE hires; current ICE agents may receive a **$10,000** annual retention bonus until 2029

$45 billion: New spending over four years for **80,000** additional detention beds

$46.5 billion: Allocated from the D.H.S. budget for the completion of the border wall with Mexico

40: Current number of states with ICE Memorandums of Agreement for **287(g) programs,** allowing state and local law enforcement to assist with immigration enforcement

Sources: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Brennan Center for Justice | *Data compiled by Brigid McCabe, O'Hare Media Fellow.*

God-given rights and human decency."

Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami suspects South Florida, with its many thousands of Guatemalan, Honduran, Haitian and Mexican farmworkers, will likely prove irresistible for ICE agents seeking a bountiful harvest of immigrant apprehensions. He holds on to a hope that Congress can be persuaded to intervene.

"The administration is enforcing the laws, but Congress can make the laws and remake the laws," the archbishop says. "Congress has to do something."

Mr. Appleby believes the church should be preparing for unprecedented conditions in 2026. He urges church leaders to find creative ways to respond.

The church must also improve its ground game at the parish level, Mr. Appleby suggests. Catholic parishioners are going to need tools "to legally respond to these enforcement actions to protect their communities."

Archbishop Wester reports that Santa Fe has been working with its pastors and laypeople "on what to do if there is a raid—how to conduct themselves properly, legally and how to help immigrants that are involved."

Deportation Economics

Archbishop Wenski remains optimistic about civil society's chances of throwing up obstacles to mass deportation in 2026. He does not believe the public and, perhaps more important, the leaders of America's hospitality, agricultural and manufacturing sectors will in the end have the stomach for an effort on the scale proposed by the Trump administration.

"They're already hearing people screaming—the farmers, the hotel people, the health care [industry]," Archbishop Wenski says. "Who's going to fix the roofs, who's going to cut the grass, who's going to wait tables and bus dishes, and who's going to clean bed pans, if it's not immigrants?"

Mr. Appleby remains convinced that the deportation bonanza promised by ICE expansion over the next three years will in the end only weaken the U.S. economy even as it creates unprecedented social disruption. Among policymakers most hostile to immigration of any sort, the standard response to that concern has been that U.S. citizens will step up to fill low-wage jobs now most often accepted by undocumented workers.

"I guess we're going to find out, won't we?" Mr. Appleby says.

But with historic lows in unemployment persisting, human resource departments across the country report challenges in finding job candidates. As many as 400,000 jobs in manufacturing remain unfilled, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

That persisting capacity challenge would seem an argument for a more discerning deportation regime and improved legal channels for immigration, two policy shifts that appear off the table at the Trump White House. The current system "is so broken...there's no legal avenue for [immigrants] to come," Mr. Appleby says.

The U.S. church has for decades pressed for comprehensive immigration reform, Archbishop Wester says. "We know that reform is needed, but this is definitely not the way to do it."

Immigrants have been "demonized and dehumanized," he adds. Catholics have to reach out to their members of Congress to remind them that "these are real people enduring real suffering."

"We have to speak up for them," he says.

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent.*

Could Pope Leo go to Gaza? Probably not.

Calls for Pope Leo XIV to intervene in the Gaza crisis by personally visiting the conflict zone mounted this summer, most notably with an Instagram post from Madonna on Aug. 12.

"Most Holy Father," the pop star wrote, "please go to Gaza and bring your light to the children there. As a mother, I cannot bear to watch their suffering. The children of the world belong to everyone. You are the only one of us who cannot be denied entry."

This latter claim is unfortunately not true: Israel has complete control over who enters Gaza, including religious leaders and foreign heads of state, and its borders have been "effectively sealed" since Oct. 7, 2023. The pope could certainly be denied entry.

Calls for a papal visit came as malnutrition deaths spiked in the Gaza Strip after Israel imposed an almost total blockade of food, fuel and medical supplies entering Gaza. Since late May, only limited aid has reached those in need, and only through the Israeli- and U.S.-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation.

Requests like Madonna's for a pope to enter a war zone to make peace are not unprecedented. In the buildup to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Pope John Paul II faced calls to visit the country after his attempts to find a diplomatic resolution were pointedly ignored by President George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein. The Australian anti-nuclear activist Dr. Helen Caldicott appealed to John Paul to fly to Baghdad, saying he was the "only person on earth who can stop this war."

These appeals, not unlike calls to a superhero for help, suggest the frustration of average people desperate to stop the violence their governments are perpetrating or that they see unfolding in the media. They are also evidence of the unique position the pope holds in popular imagination as a broadly respected moral authority whose mere presence in a war-torn country might inspire civic and military leaders to stop the killing.

There is also a recent historical precedent for a pope successfully entering an active war zone: Pope Francis' visit to the Central African Republic in 2015. This risky papal trip did not end or even formally pause fighting in the country, although it did result in some restoration of normalcy in the Muslim enclave of PK5 in the capital city of Bangui, including the reopening of schools and the signing of a nonaggression pact between local groups there within a few months of the pope's visit.

Unfortunately, it is highly unlikely that Israel would allow Pope Leo into the enclave. He is a foreign head of state and has been vocally critical of Israel's actions in Gaza. He has called on Israel to allow aid into Gaza and at times has been criticized for speaking about the suffering of Palestinians without mentioning the Israelis taken hostage on Oct. 7, 2023.

Pope Leo XIV offers his blessing at the conclusion of the Angelus in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, on the feast of the Assumption of Mary on Aug. 15.

Popes also generally travel with a cadre of journalists, and Israel has not permitted outside journalists to enter Gaza since the start of the war.

It would certainly be a powerful gesture if Pope Leo were to publicly demand entry into Gaza, even if it would be denied. The question remains whether he could convince leaders to end the war or even allow more aid into Gaza. The possible repercussions—like setting a precedent of sending popes into dangerous situations, or degrading the Holy See's relationship with Israel, which allows at least some dialogue at the moment—also raise the question: Even if the pope could visit Gaza, should he?

For now, it appears that the new pope is working through the Holy See's traditional diplomatic channels. As he entered his vacation home at Castel Gandolfo in August, Pope Leo spoke about Gaza's hunger and humanitarian crises and the importance of the safe return of Israeli hostages.

Asked what he was doing about these issues, he said, "The Holy See cannot stop them...but we are working, let's say, on 'soft diplomacy,' always inviting, encouraging the pursuit of nonviolence through dialogue and seeking solutions—because these problems cannot be solved by war."

Colleen Dulle, *Vatican correspondent.*

Kevin Clarke

Christian leaders in Honduras promote a free, fair and peaceful national vote in November

Honduras will hold national elections this November, an electoral process unfolding against a backdrop of deep polarization, escalating violence, pervasive corruption and the influence of powerful organized crime groups. A failed or violent transition of power could lead to greater destabilization, possibly accelerating emigration and reinforcing regional authoritarian trends.

Concerns about the integrity of the electoral process are widespread. Both Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches in Honduras have voiced their unease. But local political analysts believe the election offers an opportunity to restore public confidence in democracy and dodge the return of authoritarianism.

In July, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Honduras and the Honduras Evangelical Fellowship, an association of more than 400 Christian evangelical Protestant churches and organizations, issued a joint statement. It called "upon all men and women of faith to join in an extended prayer for Honduras" and to walk together, "in faith and hope," to support peaceful elections in November. The march was conducted on Aug. 16 in cities across Honduras.

"Let our message be clear: The will of the citizens, legitimately expressed at the ballot box, must be respected on November 30 and every four years," the Christian leaders said.

Political tensions are already running high during this presidential election cycle, which started in September 2024. By mid-July the National University of Honduras had recorded 109 violent incidents related to the upcoming vote.

The November election offers Hondurans an opportunity to choose among three candidates. Rixi Ramona Moncada Godoy is the ruling Libre Party's candidate. Nasry Asfura is a career politician and former mayor of Tegucigalpa from the conservative National Party, which ruled the country from 2010 to 2021. He also ran for president in 2021 amid his party's corruption and drug trafficking scandals but lost to the current president, Xiomara Castro.

Salvador Nasralla, a former TV personality, is also seeking the presidency after unsuccessful campaigns in 2013 and 2017.

"All parties are accusing each other of fraud before elections even take place because none of their candidates have a solid lead," Iolany Pérez, a Honduran political analyst and a journalist at the Jesuit-sponsored Radio Progreso said. "This way the losing parties can pressure the winning side into political negotiations to advance their own interests."

Complicating all political outcomes in Honduras is the presence of vast criminal resources for the funding of campaigns. There are no effective controls on political do-

A pro-democracy demonstration in San Pedro Sula in January 2018

nations or mechanisms that can prevent candidates from accepting money from organized crime.

The churches' walk-for-peace effort in August fueled a debate about the role of churches in Honduran politics. Joaquín Mejía, a prominent human rights lawyer, asked church leaders to reflect on how their actions may contribute to or diffuse polarization, pointing to the interventionist role played by some faith leaders in supporting a coup in 2009 that deposed then-president Manuel Zelyala, husband of the current president. He suggests that those church leaders should ask for the public's forgiveness and refrain from involvement in political affairs.

"Alternatives can emerge from great crises," said César Ramos, the coordinator of the Pastoral Program for Human Migration of the Archdiocese of San Pedro Sula. "Besides elections, Honduras is struggling with food insecurity, violence, unemployment and polarization. We must concentrate on solutions. We can find solutions to these puzzles with the help of a God of justice."

"In my own work with migrants, I lean into the story of Jesus helping his disciples feed a crowd with only a few fish and bread," he said. "We must also serve from where we are, from our own limitations. That's why it's important that the Catholic Church joins this cry for peace and dialogue and calls for adherence to justice and truth."

"After the elections, the challenges in Honduras will continue," Ms. Pérez said. "Churches need to keep playing a leading role demanding social justice.

"They need to remind all political parties that they all need to work for the common good of the country. And they should do it every day, not only every four years when we have elections," Ms. Pérez said.

Dany Díaz Mejía *contributes from Honduras.*

President Trump and Elon Musk in the Oval Office on May 30

OSV News photo/Nathan Howard, Reuters

D.C. parish sponsors support group for laid-off federal workers

This year the mission of Holy Trinity Parish in Washington, D.C., to "accompany one another in Christ" took on a new urgency. The parish started a support group, called Strategies for Survival and Finding Work After Job Loss, after parishioners raised concerns about how federal government job cuts were affecting their community.

Marie J. Raber, facilitator of the group and a longtime parishioner, said that nearly all of the participants have been federal government workers whose jobs were eliminated during the rapid downsizing initiated by the Trump administration. "This is a social justice issue," she said. "These people have been treated terribly."

"There was no time taken to let the person know how valuable they had been to the department or the organization," she said, "so they were simply told their job was eliminated, [and to] pick up their things and leave the building."

Tom Neeley, a communications consultant, also lost his work with federal agencies. "It was a hard transition to make, a hard reality, [and] something very humbling," Mr. Neeley said. "It was a difficult role to be in, to realize I needed help."

Hannah Byrd began working in 2023 for Democracy International in programs funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. She and colleagues were furloughed after U.S.A.I.D. was shut down. She began searching for a new job in February.

The support group "came at a really critical time for me in the job search process," said Ms. Byrd. The group helped participants "feel proud of our accomplishments and be hopeful there are good opportunities out there for us," she said.

As she navigates a crowded job market, Ms. Byrd said the Holy Trinity support group "has been so helpful keeping hope alive. That's the key to persevering through this."

Mark Zimmermann, *OSV News correspondent.*

Together in Faith

Lessons in dialogue at the Chapel of the Ascension in Jerusalem

By Stephanie Saldaña

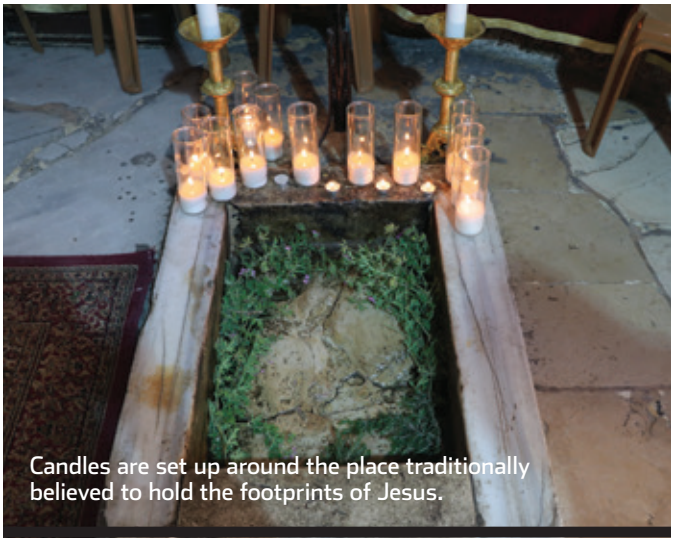
It was on Wednesday, Ascension Eve, that I made my way up the long incline of the Mount of Olives, past the gnarled trees of the Garden of Gethsemane, alongside the vast Jewish cemetery and the overlook where tradition says Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and on to the Dome of the Ascension. The chapel stands at the top of the Mount of Olives, an octagon of white stone so unassuming that one could easily walk past it. I climbed a flight of wide stairs, walked through an initial entrance, and then continued into a courtyard surrounding the dome, which on this day was exposed to the relentless May sun. I followed the stone pathway to the door of the chapel itself and ducked inside. To the right, pilgrims were kneeling and kissing what looked like a framed, imprinted stone in the ground. For centuries pilgrims had journeyed to place their hands in those indentations, believing them to be the very footprints of Jesus, marking the last place where his body touched the earth before he ascended into heaven.

In a land of grand churches and basilicas, the Chapel of the Ascension in Jerusalem is an anomaly. Humble and unadorned, its smallness stands in contrast to the vastness of the sky above it, the arches on the chapel's sides inviting the pilgrim to look upward. But its simplicity is not the only thing that makes the chapel unusual. The Chapel of the Ascension is also a mosque. For most of the year, the Dome of the Ascension is administered not by a Christian community, but by the Islamic *waqf* of Jerusa-

Greek Orthodox clergy process around the Dome of the Ascension.

All photos by Stephanie Saldaña

It was a remarkable testament to the diversity of Christianity in Jerusalem.



Candles are set up around the place traditionally believed to hold the footprints of Jesus.

lem, the Islamic religious endowment in this case tasked with overseeing one of the most important holy sites in Christianity. On almost every other day, Christian pilgrims who wish to pray there can pay a fee at the entrance and visit inside the chapel, but no liturgies are celebrated.

Yet every year on the feast of the Ascension, because of the status quo agreements of the Holy Land, the Muslim *waqf* allows the Christian communities to celebrate their diverse liturgies inside the Ascension compound. On that day, the mosque/chapel is transformed into a Christian liturgical space, complete with icons and incense and altars, processions and prayers and Masses, an ephemeral moment in which an entire liturgical world suddenly appears and is lived before it vanishes.

Because the Eastern Orthodox and Western churches follow different liturgical calendars, the feast of the Ascension is usually celebrated twice in the mosque/chapel each year. But 2025 was different. Though the Eastern Orthodox churches follow the Julian calendar for Easter and the Western churches follow the Gregorian calendar, Easter in 2025 fell on the same day for everyone. This meant that the Ascension, celebrated 40 days after the Resurrection, would also overlap. The Orthodox, Armenian and Latin Rite (Roman Catholic) Christians of Jerusalem would all celebrate the Ascension in the same place on the same day, negotiating how to share a small dome that had only enough space inside to hold a handful of people at a time. It was complicated. It was also glorious.

This is the story of how, unnoticed by most of the world, Greek Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians in Jerusalem came to celebrate their feast of the Ascension in the holy space where they all believe Jesus ascended to heaven, a space that is also a mosque. It is also the story of the hard work of the theology of life, and what it points to as possibilities for the rest of us.

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At 1:30 p.m. on Ascension Eve, the Franciscans were already gathering outside the entrance of the church, wearing their brown robes. Inside the compound, much had already been prepared. The Franciscans had pitched small tents, one of which contained a sacristy, another of which would hold beverages and snacks for nourishment as the long day wore on. The Armenians had put up a large tent in the back left-hand corner of the compound, a carpeted space with an icon of Jesus ascending into heaven hung behind the altar. To their immediate right, the Coptic Christians, mainly from Egypt, had pitched the small tent they use for this event every year, the top of which depicted Jesus above his disciples. Beneath it, a banner read in Arabic: "O you men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!"

To the right of the Coptic tent, the Syriac Orthodox Church had pitched their own, where they would pray in Syriac, a liturgical dialect of the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus. Finally, the Greek Orthodox Church pitched a large tent that took up much of the right side of the courtyard, a green covering that sheltered the clergy and faithful from the heat.

It was a remarkable testament to the diversity of Christianity in Jerusalem. I watched the Armenian clergy carry in a fan. A young Greek Orthodox priest appeared clasping a large bunch of rosemary that he would use to sprinkle holy water on arriving pilgrims. The Roman Catholics carried in a keyboard that they would set to organ mode to accompany their singing in Latin from inside the dome. This would be a tightly choreographed festival. Every community had strict guidelines about when they were allowed to pray inside the shrine, how many times they could process around it, how often they could incense the door and where they could pitch their tents. The electricity for the lighting and fans was possible thanks to working relationships with the Muslims in charge of the mosque.

A Roman Catholic Mass is held in the middle of the night in the Dome of the Ascension.

The feast would begin with vespers on Ascension Eve, continuing with prayers through the night and culminating in Masses the following morning.

At 1:45 p.m., Ibrahim Faltas, the vicar of the Custody of the Holy Land, led the Franciscans as they made their official entrance through the main door in two long lines of brown robes, singing in Latin. By 2 p.m., they were cleared from the path, and officials from the Greek Orthodox Church made their entrance. They were led by a *kawass*, one of the armed church escorts dating from the Ottoman period, sometimes referred to as the Swiss Guards of the Holy Land, who was wearing a suit and red *tarbush*. They circled around the dome, sprinkling it with holy water and singing in Greek. Next, the Armenian Orthodox clergy entered, wearing black vestments, along with lines of seminarians in yellow robes with gold sashes, singing in Armenian. At 2:25 p.m. the Coptic Orthodox Christians officially entered, their black *qalansuwa* hats embroidered with crosses representing the 12 Apostles, followed by the Syrian Orthodox Christians at 2:35 p.m.

Between these entrance processions, three men stood in the center of the compound checking in with one another. It became quickly apparent to me that they were tasked with making sure that everyone was in the right place at the right time. Father Athanasius Macora, an American Franciscan who is secretary of the Status Quo Commission of the Custody of the Holy Land, stood in his brown robe and floppy hat, busily writing down in his notebook the precise time that each community entered and left the shrine, and how often they incensed. He introduced me to Father Vazgen Alekyan, the chief dragoman of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, who was similarly tasked with facilitating communication between the Armenian community and the other churches, and to Father Mattheos (who does not use a last name), the elder dragoman archimandrite of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. They all spoke multiple languages, and because it was unusual that all three of their communities were sharing the Dome of the Ascension on the same day, they knew dialogue would be essential.

I asked them if the feast of the Ascension is indeed the only day of the year in which they are allowed to hold the liturgy inside the compound. Father Macora confirmed that for the Catholics of the Latin Patriarchate, this is true. Father Alekyan told me that the Armenians are able to additionally celebrate on one Sunday during Lent. Father Mattheos clarified that the Greek Orthodox Christians also celebrate at the Dome of the Ascension on Lazarus Saturday, the day before Palm Sunday on which they remember Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead in the nearby village of Bethany.

It was an unusual glimpse into the intricate details of the status quo, the historical and legal agreements that outline which religious community can worship where and when in the holy sites of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Though the rest of us may not know the details, these agreements are essential to the peaceful functioning of daily life in Jerusalem.

Father Macora noted that for the most part, everything usually goes smoothly on the shared feast days. Misunderstandings or moments of tension can usually be cleared up with a handshake or a conversation.

"It's a lot about relationships here," he told me. "The Middle East is really about relationships. I see my job as being a cease-fire observer, because the easiest way to understand the status quo is as a cease-fire agreement, in which no one is able to change the armistice lines." In most cases, this means making sure that his own community does its part to keep the peace. I watched him ask fellow Franciscans to clear the path for other processions, to move their chairs and to remain aware that they were sharing space.

It is necessary to hold multiple narratives at the same time.

Considering the sensitivity, I was surprised by the conviviality among the clergy of the diverse churches. A Syriac Orthodox priest called out "*Buono Festa!*" in Italian to the Franciscans walking by. There were congratulations for the election of Pope Leo. "It's nice weather this year," someone commented. "Last year it was hot!"

Franciscan brothers filmed on their phones as processions from the other churches entered. Priests switched back and forth between Arabic and Greek, Italian, French and English, with the occasional Syriac greeting thrown in.

As I finished taking notes, a pilgrim came up to Father Macora and quietly asked where he could use the men's room.

There were no bathroom facilities inside of the Dome of the Ascension. But again, the Christian communities had found a solution to this challenge through dialogue with the Muslim community.

"You can use the bathroom of the mosque next door," he answered.

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By 2:45 p.m., we were sitting in the courtyard for vespers. Because only a few people could fit inside the dome, we listened to voices in Latin that emanated through the door of the chapel and wafted outside. A Franciscan priest handed me his program when he saw my empty hands. Now his own were freed, and he ducked into the tent sacristy to prepare the incense. I read the refrain from the Gospel of John: "No one can ascend to heaven except for the one who has descended from heaven."

Of the four Gospels, the story of the Ascension appears only in the Gospel of Luke. Yet it also begins the Book of Acts, making the Ascension story the narrative link between the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and the life of the church. In Luke's Gospel account, Jesus ascends into heaven, and the disciples return to Jerusalem with great joy.

Yet the Book of Acts preserves some of their bewilderment, as they watch him disappear into the clouds, straining to still see him. Two white robed men ask them: "Why are you standing here staring into heaven?" They explain that Jesus had ascended into heaven, and one day he would return.

Since early Christianity, pilgrims had come to the Mount of Olives to remember this moment. Christians initially connected the Ascension with a nearby cave, where tradition held that Jesus often taught his disciples, the site of which later became the famed Eleona Church. When the pilgrim Egeria visited Jerusalem in 384, she mentioned praying at "the place where the Lord ascended into heaven" but did not mention a church, suggesting that at that time the Ascension was venerated in an open space. By the late fourth century, a church had been built at the site on the top of the Mount of Olives. Later pilgrims would describe a church with a dome, open to the sky, and the footprints that have become its hallmark.

In time, the site became the center of particularly strong devotion. In her book *Standing on Holy Ground in the Middle Ages,* Lucy Donkin notes that pilgrims to the Holy Land often quoted Psalm 131 to give meaning to their journey. Though the Hebrew might be translated: "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool," she writes that Eusebius translated the verse into Greek as "We shall worship in the place where his feet have stood," a translation that then carried over into the Latin. Pilgrims came to the site of the Ascension to answer the psalm's invitation to worship at the place where Jesus' feet had stood, a reminder that Jesus had been raised into a body.

In a sense, it is not so different today. I spoke to Hana Bendcowsky, the program director for the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue and the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations. As an expert in the holy sites in Jerusalem and the Christian sites in particular, she trains tour guides to recognize how the different faith traditions in Jerusalem are in dialogue with one another. She told me that she had always seen the Mount of Olives as a kind of cosmic elevator for the three religious traditions, linking earth to heaven, the site not only of the Ascension but of prophecies about when the Messiah will come again. She noted that when she brought many Christian pilgrims to the chapel, she could sense the importance for them of being physically in contact with the last place where they believed Jesus was when he was on earth.

It was almost as if they wanted to grab hold of him and keep him there, she said.

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To tell the full story of the Chapel of the Ascension, it is necessary to hold multiple narratives at the same time. While the Church of the Ascension is sacred for Christians, it is also the Mosque of the Ascension, belonging to the Muslim community since the time of Saladin. The entrance is marked by a plaque with an inscription in Arabic marking a Muslim holy shrine. Inside the dome, not far from the

Armenian seminarians pray in front of the Dome of the Ascension.

footprint, is a *mihrab*, showing Muslims the direction of prayer. And while Muslims today do not pray in the site—they pray at a neighboring mosque—the Islamic architecture at the site is undeniable. A minaret is part of the exterior wall of the compound, and every time I climbed the mountain to reach the chapel, I used the mosque's minaret as my reference point.

To try to understand the site's significance to the Muslim community, I spoke to Mustafa Abu Sway, a Palestinian Islamic scholar and the holder of the Integral Chair for Al-Ghazali at Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. He grew up nearby the traditional place of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives, playing in the groves of Gethsemane as a child and watching the Palm Sunday procession that descended the hill once a year. Like many Muslims in Jerusalem, he also attended Christian schools, studying with the Anglicans at St. George's primary school, with the De La Salle Christian Brothers at Bethlehem University and then finishing up with a doctorate in philosophy from Boston College in the United States.

He told me that for him as a Muslim, the mosque of the Ascension is a reminder of the great esteem that Muslims have for Mary and Jesus. Though they do not believe in the divinity of Jesus or that he is the son of God, they hold Jesus as a prophet equal to all other prophets, one who performed miracles and raised the dead to life, always by the power of God. They also honor the Virgin Mary, and a chapter of the Quran, Surah Maryam, is named after her.

"I have never found a Muslim scholar—in 14 and a half centuries—who has ever said anything that is negative or inappropriate about the Virgin Mary, may peace and blessings be upon her," Dr. Abu Sway said. He noted how many Muslim families name their daughters Mary. "We love Mary and Jesus both," he said.

But why is there an Islamic site at the place of the Ascension? He noted that while Muslims do not believe that Jesus was crucified on the cross, most believe that the Prophet Jesus was lifted up by God and ascended into heaven. Though today the dome is not a traditional place of Muslim pilgrimage and is primarily a Christian pilgrimage site, it is still respected by Muslims and serves as a reminder of the Ascension.

And while he has never seen the Christian feast of the Ascension himself, he's not surprised to hear about the agreement that allows Christians to celebrate their liturgies in the space each year. For Dr. Abu Sway, the place of the Ascension is a reminder that religious communities in Jerusalem have shared space for centuries, especially on the Mount of Olives. He notes that on his daily walk to Al Aqsa Mosque, which is fully visible from the mountain, he passes Gethsemane and the Jewish cemetery.

The idea that Jerusalem is separated into different religious quarters distinct from one another is a fiction invented by foreign tour guides, he insists. Just as he grew up as a Muslim on the Mount of Olives, surrounded by churches and playing in the Gihon Spring, some of the holiest sites in Christianity, such as the Way of the Cross, run through the so-called Muslim Quarter. Likewise, the Mosque of Omar, an important site for Muslims, stands just across from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

He laments that this shared narrative of Jerusalem is slowly being forgotten: "Interfaith dialogue has collapsed here," he said. "We need people to be courageous."

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I left the Chapel of the Ascension to rest for a few hours and climbed the hill by flashlight at 10:30 p.m. to find the courtyard filled with Catholic pilgrims. At 11 p.m., there would be Catholic Masses in Latin, Italian and Arabic simultaneously. In this case, Latin is used so that people from around the world could participate by using a common language. Services would continue through the night.

In the dark, lamps cast light on the dome, and the stone pathway leading to the entrance was illuminated. Inside, we could see the candles alight on the altar. I sat with the Arabic speakers, their presence a reminder of the local church that remains in the Holy Land despite the challeng-

These agreements are essential to the peaceful functioning of daily life in Jerusalem.

es. During the Gospel reading, the priest kept pointing to the ground, to emphasize: *It happened here. In this place.*

When the Mass finished, I descended the hill for a few hours of sleep. At 4:30 a.m., I climbed the Mount of Olives one last time. The air was full of birdsong. What appeared to be a fox leaped across the path and into the olive trees. A new set of pilgrims had arrived for the 5 a.m. Mass. I watched the faithful receiving Communion, the minaret visible behind them, the rising sun imbuing the stones with warmth.

Peter Jadallah, an Egyptian American Jesuit, greeted me. Like many Jesuits, he held a particular attachment to the place of the Ascension. Years before, he had spent hours praying inside of the aedicule, asking for the intercession of St. Ignatius to help him discern if he should remain in the Holy Land. His choice of praying in the chapel had been intentional—after all, St. Ignatius himself had visited the site during a critical moment of transition in his own life.

The story of St. Ignatius' visit to the Dome of the Ascension is a curious one. In his autobiography, Ignatius recounts the story of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in September 1523, shortly after his conversion. While he had intended to stay a long time in the Holy Land, visiting the holy places often and journeying in the footsteps of Jesus, things did not go as he hoped. Shortly after his arrival, he was ordered by the provincial superior of the Franciscans to leave. He obeyed.

Before he left, however, his autobiography notes that he was seized with a great longing to visit one last time the place on the Mount of Olives where Jesus ascended to heaven, wishing to see Jesus' footprints again. He climbed the Mount of Olives and bribed the guards to let him inside. He prayed, then left and continued to Bethphage but later realized that he had forgotten which direction the right and the left footprints of Jesus had been pointing. He returned, this time bribing the guards with scissors.

Shortly after, Ignatius left the Holy Land on a boat, never to return. His obedience had a significant repercussion in church history. It was only later that he founded the Society of Jesus with his companions.

For many Jesuits, Ignatius' visit to the place of the Ascension is seen as a metaphor for discernment, looking to the person of Jesus in seeking direction. But for David Neuhaus, a Jesuit in the Holy Land and professor of Sacred Scripture, St. Ignatius' attachment to the site of the Ascension has another meaning. Father Neuhaus notes that in the Lukan narrative the Ascension is the essential link between the historical body of Jesus of Nazareth, who ascended into heaven, and the body that represents Jesus in the world, whose main job is to make the absent one present.

"It's there at the Ascension that the historical, corporal body of Jesus goes up to heaven," he told me. "And at that same place the disciples are told: 'Why are you looking up into heaven? He will come again.' From there they need to re-present the absent body. For Ignatius, that is the Society of Jesus."

In that sense, the Ascension was not only an event. It was a beginning with a purpose.

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The morning Mass for the Roman Catholics concluded, and workers entered the shrine to remove the keyboard, to take down the white curtain, and to carry away the altar and the white candles placed around the footprints. I left for breakfast at the Carmelites, who served us bread and coffee near the site of the ancient Eleona, where today tradition holds that Jesus taught the disciples how to pray the Our Father.

By the time I returned an hour later, the place of the Ascension had been transformed to an Orthodox liturgical space for the final hours of the feast. A young Greek Orthodox priest set up a table at the entrance to the site, blessing the incoming pilgrims with holy water. Pilgrims who entered the shrine lit beeswax candles, knelt on a small red carpet now placed on the ground and blessed the footprints with perfumed oil.

Then the diverse Orthodox churches began celebrating their liturgies, all at once. I could walk from the Armenian tent, where priests were singing in Armenian, next door to the Coptic tent where they prayed in Coptic, then on to the Syriac tent, where they sang the Our Father in the original language, to the Greek Orthodox tent, where amid the Greek liturgical chants pilgrims were lining up to kiss an icon of the Ascension. On perhaps no other day in Jerusalem was the remarkable diversity and ecumenism of Christianity on display so vividly.

This would continue for hours. At the end, as tradition holds, the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox community and

other clergy would sit down with the sheikh of the mosque before leaving in a courtesy visit, and they would drink coffee together.

For Ms. Bendcowsky, who describes the coffee as "part of their liturgical routine," that small gesture held great meaning. "It's still a Muslim place," she told me. "They [the Christians] are guests, and they are allowed to pray in a place that doesn't belong to them." While she acknowledged the practical aspect of the courtesy visit, she ultimately saw the act of sitting together, across faiths, as a symbol of communities who work hard to maintain relationships.

"It's connected to mutual respect," she concluded. "For me it is a great sign of humility."

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By the end of the day everything would be carried away—the chairs, the altars, the icons, the incense, the tents—until the shrine was returned to its unadorned state. Next year, the feast day will fall on separate calendar days for the Eastern and Western churches. It will be much less complicated, but I will miss the languages and the liturgies, the small acts of attention, the camaraderie of the churches together.

It is possible to see this year's feast of the Ascension as simply a day. But perhaps it is more. On a year in which the church celebrates the 1,700-year anniversary of the ecumenical council of Nicaea, the footprints at the center of the simple dome are a telling reminder that what unites the Eastern and Western churches is the person of Jesus.

It was also a much-needed sign of hope. The Christians of the Holy Land, already a minority, find themselves in crisis. The ongoing war in Gaza, the collapse of Christian pilgrimage to the region and the related economic hardships, and the increasing regional instability—with no end in sight—have all taken a toll on the morale of many local Christians. A recent survey from the Rossing Center in Jerusalem found that 48 percent of local Christians under the age of 30 are considering migrating.

Conversely, the common struggle to survive has united local Christians in what has been called an "ecumenism of witness." Together with the interreligious dimensions of daily life in the Holy Land, this means that there is a quiet vocation to simply being a Christian who remains in Jerusalem, even if the work of dialogue and human fraternity is largely made up of notes on paper and moving chairs, being willing to learn the language of our neighbor, making space and cups of coffee, and the concrete work of being together.

For Father Frans Bouwen, a member of the Missionaries of Africa who has worked on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in Jerusalem for over 50 years, events like the feast of the Ascension point to something greater. He notes that the Christians in the Holy Land, rooted in their history, still have an awareness of being one church in the beginning. For that reason, Jerusalem is a *locus theologiae,* a source from which theology is made.

Pilgrims kiss the stone traditionally believed to contain the footprints of Jesus.

"It means something that the communities in the land are able to coexist," he said. "For centuries we have been able to live together in this land—not without tensions sometimes—but we always found a solution. That's the message of Jerusalem to the world."

He points me to the words of Pope Francis, who in an address in 2022 noted that "the dialogue of doctrine must be theologically adapted to the dialogue of life."

"When they speak of ecumenism in Europe," he continues, "They say: 'Where is the dialogue?' For them, ecumenism is doing theological dialogue. But that's not the prominent thing. Ecumenism is living together."

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

Walking the Lakota Catholic Way

The life and ministry of Ben Black Bear Jr., the longest-serving Native American Catholic deacon in the United States

By J. J. Carney

To hear Ben Black Bear Jr. tell the story, his path to the Catholic diaconate started in high school with a simple call to serve his Lakota people. "Our culture teaches us to think of the community first," he recalled. "And in thinking about what I could do for my community, I settled on teaching people about the Catholic Church." So began a decades-long journey that will be celebrated in 2026 when the Diocese of Rapid City marks the golden jubilee of Deacon Black Bear, America's longest-serving Native American deacon.

The seeming simplicity of Ben Black Bear's vocational call belies the deep complexities and ambiguities of its historical context. It was the early 1970s on South Dakota's Rosebud Reservation. Native American communities were grappling with a century of federal repression and forced cultural assimilation, often with the active complicity of churches and missionary boarding schools. In 1973, members of the American Indian Movement occupied neighboring Pine Ridge Reservation's Wounded Knee, the site of an infamous 1890 U.S. Army massacre of hundreds of Lakota women and children. The Wounded Knee occupation sparked a confrontation with federal agents that left two F.B.I. agents dead and further exacerbated relations between Lakota tribes and a U.S. government that had not granted native tribes American citizenship until 1924.

The Catholic Church was not spared the ferment. Ben Black Bear's former Catholic boarding school at St. Francis Mission closed in 1970, as did the elementary boarding school at Pine Ridge. A year earlier, the Jesuits had renamed their day school at Pine Ridge after Red Cloud, the famous Oglala Lakota chief who had first invited the Jesuit *Sina Sapa* ("Black Robes") to Pine Ridge in the 1870s.

Inspired by the *aggiornamento* spirit of the Second Vatican Council, in 1972 Jesuit missionaries moved to train a new generation of Lakota lay leaders in a three-year theology program organized around Scripture, church history, Catholic social teaching and liturgical studies. Ben Black Bear was part of this group. But with the opening of a new pastoral ministry in 1974 allowing married men to become permanent deacons, church leaders saw an opportunity to go even further. Ben Black Bear's incipient call to serve his Lakota community was now merging with the Catholic Church's urgent need to indigenize its ordained leadership.

There was just one problem. Mr. Black Bear was in his late 20s, and church law forbade the ordination of permanent deacons under the age of 34. John Hatcher, S.J., who was serving on the reservation at the time, and other Jesuit leaders appealed to Harold Dimmerling, the local bishop of Rapid City, for an exception, given the acute need for ordained Native American leaders at Rosebud and Pine Ridge. Bishop Dimmerling was supportive, but the Vatican's Congregation for the Sacraments initially refused the bishop's entreaties. Not easily dissuaded, Bishop Dimmerling approached Joseph Bernardin, then archbishop

Ben Black Bear Jr., at far left, with his family on his ordination day in 1976. Ben Black Bear Sr. is at far right.

of Cincinnati and president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, who spoke to Pope Paul VI about Mr. Black Bear's case.

Pope Paul VI was in the midst of drafting his groundbreaking mission encyclical "Evangelii Nuntiandi," which argued that "the split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time.... Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures" (No. 20). Perhaps reflecting on those words, the pope made a personal indult approving a canonical exception that enabled Ben Black Bear Jr. to be ordained a deacon on June 19, 1976. Deacon Black Bear was assigned to St. Charles Borromeo Parish at St. Francis Mission, where he has served for the last 49 years.

Integrating Spirituality

Unlike past generations of Lakota Catholics, who experienced pressure to reject Native American spiritualities in favor of Catholic rites and rituals, Deacon Black Bear made it his mission to integrate the two. As an example, he noted that his diaconal care for Catholic sacramentals on the altar grew out of his childhood training in "how to handle sacred things" at traditional sweat lodges. Likewise, the popularity of elements of Native American spirituality in the 1960s and '70s led to a resurgence of interest in reconnecting with traditional practices like sun dances among his fellow Lakota. Chuckling, Deacon Black Bear recalled, "I don't think they understood what they were doing." He thus found himself explaining the deeper religious symbolism of the sacred trees of sun dance rituals to Lakota spiritual seekers while comparing these traditions with how Christians understand the symbolism and meaning of Christ's cross.

Reflecting his commitment to interreligious dialogue, Deacon Black Bear served as one of the lead translators in a multi-year dialogue involving Jesuit priests and Lakota medicine men (including his own father, Ben Black Bear Sr.). During the 1980s, he was a member of the Diocese of Rapid City's Lakota Inculturation Task Force, which integrated Lakota religious symbolism and rituals into sacramental practices of baptism, Eucharist, confirmation and funeral rites.

Language was central to Deacon Black Bear's project of spiritual integration. His passion for this linguistic mission grew in part from an awkward moment early in his diaconate, when he stumbled through a Lakota translation of the Our Father at a national congress of the St. Joseph and St. Mary societies, a longstanding association of Native American Catholic leaders. Chastened by this experience, he further immersed himself in developing literacy in his mother tongue. He began teaching Lakota to all grades of the local Catholic school. As head of Indian studies at Rosebud's Sinte Gleska University, he introduced the re-

Ben Black Bear Jr. says his path to the Catholic diaconate started in high school with a simple call to serve his Lakota people.

gion's first tertiary program in Lakota studies. He preached and sang in Lakota at multiday wakes and funerals, one of Rosebud's most important forms of community gatherings, while also celebrating baptisms and teaching Bible and catechesis classes in his mother tongue. All of this was part of Deacon Black Bear's mission to enable his fellow Lakota to "try to understand the Catholic Church in our language." When I met him, he was poring over baptismal records from the 1880s, examining and correcting Jesuit missionaries' flawed English translations of Lakota names.

Like any good linguist, Deacon Black Bear recognizes that language reflects a worldview. "When you speak English, you think as a person who speaks English. When you speak Lakota, you think in that language." Translation and learning a new language thus entail "learning how to think completely differently than how you think normally." For Deacon Black Bear, this integral connection between language, epistemology and worldview underlies the need for an ecclesiology in which *catholicity* equals "unity in diversity" rather than "homogeneous uniformity." "White people look upon me as a Catholic like they are, but I am not. I am still just as Lakota as the day I was born, and that is going to last until the day I die," he said, meaning that a person's culture shapes how he or she sees the world.

He also believes that this understanding of catholicity entails a willingness to retell biblical lessons in idioms that local people can understand. For Deacon Black Bear, the fundamental dynamic of preaching is one of careful scriptural exegesis, listening to the community and then creative application.

As an example, he explained how he taught the story

Deacon Black Bear was a lead translator in a multiyear dialogue involving Jesuit priests and Lakota medicine men.

of the prodigal son to a Lakota audience. Whereas Europeans and white Americans often relate this story through a lens of possession and inheritance, Lakota culture does not emphasize personal property. The Lakota tradition encourages giving things away rather than hoarding excess belongings. As Deacon Black Bear joked, "You never see a [Lakota] grandma pulling a trunk of stuff to another place!" For a Lakota audience, then, the prodigal son's carousing behavior, drunkenness and isolation resonate more deeply than inheritance disputes. Deacon Black Bear therefore emphasized the ostracized son's turning away from this behavior and the father's welcoming of his son into a community called to love and trust him again.

Generations of Faith

Deacon Black Bear's lifelong mission of Catholic-Lakota reconciliation continues through the next generation of his family. His son, Ben Black Bear III, and daughter-in-law, Jennifer Black Bear, coordinate religious education in local schools for nearly 300 Lakota students. Noting that her devout grandmother used to attend both sun dances and Sunday Masses, Jennifer described her mission in terms of "teaching the Catholic faith, yet also our Lakota values and culture." They prepare Catholic children for the sacraments, work with youth leaders to coordinate community service projects, lead young people in reflections on the Sunday Gospels, and teach students how to pray the Our Father and Glory Be in Lakota.

Unlike the early efforts of church missionaries, Jennifer Black Bear's Catholic religious ed classroom is now a primary setting where Lakota young people learn their ancestral language and, in her words, "realize that they're Native American." This includes studying core Lakota spiritual values such as generosity, wisdom, respect, honesty, humility and compassion.

Jennifer and her husband have also been invited to offer optional religious education in four public schools on Rosebud Reservation. For Jennifer, this desire for instruction reflects a growing awareness that "spiritual grounding matters" in countering the reservation's malaises of drug addiction, alcoholism, unemployment and generational trauma.

Jennifer Black Bear, the daughter-in-law of Deacon Ben Black Bear, coordinates religious education for Lakota students along with his son, Ben Black Bear III.

Jennifer's and Ben's ministries have also had an impact at the national level. They helped establish the Native American Pastoral Fund with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and represented their region on the National Tekakwitha Board, a leadership group for the over 500,000 Native American Catholics in the United States. For Jennifer, any broader public impact starts with their local commitment to the 25,000 residents of Rosebud Reservation: "We are from here. We are born and raised here. We are Lakota, and Catholic."

Jennifer Black Bear's and Ben Black Bear's integrated spiritual identities are mirrored in the leadership of Rosebud's St. Francis Mission. Founded by the Jesuits in 1886 at the invitation of the local chief Spotted Tail, St. Francis retains its close connection to the Society. The local pastor, Edmund Yainao, S.J., is a Tangkhul native of northeastern India, prompting some Lakota elders to joke, "You are the real Indian that Columbus was looking for!" Jim Lafontaine, S.J., who moved to the reservation from New England, serves as principal of Sapa Un Jesuit Academy, launched in 2013 according to the Nativity school model.

With the exception of Father Yainao and Father Lafontaine, all the leadership staff members at St. Francis are Lakota. Rodney Bordeaux, an Episcopal convert to Catholicism, is the first Lakota layman to serve as president of the mission. Harold Compton, another Lakota lay Catholic, serves as chief operating officer; he has taken a particular interest in preserving St. Francis' outstanding historical archives and Lakota heritage museum. Caroline Decory works in fundraising and development, all while helping to coordinate food distribution for upward of 400 families and running the mission's extensive addiction and recovery programs. All three leaders spoke glowingly of Sapa Un school, whose model of invested parents, high-quality education and integration of Catholic and Lakota spirituality aims to form a cadre of future Native leaders at Rosebud. "Education can be a way out of poverty," Mr. Bordeaux argues. "We can't just dwell on the past. We need to develop strong businesses and tribal governments that can carry people into the future."

Reckoning With the Past

Mr. Bordeaux's reference to the burden of the past reflects one of the primary challenges facing Catholic leaders on the reservation. North America as a whole, and Native American communities in particular, are experiencing an ongoing reckoning concerning U.S. federal policy toward Native American communities and the violence of the Christian boarding school era. This includes the discovery of mass graves at former Catholic boarding schools in Canada, the tabulation of excessive mortality figures in early 20th-century Native American schools and the individual horror stories of dehumanization and cultural denigration that have emerged from listening sessions across the country. In Mr. Bordeaux's words, "[U.S. federal officials] wanted to kill us off." Peter Klink, S.J., who has spent 40 of the past 50 years serving at Pine Ridge's Red Cloud mission, expressed his own Ignatian "desolation" at the knowledge that Jesuit "Westernization" contributed to the Lakota people's loss of language and distancing from their traditional cultures.

And yet these leaders are also quick to contest some narratives that they see as one-sided and as painting all missionary efforts with the same brush. Mr. Compton and Mr. Bordeaux argued that most Jesuits steadfastly tried to preserve Lakota culture, in stark contrast to the "kill the

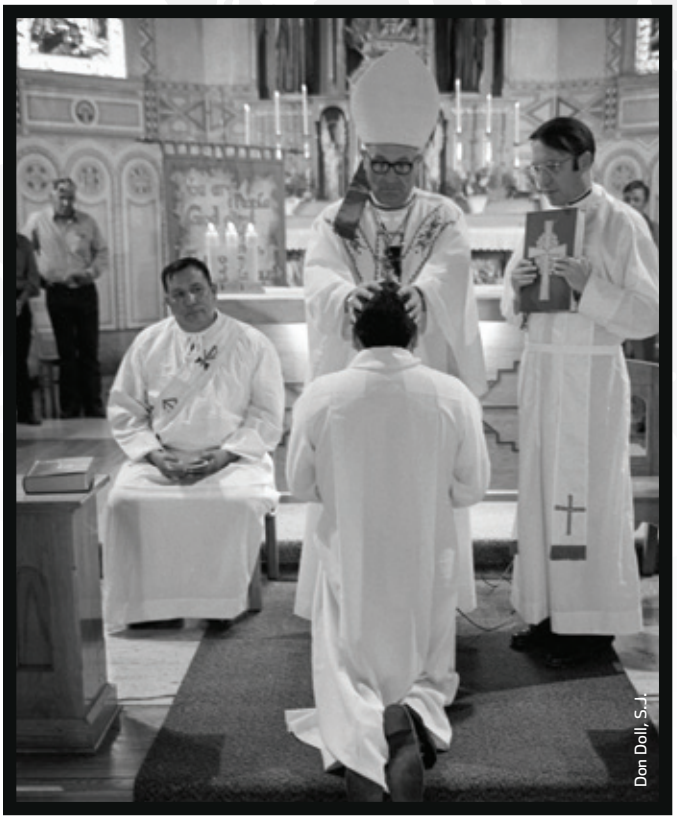
Language was central to Deacon Black Bear's project of spiritual integration.

Indian, save the man" approach at General Richard Pratt's Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. Echoing this sentiment, Father Klink noted that Eugene Buechel, S.J., developed 35,000 English-Lakota translation cards that laid the groundwork for the first Lakota-English dictionary, still seen as an authoritative manual for the language. Ms. Decory and Jennifer Black Bear agree that while the harsh Catholic assimilationist practices of the past should be rejected, it is not fair to assume that today's faith leaders are still operating out of the same playbook. In Ms. Decory's words, "We're not those people who were here before."

For others, the negative stereotype fails to give credit to the positive legacies of the mission schools. Phyllis White Eyes Decory, who studied at Holy Rosary Mission School at Pine Ridge between 1936 and 1950, praised the educational rigor, vocational training and discipline of her former school and passionately defended the Jesuits from charges of cultural genocide. "They didn't discontinue our culture! We learned to bead; our dress was accepted; we had Lakota dancing before basketball games." Ms. White Eyes Decory went on to serve as secretary of Native affairs for the Diocese of Rapid City, where she worked to integrate the Lakota *Azilya* sage purification ceremony into Catholic liturgy.

This spirit of adaptation may offer a deeper lesson for a polarized age such as ours. In their holistic, border-crossing ministries and identities, Deacon Ben Black Bear and his fellow Lakota Catholic leaders offer a critical counter-witness. In doing so, they carry forward the legacy of Servant of God Nicholas Black Elk, or what the ethnographer Damian Costello has described as the great Lakota catechist's and holy man's rooting of his identity in "complementary spiritual and ritual traditions." Theologically, they embody the Catholic "both-and" principle, the idea that the church develops through synthesizing the deepest truths of seemingly disparate traditions. Their lives also remind us that Christianity, like Lakota spirituality, is not primarily an ethical ideology or set of doctrinal teachings, but rather a spiritual walk and way of life. "More than anyone, Deacon Ben has shown us that we can walk in the ways of the Lakota and the Catholic way," says Eugene Iron Shell, now in formation to succeed Ben Black Bear as a Lakota Catholic deacon. "He leads by humble example and shows us the way."

Deacon Black Bear was assigned to St. Charles Borromeo Parish at St. Francis Mission in 1976.



The diaconate ordination of Ben Black Bear Jr. in 1976

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LOOKING FOR HER

By Eileen Markey

In the scrum of the state fair exhibition hall, I was beside her and now I am alone in the crowd, seven or eight years old. I strain for her not-from-here accent, a frequency above the others.

In the woozy blackness of night, mouth parched with fever, I barefoot the eternity to her side of the bed. Her hand on my forehead, and now the chalky taste of St. Joseph's children's aspirin.

As the custodian locks the school, the violin lesson long over, I explain she's late, not absent. No, she hasn't forgotten me. Any one of these car headlights, this one, this next one, will be her.

Twenty-five and hastily flying home, I look for her at the international arrivals gate. She pulls the family car into the taxi lane, a day of driving nothing at all, she says.

Ragged and leaking, finally winning the baby home from the neonatal unit, I look for her in the apartment. She's put on tea, filled the refrigerator, turned the lights low.

At that child's graduation party in the Bronx loud park, I look for her, unsteady now on frail legs, determined to be of the crowd.

As the elevator doors ping open to fluorescent light, I search the ward. She is tiny in the bed, confused. No, this is not her normal way, I tell the doctors who never listen.

As she slides between here and somewhere else, I crawl into the bed beside her, hoping to see where she is going. Her hands are warm, but the skin is turning waxy, her breath shallow.

She is barely a shape under the shroud as they carry her from home to hearse and we stand in sad salute on the front lawn. We are all of us, suddenly, old.

I am looking for her now in the thrift shop, rotely shifting the blouses on their hangers, Shht. Shht. Shht along the rack. She isn't here but I am, old as she was when she'd haunt the sales, buying sweaters I wouldn't wear. So much easier to care for babies than teenagers.

At the garden center, thumbnail on the velvet of the purple pansies she planted each spring, I fall apart weeping. Then put them in pots on my stoop.

With the immigrant mother selling mangoes at the traffic light, a toddler on her back, I chase her. My stupid lack of Spanish, my mother's will to connect.

I am looking for my mother, so I commit to the volunteer shift, enroll in the committee, make the calls. I show up at the meetings with her arched eyebrows. Her zero poker face.

I thrill to glimpse her sharp glance, the mischief of crows' feet, the downturned mouth. But it is only a mirror. My own aging face.

I send myself to silent retreat at this guest house in the country, mumbling through the last Station of the Cross. They got him in the end. After all that. Death insatiable with its great gaping maw.

Then a blur of purple at the bottom of my vision. A crocus, impertinent in the March cold: and I've found her, winking.

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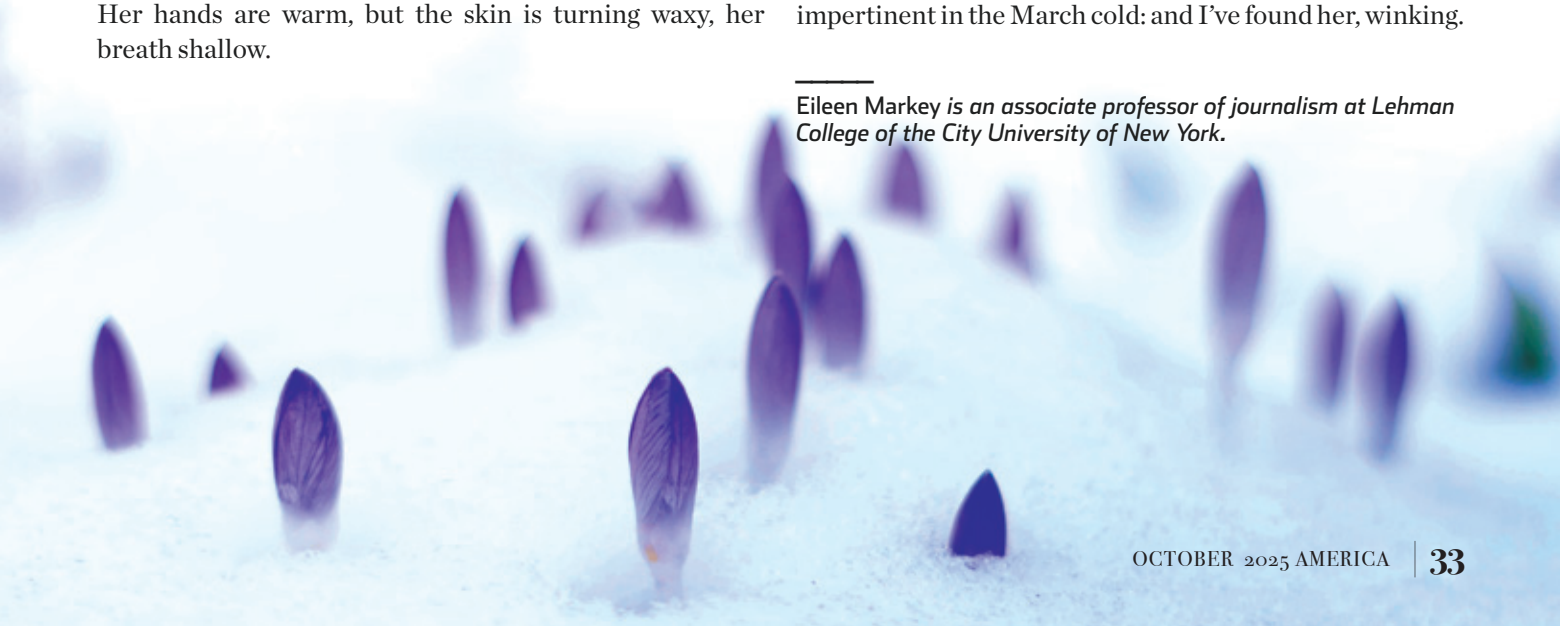


Church Ministries Offer Critical Help to Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries

We all strive to protect our children so they can grow in health, intelligence and virtue. Parents in developing countries love their children in the same ways, but these boys and girls face very different challenges. They regularly go to bed hungry, don't attend school because their parents can't afford it, and are often put to work at an early age or left to fend for themselves while their parents work long hours in agricultural settings. The sad fact is that poor children in developing countries must struggle to get what they need — even the most basic necessities.

"As a parent, I never had to send my kids out before dawn to collect pond water for our family to drink, cook and bathe — but that's a common chore for kids living in remote areas of developing countries," explained Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, one of the leading Catholic ministries involved in relief and development missions worldwide. "School is another example. Parents in the U.S. don't generally have to worry about their children being able to access schooling. But in impoverished regions of countries like Haiti, Malawi and Guatemala, a child can grow up without ever seeing the inside of a classroom. Even those who attend school often have to walk miles to get there and arrive so weakened by hunger that they can't focus on their studies. My heart breaks for them — and I believe that, as Catholics, we should do everything we can to improve their lives."

Fortunately, Cross Catholic Outreach makes helping these young ones possible by partnering with dedicated priests, religious sisters and Catholic lay leaders in developing countries.

"Local and in-country Catholic missions are the best way to positively impact the lives of vulnerable children because they focus on the whole child and the Catholic social teaching of integral human development," Sagarino said. "When a child is hungry, there are often many other factors at play, and spiritual need is one of them. Catholic ministries can best meet these needs."

Sagarino noted that Cross Catholic Outreach supports some of the most vulnerable children in developing countries, such as those living with the stigma of HIV, abused children and abandoned boys and girls without anywhere to turn but the Catholic ministries that have taken them in. These projects — in over 30 countries like Kenya, Guatemala and Ethiopia — are literally saving lives and providing hope in extreme darkness.

Naomi holds hands with her younger sister during her first visit home in five years. She fled when she found out her father was planning to sell her into child marriage, and was taken in by the Marie Adelide Girls Rescue Center.

"For example, a partner of ours in Kenya, the Marie Adelide Girls Rescue Center, takes in girls who are fleeing child marriage and female genital mutilation," Sagarino illustrated. "At the rescue center, these terrified girls find a safe home, counseling, medical care, schooling and daily spiritual formation. It's an incredible act of mercy that lifts up these young, at-risk girls."

Cross Catholic Outreach is able to serve vulnerable children around the world thanks to generous donations from Catholics in the U.S. In 2024, the organization provided more than $397 million in aid, including projects for orphans and vulnerable children as well as feeding programs, community water projects, new housing for the poor and much more.

"We are so grateful for Catholics in this country who partner with us to ensure vulnerable children are cared for. I know that — like me — Catholics want these children to enjoy the same opportunities and advantages their own sons and daughters have," Sagarino said. "That's why I'm confident they will continue to give generously to the projects we are undertaking in developing countries. They understand their support is critical to the Church's mission to improve the lives of the world's neediest boys and girls."

Readers interested in supporting the ongoing and transformational work of Cross Catholic Outreach can contribute through the ministry brochure inserted in this issue or send tax-deductible gifts to: Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC06056, PO Box 97168, Washington, DC 20090-7168. The ministry has a special need for partners willing to make gifts on a monthly basis. Use the inserted brochure to become a Mission Partner.

Impoverished Families Rely on Cross Catholic Outreach and Rosary Devotions To Meet Urgent Needs

Anderson, a high school student, wakes up in his rural Guatemalan home at 4:30 each morning, gathers his school things, then walks in the dark with his grandmother to a larger town 30 minutes away so she can take the bus to her job in Guatemala City. He then takes a bus to school, works hard all day, and travels by bus and foot down the dirt roads back home for chores and homework. Sometimes in the afternoon, he leads his youth faith group or practices with the choir in the local church. But his day isn't over — after dinner, he walks back to the larger town to chaperone his grandmother home at night.

"Each day sounds exhausting, but Anderson is full of enthusiasm and positivity because he knows that without God and the work of the Church in his life, it would be much worse," said Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, the relief and development ministry that has supported Anderson and other families in his community for years.

"Most adults in Anderson's rural community are day laborers in the fields, making around $8 a day when they can find work. This means that families barely earn enough to put food on the table. Their poverty is significant and heartbreaking — they have so many needs, and many are quite urgent," Sagarino explained.

These needs include nutrition, clean water sources, secure and humane housing, and education beyond primary school.

Anderson's family has received several types of aid through the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Lima, funded by Cross Catholic Outreach. Notably, he received a scholarship to attend Sacred Heart of Jesus School, a new Catholic school also built with funds from the organization. This scholarship has been crucial for Anderson, who was on his way to dropping out after sixth grade because he couldn't afford the tuition, uniform and supplies that high schools in Guatemala require.

Since these blessings entered his life through the diocese, Anderson has benefited in ways far beyond the material help he received.

"What impressed me most when I spoke with Anderson was his faith," said Sagarino, who met Anderson on a trip with three U.S. bishops who serve on the Board of Directors for Cross Catholic Outreach. "He is thoughtful and loving, and fosters a true devotion to the Mass and the Rosary. The bishops even told him he'd make a great priest!"

Anderson praises God for the blessings he's received by being active in the Catholic Church. In addition to leading his youth group weekly, he sings in two choirs and carries out several works of charity in his rural village. He and his youth group maintain a schedule of homes they visit to pray the Rosary with the family for their particular needs.

"Meeting the urgent needs of the poor is about so much more than providing physical aid, and Anderson is a great example," Sagarino said. "When we come together as one Church to help the less fortunate, the Holy Spirit is active in a very real way. The Spirit draws those who benefit from this aid closer to God and moves them to help others in turn."

Cross Catholic Outreach encourages spiritual growth in those they serve by partnering with Catholic priests, sisters and laypeople who incorporate faith formation in their outreach efforts. The organization also evangelizes directly by providing Bibles and rosaries to poor communities. This past year, they provided 135,567 rosaries to poor children around the world, alongside other blessings, and they know the rosaries are particularly fruitful.

"For centuries, the Rosary has taught common people and scholars alike about our Lord and our Holy Mother. There is no greater spiritual tool," Sagarino said. "A devotion to the Rosary teaches us how to place our faith in God and the intercession of Mary. It provides incredible spiritual and psychological benefits for those who endure so much suffering.

"There are heartbreaking needs in the world — from starvation to a lack of medical care to complete devastation from natural disasters. In every case, we are presented with an opportunity to carry out Christ's command to love our neighbor and encourage those in need to find their strength in God."

A child in Kenya holds a rosary as she joyfully drinks from a new water system in her community, made possible by Catholic donors in the U.S.

Sagarino noted that most American Catholics are eager to address the serious needs of the poor in developing countries but it can be difficult for them to know how to get involved or decide which specific ministries to support. "After all, every donor wants his or her gift to have an impact and to bless as many people as possible," she said. "That's why we set up our Most Urgent Needs Fund so that Catholics in the U.S. can support ministries abroad in areas that need it most. This fund provides us with a flexible way to shift support to our partners who are facing urgent needs.

"My hope is that as more Catholics in the U.S. learn about these dire needs and how they can enact incredible works of mercy, more will join us. We believe that we can drastically reduce unnecessary suffering in the world and, in the process, bring those we serve closer to Christ."

How To Help

To fund Cross Catholic Outreach's effort to help the poor worldwide, use the postage-paid brochure inserted in this newspaper or mail your gift to Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC06056, PO Box 97168, Washington, DC 20090-7168. The brochure also includes instructions for becoming a Mission Partner and making a regular monthly donation to this cause.

If you identify an aid project, 100% of the donation will be restricted to be used for that specific project. However, if more is raised for the project than needed, funds will be redirected to other urgent needs in the ministry.

A Tradition of Inclusion

D.E.I. and the mission of Jesuit universities

By William M. Treanor and Amy Uelmen

This past March, Georgetown University Law Center fended off an extraordinary incident of unprecedented government overreach when the chief federal prosecutor for our district, interim U.S. Attorney Edward R. Martin Jr., opened an inquiry into the content of our curriculum. Such incursions constitute a threat of the highest order to our nation's First Amendment values. Now more than ever, it is urgent to stand up for our university's autonomy to make curricular decisions based on its Jesuit mission.

Over the past several months, many other institutions in the United States have been subject to intense scrutiny from the federal government regarding a perceived threat that comes under the umbrella of what is termed D.E.I. The acronym, short for "diversity, equity and inclusion," generally refers to a set of programs and practices focused on fair treatment and greater participation, especially of people who have been marginalized or underrepresented in work, educational or other settings.

In various orders, memoranda and letters, the current presidential administration has offered a specific narrative and interpretation of why D.E.I. programs and practices should be eliminated. According to an executive order dated Jan. 21, such practices "not only violate the text and spirit of our longstanding Federal civil-rights laws, they also undermine our national unity, as they deny, discredit, and undermine the traditional American values of hard work, excellence, and individual achievement in favor of an unlawful, corrosive, and pernicious identity-based spoils system." Accordingly, the executive order requires government agencies to combat "illegal" D.E.I. preferences, mandates, policies, programs and activities, including in the private sector.

In a memorandum to "All Federal Agencies," dated July 29, the U.S. Department of Justice upped the ante, with extensive guidance for rooting out "illegal" preferential treatment of underrepresented persons and groups by federally funded entities. It instructs: "Preferential treatment occurs when a federally funded entity provides opportunities, benefits, or advantages to individuals or groups based on protected characteristics in a way that disadvantages other qualified persons, including such practices portrayed as 'preferential' to certain groups. Such practices violate federal law unless they meet very narrow exceptions." The memorandum proceeds to detail the practices and proxies


iStock/Daniel Lange

Healy Hall at Georgetown University. This past March, Georgetown University Law Center was the subject of a government inquiry into the content of its curriculum.

that it considers to be unlawful discrimination.

Diverse Identities and Needs

The often unstated premise for the attack on D.E.I. programs and policies is that they necessarily push down or squash the identity and interests of those who are not the beneficiaries of these efforts. This zero-sum-game vision sorts the world into undeserving winners and otherwise deserving losers, and in the scramble for scarce resources, this vision concludes that D.E.I. is unjust and unfair.

But this is not the only way to see and respond to a world of diverse identities and needs. Through the lens of a less individualistic worldview, what comes into relief are the historical, social and cultural gaps and flaws in the mythic exhortation to "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" through hard work and individual achievement.

Most poignantly, what emerges through this lens is how particularized attention and care for the growth and development of those who have been historically excluded or who have suffered from discrimination is not a zero-sum game but an opportunity for the harmonious growth of the entire community and all of its participants.

At educational institutions, similar efforts to sustain learning communities that encourage encounter amid deep differences help to foster settings that lead to the kind of growth and insight that inspire and drive the core of their missions.

Jesuit and Catholic

As the mission statement of Georgetown University holds: "[S]erious and sustained discourse among people of different faiths, cultures, and beliefs promotes intellectual, ethical, and spiritual understanding."

In other words, the educational environment that we aim to foster and support is best nourished by working to get all the voices in the room and participating in the conversation. Implicit in this statement is the commitment to build an educational environment that gathers, respects and sustains people of different faiths, cultures and beliefs. And this work is often grounded in specific attention to the social, cultural and historical realities that have led to exclusion.

In contemporary political terms, the mission of Georgetown is closely aligned with many aspects of D.E.I. principles and practices. But for a Catholic and Jesuit university like Georgetown, the principle involved is not one that is a product of contemporary concerns about the mandates of justice. It is, rather, a principle—and a worldview—that is central to centuries-old Catholic and Jesuit teachings and practices.

D.E.I. Values and Catholic Social Teaching

An extensive line of Catholic social thought commentary could also sustain many approaches to D.E.I. practices and programs. But these teachings rest on their own theological and philosophical foundations. For example, core constitutions from the Second Vatican Council provide abundant insight into how church teaching meshes with the values of human dignity and the unity of the human family, as well as contemporary reflections on democracy and pluralism. In the encyclicals of all the popes since Vatican II, one can also easily find a throughline of analysis on how church teaching sustains the values of inclusion and full participation in a diverse world.

For example, in "Populorum Progressio" (1967), Pope Paul VI set out a vision of radical inclusion based on solidarity in action, so that "no one is left behind as development advances." The pope also identified obstacles to solidarity and sources of injustice, such as inequity in trade relationships and the sense of isolation that emerges from nationalism and racism.

Similarly, in "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis" (1987), Pope John Paul II offered an extended reflection on how the practice of solidarity can help to foster a vision of radical inclusion: "Solidarity helps us to see the 'other'...as our 'neighbor,' a 'helper' (cf. Gen 2:18-20), to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God."

In "Caritas in Veritate" (2009), Pope Benedict deepened the social, cultural and economic implications of a theological understanding of human community patterned on the dynamic life of communion at the heart of the Trinity. Within this vision, unity in diversity is not a zero-sum game that sorts people into "winners" and "losers." Instead, true openness to the distinct reality of other persons leads not to a "loss of individual identity" but rather to "profound interpenetration."

And in "Fratelli Tutti" (2020), Pope Francis' reflections on social friendship offered a path to fostering a

The mission of Georgetown is closely aligned with many aspects of D.E.I. principles and practices.

greater sense of inclusion. "Only a gaze transformed by charity can enable the dignity of others to be recognized and, as a consequence, the poor to be acknowledged and valued in their dignity, respected in their identity and culture, and thus truly integrated into society," he wrote. From this perspective, those on the "periphery" are to be included because they truly have something to offer: "For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centres of power where weighty decisions are made." Specifically with regard to the inclusion of migrants, he notes: "[A]n individual and a people are only fruitful and productive if they are able to develop a creative openness to others."

Finally, it would also be important to note that Catholics in specific regions of the world also look to their regional conferences of Catholic bishops for reflections and guidance that can inform their work to respond to social and cultural challenges in their region. For example, in their pastoral letter "Brothers and Sisters to Us" (1979), the bishops of the United States set forth a strong condemnation of racism as a sin, noting that the responsibility "to resist and undo injustices" of racism extends beyond the realm of personal fault. They wrote: "The sin is social in nature in that each of us, in varying degrees, is responsible. All of us in some measure are accomplices." The breadth of the shared duty to work for justice is clear: "The absence of personal fault for an evil does not absolve one of all responsibility. We must seek to resist and undo injustices we have not caused, lest we become bystanders who tacitly endorse evil and so share in guilt in it."

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Longstanding, wide-ranging and deep sources within the Catholic social thought tradition clearly articulate the moral imperative to foster appreciation for diversity and the values of equity and inclusion, and the responsibilities that flow from these values.

Jesuit Mission and Pedagogy

The driving mission of a Jesuit university is rooted not only in the obligations that flow from the Gospels and the beliefs of the Catholic Church, but also in the history, spirituality and charism of St. Ignatius Loyola and the Jesuit order.

As the Jesuit historian John O'Malley wrote in *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II*, the Jesuits' distinctive contribution to the church's efforts to understand and respectfully engage with other peoples, cultures and belief systems throughout the globe is characterized by the pastoral principle of accommodation to times, places and circumstances, with manifold examples of "radical adaptation" and "sweeping inculturation."

In contemporary terms, decrees from the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (1995) capture well the Jesuit commitments to promote cross-cultural understanding (No. 4) and interreligious dialogue (No. 5). And as the Jesuit theologian David Hollenbach explained in a 2016 essay, the pursuit of interreligious and cross-cultural understanding is considered to be "an essential expression of Christian love for one's neighbor and universal respect for the dignity and rights of all people."

In 2022, referring specifically to the mission and identity of Jesuit universities, the current superior general of the Society of Jesus, Arturo Sosa, highlighted the mutual benefits of culturally diverse educational environments. He explained: "Because 'the world is our home,' as the first Jesuits said, every culture that dwells in it is our sister. That is why we want to go beyond multiculturality and open ourselves to interculturality as a process of human enrichment."

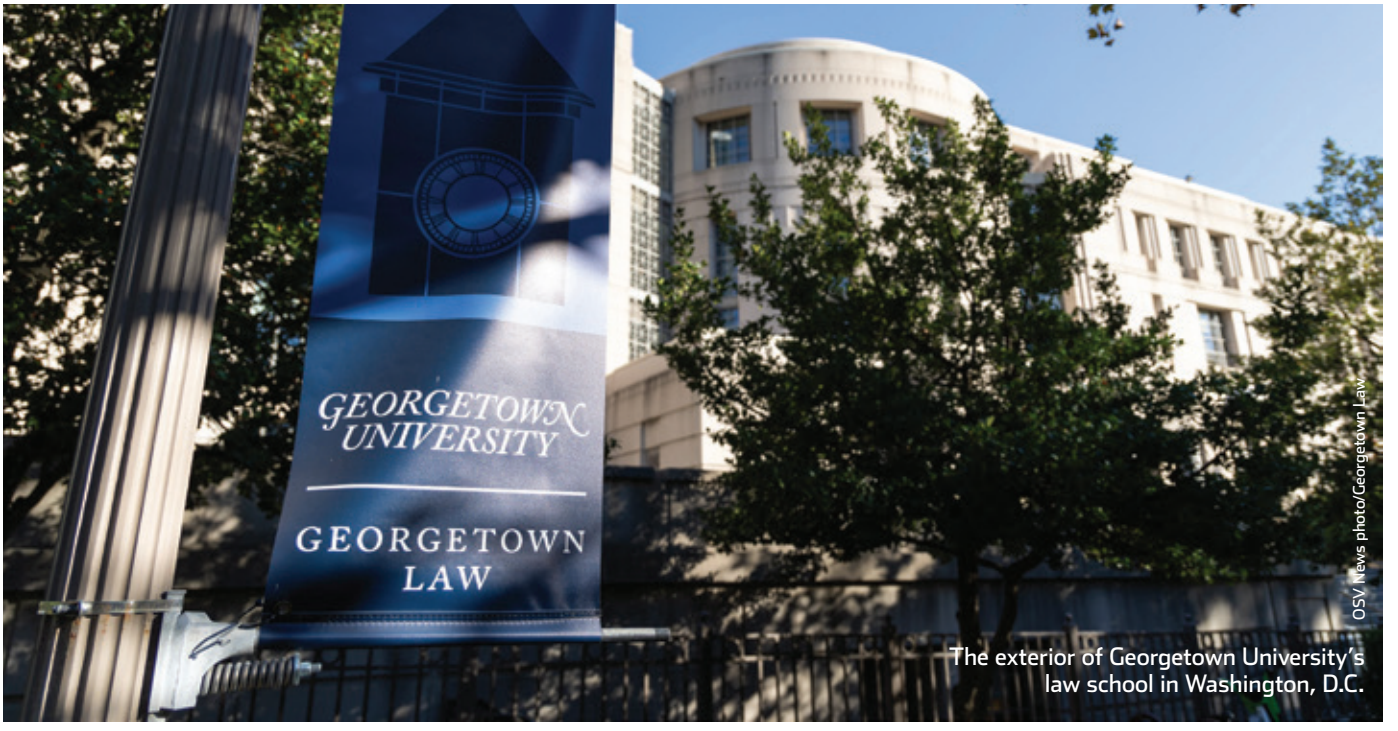
It is also important to note the mandatory nature of Jesuit institutional alignment with the Jesuit mission. Every seven years, each Jesuit university is required to engage in a "Mission Priority Examen" through which it is accountable to the Jesuit order. Ultimately, reports are reviewed by the Jesuit superior general to determine if priorities are aligned with the Jesuit and Catholic mission.

Thus, for Georgetown, the animating principle of our mission statement—that "serious and sustained discourse among people of different faiths, cultures, and beliefs promotes intellectual, ethical, and spiritual understanding"—is not an optional encouragement but the mandatory foundation for every aspect of our institution.

First Amendment Freedoms

Recent government scrutiny and invasive inquiry into university curricula and programming have resulted in a completely unprecedented and astounding unconstitutional attack on the freedom and integrity of academic institutions—and in some cases, also on the precious value of religious freedom.

The threats are not hypothetical. On Feb. 14, the Department of Education issued a letter setting forth the department's views on the Constitution and Title VI of the



The exterior of Georgetown University's law school in Washington, D.C.

OSV News photo/Georgetown Law

Civil Rights Act. It informed schools that they could not legally consider race in a wide variety of activities, including "hiring, promotion, compensation, financial aid, scholarships, prizes, administrative support, discipline, housing, graduation ceremonies, and all other aspects of student, academic, and campus life."

Two weeks later, the department issued a broad follow-up letter, saying that it would investigate schools that "us[ed] racial classifications and race-based policies to further DEI objectives, 'equity,' a racially-oriented vision of social justice or similar goals."

In March, Mr. Martin, the interim U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, moved from these declarations about the law and threats of investigation to an attempt to coerce compliance. His letter to the dean of Georgetown Law opened:

> It has come to my attention reliably that Georgetown Law School continues to teach and promote DEI. This is unacceptable. I have begun an inquiry into this and would welcome your response to the following questions:
>
> First, have you eliminated all DEI from your school and its curriculum? Second, if DEI is found in your courses or teaching in anyway [sic], will you move swiftly to remove it?

The letter from the person holding authority as the chief federal prosecutor for the district also included a direct threat to Georgetown Law's current students and alumni: "At this time, you should know that no applicant for our fellows program, our summer internship, or employment in our office who is a student or affiliated with a law school or university that continues to teach and utilize DEI will be considered."

The response on March 6 of William Treanor, then the dean of the law school, emphasized the foundational bedrock of Georgetown University's Catholic and Jesuit mission. After quoting the Georgetown mission statement—"serious and sustained discourse among people of different faiths, cultures, and beliefs promotes intellectual, ethical, and spiritual understanding"—he explained: "For us at Georgetown, this principle is a moral and educational imperative. It is a principle that defines our mission as a Catholic and Jesuit institution."

Dean Treanor explained the flatly unconstitutional nature of the interim U.S. attorney's inquiry and challenge: "Your letter challenges Georgetown's ability to define our mission as an educational institution." He further noted: "The First Amendment, however, guarantees that the government cannot direct what Georgetown and its faculty teach and how to teach it. The Supreme Court has continually affirmed that among the freedoms central to a university's First Amendment rights are its abilities to determine, on academic grounds, who may teach, what to teach, and how to teach it."

Dean Treanor's response also expressed alarm with the nature of the interim U.S. attorney's threat:

> Your letter informs me that your office will deny our students and graduates government employ-

A Jesuit university, like any university, has the right to control its own curriculum.

ment opportunities until you, as Interim United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, approve of our curriculum. Given the First Amendment's protection of a university's freedom to determine its own curriculum and how to deliver it, the constitutional violation behind this threat is clear, as is the attack on the University's mission as a Jesuit and Catholic institution.

While Mr. Martin's nomination was subsequently withdrawn, other challenges remain—and new fronts of attack on the independence of Jesuit and other universities open every day.

Free Speech Rights

It is well established that the First Amendment protects the free speech rights of organizations as well as individuals. For example, in NRA v. Vullo, the U.S. Supreme Court held that the National Rifle Association had First Amendment rights and that, as a result, New York State financial regulators could not punish the organization for its gun promotion advocacy.

So, too, do universities have First Amendment rights as organizations. It is well established that for universities this First Amendment right includes the right to determine their curriculum. In a now classic statement of the "four essential freedoms" of a university in Sweezy v. New Hampshire, Justice Felix Frankfurter explained that "[it] is the business of a university to provide that atmosphere which is most conducive to speculation, experiment and creation. It is an atmosphere in which there prevail 'the four essential freedoms' of a university—to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study." Embracing Frankfurter's concurrence in Sweezy, the court in Univ. of Michigan v. Ewing wrote, "Academic freedom thrives...on autonomous decisionmaking by the academy itself."

As an institution whose free speech rights are protected by the First Amendment, a Jesuit university, like any university, has the right to control its own curriculum—"to determine for itself on academic grounds...what may be taught [and] how it shall be taught."

Contrary to the actions and threats of Mr. Martin, because Jesuit universities have the constitutionally protected right to control their curriculum, they have the right to teach the values and practices that align with what he terms "D.E.I." Federal prosecutors have no authority to dictate what a Jesuit university—or any university—teaches.

A second reason why a prosecutor cannot dictate what a Jesuit university teaches lies in the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom. In challenging Georgetown's ability to control our curriculum, Mr. Martin was asserting that *he* had the authority to decide what should be taught at a religiously affiliated university.

As the U.S. Supreme Court held in Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru (2020), the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom protects a religious institution's autonomy, especially in these kinds of decisions that go to the heart of an institution's "central mission." Nothing is more central to our mission than our ability to teach the values and practices that reflect and sustain our mission.

What is at stake in the recent conflicts between the current presidential administration and institutional efforts to protect the autonomy to shape their own curricula? In our case, nothing less than our nation's most dearly held values, including religious freedom. The mission-driven vision for education that emerges from Catholic social thought and Jesuit mission is a precious gift for our entire polity. We owe it to our fellow citizens to protect this "moral and educational imperative" with every fiber of our being.

William M. Treanor *is the Agnes Williams sesquicentennial professor of constitutional law and constitutional history and dean emeritus of Georgetown University Law Center.*

Amy Uelmen *is the director for mission and ministry for Georgetown University Law Center.*

Editors' note: A longer version of this essay is slated for publication in an upcoming issue of The Jesuit Educational Quarterly.

In this undated photo, Robert Prevost (left) smiles while his mother (back to the camera) cuts a birthday cake at what his brother, John Prevost (right), guessed was Robert's ninth birthday, at the family home in Dolton.

OSV News photo/Prevost family

A Pilgrimage to Pope Leo's Childhood Home

One Jesuit's encounter with a cop, a cat and fellow Catholics in search of a connection to the first American pontiff

By Joe Hoover

The sheer Americanness of Leo XIV's papacy was cut to its purest form, you might say, in early July of this year on the lawn of his childhood home in Dolton, Ill.

It came in two phases:

1.) In an act of can-do Midwestern big-shoulders Chicago labor priest hammer-twixt-the-teeth Catholic charity, a company called Windy City Construction Group tore off and replaced the weathered roof of the former Prevost family home. The new roof is a lovely light gray; it looks clean and sturdy and good.

2.) Windy City then planted on the lawn a six-foot sign declaring that they were the ones who did it, with two large QR codes directing you to the company website where you, too, can get your own roof replaced (not for free).

Robert Prevost, a dual citizen of Peru and the United States, was elected supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church by the College of Cardinals on May 8. I attended the Mass of thanksgiving the Chicago Archdiocese held on his behalf in early June at Rate Field on the city's South Side. In July, I visited Prevost's childhood home at 212 East 141st Place on what one could call Chicago's Even Farther South Side.

Both had the same feel: a sort of down-home sweetness and simplicity. People streamed into the stadium and folks drove up to his home to do nothing more than rejoice and marvel at the very fact of the first American pope (let alone the first Chicago pope). At the ballpark, 30,000 people came to celebrate him. The people going to the celebration knew he would not actually be there, *and they went anyway.*

It reminded me that, amid everything happening out there—what is raw and cruel and barbaric—holiness is always in season. People still want to believe in something better. They keep putting their faith in someone new. They don't really give up. As one visitor to the Prevost home said about Pope Leo: "He gives us hope. We could use hope right now."

At the same time: While in theory I believe the Holy Spirit was at work in the conclave to elect this man pope, in actuality...? As a longtime Catholic, and as a more or less "official" Catholic—one in a religious order, one working in Catholic media—I think that belief can become a bit sterile. A preternatural skepticism, an impulse of doubt: Was the conclave just an examining of onboarding protocols and combing through H.R. files and coming up with a suitable candidate to move the enterprise forward in the coming fiscal years as revenues head south and key mar-

Dolton is a different place from when the pope grew up there.

kets need priming? Was it that, and not necessarily a mystical decision by a prayerful gathering of men channeling the divine power of the universe?

Even though I was visiting Chicago this summer, I had not thought of going to the pope's home until my editor suggested it. I quickly found on Google Maps, not joking, the "Pope Leo XIV Childhood Home" destination. I drove south down Lake Shore Drive, gliding past lakefront parks, beaches and baseball diamonds, listening to 93 XRT, the finest radio station in America. Alt-rock, '90s rock, moody acoustic, Lord Huron, Amy Winehouse, "classic rock" but the cool, Tom Petty kind. It began to feel like a mini-pilgrimage. Stunning views, shattering music, Midwestern pontiff.

Dolton is a first-ring suburb of Chicago, immediately south of the city limits. While it is not technically *in* Chicago, it is *of* Chicago. To get there, I wound around the museum campus in the Loop—the Art Institute, the Field Museum, Millennium Park where that Bean thing is—toward I-55 South and then I-94 East to Indiana and eventually Exit 68A. I drove past a mix of weedy vacant lots and low-slung, barracks-like housing developments, with a few vacant buildings here and there. I crossed train tracks and went over an old rusted bridge on the Little Calumet River. I took video of the passing scenery as I went along, surprising myself by becoming more and more excited over the course of this little papal *sortie*.

I finally pulled onto East 141st Place. The street was quiet. A cat padded along the sidewalk. Lawns were well-kept. I pulled up behind a police car in front of the home in question, 212. It was 12:31 p.m. It felt important to note that.

There it was: the Prevost home. It was reddish-brown brick. A narrow concrete walk lined with weedy white rocks led up to a bright red door. The house was small, with almost a cottage feel to it. Wood chips lined the front of the house. Someone had leaned a bare wooden cross against the house next to the front steps.

Ever since it was discovered that the new pope had grown up here, a squad car has been stationed in front of the home between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. every day. On duty that day was Officer Ruffin, who told me that people come by all the time, praying and taking pictures. "Catholics take care of their own," she said. She said that the block "feels more peaceful" since the pope was elected.

Joe Hoover, S.J.

The Nguyen family of San Jose, Calif., at Pope Leo's childhood home

The Prevost family lived on 141st Place for 47 years, between 1949 and 1996. The parents, Louis and Mildred, raised three sons there: Louis Martin, John Joseph and the future pope, or Rob as he was known to his family. Louis was a World War II veteran. The family was active at nearby Mary of the Assumption parish, where Rob was an altar server. Louis and Mildred were lifelong educators, Louis eventually becoming a school superintendent in the south suburb of Glenwood. Rob went off to an Augustinian minor seminary in Michigan at age 14, around 1969, never lived at home again, and then became perhaps the most famous living spiritual leader in the world.

It was steamy hot outside and reminded me of a long, dull summer afternoon at my grandparents' wheat farm in Oklahoma. I cased the home, the backyard, the front porch. I inspected a green water hose. Why? I don't know. It seemed important. A man named Ike drove his van over, "Ike's Tire Repair" painted on his door. He got out, chatting with Officer Ruffin, whose tire he had once repaired. I took Ike's picture in front of the house. He said about the new pope, "You never know how far you get if you have luck and hard work."

The Nguyen family pulled up. Khuong and Hellen and their four small children and Hellen's father had made a pilgrimage to the pope's home from San Jose, Calif. "He is the first American pope in 2,000 years of the papacy," said Khuong, explaining what drew them halfway across the country to Chicago.

"He gives us hope," said Hellen. "We could use hope right now. He can help guide us to the right path, to make the church stronger." We need hope, she said, because of "so many wars, secular culture and babies unborn and born." We need "someone to pray for us, to teach us."

The former Prevost home at 212 East 141st Place in Dolton, Ill.

Dolton Left Behind

Dolton is a different place from when the pope grew up there in the ’50s and ’60s, an era when there was an abundance of jobs in nearby mills and factories. Through the ’80s and ’90s, steel mills and other industries were shuttered. The old, familiar story. The New York Times reported a complete flip of racial demographics in the Village of Dolton. In 1980, the population was 94 percent white and 2 percent Black. Thirty years later, in 2010, the ratio was 5 percent white and 90 percent Black.

As a report by WBEZ put it, the community was a victim of “a well-worn pattern of deindustrialization that leads to a disenfranchised economic class.” Dolton, in other words, lives at the peculiar American post-industrial matrix where the stuff of Bruce Springsteen songs became the seeds of Donald Trump’s presidency.

Kim Graham lives right around the corner from the Prevost home, showing up to see it for the first time since the papal election. She told me that Dolton needed a boost. The municipality had been in the national news spotlight the past year and a half over allegations of financial misconduct by former Mayor Tiffany Henyard.

Miss Graham hopes the discovery that the pope was from Dolton will help shift the spotlight. “It brings a good side,” to the city, she said. “It will enhance the presence of the other churches.”

She added, “It took something of the Christian faith to uplift the area.”

Kareem Davis stepped out of the house next door to the Prevost home. He had actually been trying to purchase this house, which abuts his, well before it became world famous. The interior of the Prevost house had been renovated last year, and the home was put up for sale (3BR, 3 bath, 1,200 square foot), listed at $199,000. On July 1, with some controversy given the city’s financial troubles, the Village of Dolton bought the home. It intends on making it a historical landmark. No one resides there now.

Mr. Davis, who grew up Baptist and with his wife Donna attends St. Sabina’s Catholic Church in Chicago, hopes the home stays as it is. “It should be a place of prayer,” he said. “A sanctuary, a place you could come and repent and let loose the things you have done with your life.”

He is concerned about what the new owners could do with the building. “The city might turn this into a circus, a money-making machine, and it will be struck down by the Lord. He don’t want that.”

Mr. Davis said his faith has grown because of where he lives. “That happens when God shows something to you. You can’t ignore it. This entity of your Lord has struck right here.”

The six-foot-high white sign in front of the Prevost former home features a lovely portrait of Pope Leo, formerly Cardinal Prevost, formerly Bishop Prevost, Prior General Prevost, Father Bob Prevost and Rob from Mary of the Assumption. (The QR codes? Okay, roofers have to eat.) An inscription beneath his portrait reads: “Every Great Story Has a Strong Foundation—A Roof for the Pope’s Roots.” Kate Christensen, who stopped by with her husband Roy, looked at Leo’s portrait on the sign and said, “Just looking at his face, you can see the peace in him and the holiness.”

The compact little Prevost home, the white shutters, the small green lawn. The cottageness of it. Humble and small. Almost heartbreakingly small. Not heartbreaking as in you feel bad for people living in small houses, just heartbreaking as in, when you look at it, you realize you have a heart—a heart for the South Side red brick Chicago Catholic 1950s 40-kids-to-a-nun thing. Mary of the Assumption and Daley of the Mayor and Mildred of the Rosary and Altar Society and Louis who served on a landing craft at Normandy (*you cannot make this stuff up)* kind of place. One whose foundation seemed to have been laid before all of creation for the first American pope to come from. And *Peace be with you!* he said first thing from the balcony. So drop your skepticism because this entity of your Lord has struck right here.

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*Joe Hoover, S.J., is **America**’s poetry editor and producer of a new film, “The Allegory.”*

For more news and analysis about Pope Leo XIV, listen to **America**’s “Inside the Vatican” podcast, with our Vatican correspondents Gerard O’Connell and Colleen Dulle. Go to **americamagazine.org.**

CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV visits the Vatican Observatory in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, on July 20, 2025.

Of Heaven and Earth

Five lessons learned as director of the Vatican Observatory

By Guy Consolmagno

Sept. 19 is my official retirement date as the director of the Vatican Observatory. After a delightful 10 years in the post, I am happy to turn the keys over to Richard D'Souza, S.J., a galactic astronomer of world renown. But as I depart, I thought I would pass along a few words of advice based on my experience.

1. *Humility is power.* When I became director, I had no experience dealing with the Vatican and its infamous bureaucracy. I didn't even know what I didn't know. So I dealt with it in a very American, straightforward way: total honesty.

Let's say the frammis needs a new thingamabob. I would not go to the office of thingamabobs and demand a replacement. That would never work; I had no status with them. That would take months.

Instead, I would go to the director of frammises and humbly ask, "Please help me. I am a foolish American, and I don't know what to do. But I think there is something wrong with the frammis."

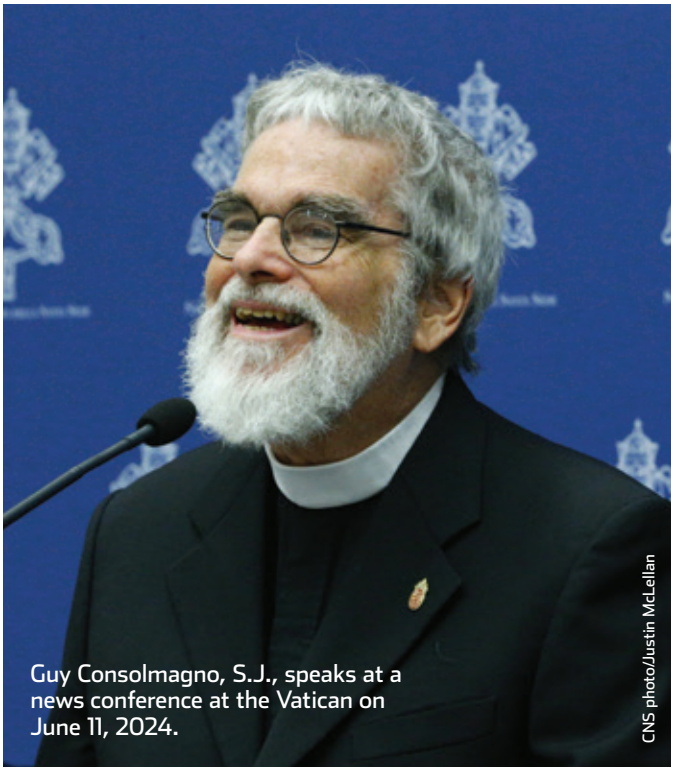
The director of frammises would then glance at the problem. "Ah," he would say wisely. "I suggest you need a new thingamabob. Let me take care of that for you." Being wise to the ways of the Vatican, he would have the thingamabob installed in days.

There is more going on here than simply asking rather than demanding. In Vatican culture, once someone does you a favor, you become their client, their protégé. You've given them status by putting yourself under their protection. Since their status depends on you, in a weird way you've made yourself important to them. Suddenly: You become an important person.

2. *God answers prayers by sending people.* When I first started running the observatory, I realized that we needed a good website to engage folks who might want to know about faith and science. But I had no idea how to set up such a site, and of course no time to do that, even if I knew how. One day I was visiting friends (whom I had met through science fiction conventions), and I passed on my dream of the great website. My friend Bob gave me a funny look before saying: "You realize, I do that for a living." For the past 10 years he's worked full time, at half-time pay, building and maintaining www.vaticanobservatory.org.

Another example: The Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope in Arizona was cutting-edge when it first saw light—30 years ago. It's gotten a little less advanced since then, however. It desperately needed a complete overhaul, including the ability to be run remotely from anywhere in the world.

Turns out, the best outfit in the world to do that work is in the Czech Republic; they mostly automate breweries, so if the Czechs can trust their beer to these guys, we can trust our telescope. But could we explain the complicated details of our project over the barriers of distance and language? It just so happens that our observatory's vice director in



Guy Consolmagno, S.J., speaks at a news conference at the Vatican on June 11, 2024.

CNS photo/Justin McLellan

charge of the telescope in Arizona is Father Paul Gabor, a Jesuit from the Czech Republic. Right person, right place, right time.

There's more: At just that time, a donor joined our foundation board with just the right connections to come up with the funding to pay for that upgrade. The work is now complete—on time, on budget.

Having a Jesuit astronomer on staff who speaks Czech seems rare enough. Finding more young Jesuits anywhere in the world with an interest and ability in astronomy and its related sciences would seem almost impossible. But actually there's a remarkable list of young Jesuits in formation with advanced technical degrees, interested in joining us some day. (They include men from Australia, Canada, Congo, Indonesia and India, with others in the wings.) You might almost suspect that maybe God thinks this work is worth supporting.

Or maybe God just appreciates Czech beer.

3. Failure is not an option; it's a requirement. One day, out of the blue, came an email about some translations from Latin of a 17th-century astronomy book. (Yawn.) It was from some guy who taught astronomy in a community college. (Right.) In Kentucky. (Right.) But we happened to both be in Chicago on a certain day, so I agreed to have a coffee with him.

Today? Alongside a series of articles in journals about the history of astronomy and a couple of scholarly books from Notre Dame Press that have completely revolutionized our understanding of Galileo and his rivals, my good

> **Our job is to show the world that the church supports science.**

friend Chris Graney and I have published our own take with Paulist Press on *When Science Goes Wrong: The Desire and Search for the Truth*. And he provides a lot of the content on that website I mentioned above.

But beyond being another person sent at the right time, Chris made me realize something about the science I do that is all the more relevant in these times of science denialism. In his research we came across a number of great stories in the history of astronomy where people were almost right—which is to say, they were wrong. Yet the science grew precisely because they were wrong.

Rather than worshiping science as the last word in truth, or beating it up when it's less than perfect, we realized that science can only go right when it's not afraid to go wrong. We learn by mistakes; indeed, that's usually the way we learn.

4. Vaudeville will never die. I give about 50 public talks a year. Over the last 10 years, that's 500 talks. And our annual report shows that the other dozen members of our staff are at least as busy giving tours and talks, at both our observatory sites in Rome and Tucson and in their home countries: India, Africa, Italy, Latin America. Our job at the observatory is to show the world that the church supports science; these guys are providing the science and showing the world.

I love giving these talks, but then, it's in the blood. Several of my Italian grandmother's brothers, my great uncles, were actually vaudeville performers 100 years ago. They passed their song-and-dance skills on to their children (including my dad), who passed them on to my brother (a musician) and me.

And in this day of YouTube and Zoom, it turns out there's a great hunger for live entertainment. Who knew my family legacy would be in such demand?

5. Take a bow. You'll get blamed for what you never did, so learn to modestly take credit where it's equally unearned. I will merely point out that we have had two solar eclipses, for free, in North America during the time that I was director of the Vatican Observatory. Any clouds were not my fault.

Guy Consolmagno, S.J., *is the former director of the Vatican Observatory in Castel Gandolfo, Italy.*

Catholic Literature and the Restoration of Culture

By Katy Carl

The Catholic literary canon saved my faith—and, I believe, my sanity.

I mean both these statements quite literally. In the crucible of past culture wars that rocked both my college years and my turbulent first decade of parenthood, the broader, calmer, more capacious view of life offered by Catholic literary authors kept me grounded and (mostly) out of various mimetic crises—not by spiritually bypassing those crises, but by offering a more comprehensive vision of the here and now than what could be offered by any of the increasingly shrill and tribalistic voices flooding online spaces.

As we all know now, most online voices are out purely for their own agendas and remain quite ready to dismiss, dissect and discard any person who will not advance those agendas. I found precious few that resonated with the overtones of the one who said that his own would know his voice and he would know them.

Among the books of the past and present, I found many such resonances. This is why, for me, what we talk about when we talk about a Catholic literary revival is nothing less than a lifeline in this world that can help us keep ties to the next. This is why I am passionate about generating, guiding and guarding the Catholic literary work of the future.

Lest we confuse ourselves by talking in vague terms about "the literary revival" and "the *last* literary revival," losing our hold on history, here is my quick history of Catholic literary revivals in modern times. There have been at least three major waves, and they have tended to travel westward.

The first, which took hold in France, flourished from the early decades of the 20th century through the Second World War and succeeded in giving us major influences such as Mauriac, the Maritains, Bernanos, Bloy, Peguy and Claudel. The second flourished in England in the interwar period—the 1930s and '40s—and featured writers as different as Caryll Houselander (who published in modest num-

Figures from Catholic literary revivals in modern times: François Mauriac, Graham Greene and Sigrid Undset

bers with the confessionally Catholic house Sheed & Ward), Evelyn Waugh (who took the mainstream by storm) and Graham Greene (notorious good-bad boy and self-hating Catholic who loved to push the envelope with readers, whether they were believers or not). The Inklings are no doubt also part of this U.K.-based second wave but are best understood on their own terms, rather than on standard terms of literary convention.

The third wave, which began to rise in the United States around the end of World War II, is the "revival" most American readers have in mind when referring to Catholic literary work. It encompasses the American writers we in the United States tend to have heard the most about—Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy—as well as minor but important figures who are often forgotten, like Caroline Gordon, Betty Wahl, Edwin O'Connor and J. F. Powers. Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, both lapsed Catholics, have an underexplored relationship to this third revival, whose relationship to the mainstream of 20th-century American literature is in turn less well understood than it might be.

A Fourth Turning?

But a fourth revival, now underway, is a *global* one, and it will encompass not only English-speaking and Francophone authors but an overwhelming preponderance of those whose first language is either Spanish or a non-Romance tongue. Central and South American writers will take the stage. Writers from Nigeria and other countries in Africa where there is a significant Catholic presence will also feature prominently. The unique experiences of Christian believers in Asia and the Middle East will be closely attended to and better understood. Canadian and Mexican, Scandinavian and Japanese, Filipino and Australian works will play significant roles.

A good deal of mingling of influences will occur. German Catholic writers of the 20th century—their works nearly lost because they were critical of and suppressed by the Nazi regime—will be rediscovered. European and American Catholic texts will continue to serve as cornerstones for new literary constructions, but the finished effect is likely to be, as Evelyn Waugh says of the Brideshead chapel, "something quite remote from anything the builders intended."

These Catholic writers and readers of the global revival are fortunate in that, while we have our own productive tensions to navigate, we no longer have to face the same kind of opposition that affected the mid-century writers of the earlier American revival. For one thing, most Catholic readers of that time tended to be provincial (by which I mean switched-off, gated-in, downward-eyed and yet self-dismissive) rather than parochial (by which I mean stable, sturdy and local, sensitive to the concerns of the world beyond their walls but also confident in the validity of their own perceptions). They tended not to understand the writers their own tradition produced, whereas today, Catholics number among the most vocally eager to embrace our own in the literary sphere.

At the same time, Catholics are now gaining a certain acceptance and respect in publishing spaces, where in the past these same writers, who may have felt misunderstood in their parishes, also often faced a certain kind of friendly fire from within their profession.

What this friendly fire amounted to was the accusation that Catholics who really believe what Catholics must believe are by that token ideologues, unable to see what is true because they are in receipt of certain verbal formulas to which they consent. Flannery O'Connor had a rejoinder for that: Doctrine served her as a pair of spectacles that clarified vision rather than distorting it.

O'Connor's well-known stance is rooted in François Mauriac's book-length essay "God and Mammon," whose upshot O'Connor boils down to "purify the source" but which deserves to be read in its entirety. In it, Mauriac wrestles a bad angel who accuses him of working in bad faith and wearing blinders (and which itself happens to be wearing the earthly form of André Gide). In looking at Mauriac's resulting self-portrait, which serves as a kind of icon, practicing Catholic writers can see some of our own problems neutralized.

Lexical Shifts

We should not pretend this fourth revival will meet with no problems. If we want to understand the different, more freewheeling, but in some ways equally vexed position of the writer of faith today, we must first dwell on the state of general culture, in which language and literacy themselves are in upheaval. We can no longer assume that we share vocabularies and associations on which both large and subtle effects in literary art depend. Any two people may hear the same word but carry a wholly different set of associations for it.

We are in a moment of rapid and unpredictable lexical shifts: changes in the received meaning of words. Some feel that lexical shifts implicitly prove that *no* language has meaning other than its ability to make someone do

A Catholic literary revival offers nothing less than a lifeline in this world that can help us keep ties to the next.

something, or that all meanings are assigned and arbitrary expressions of power. This view is itself, however, often a mask for other motives. If at times it rightly warns about the agendas of the powerful, it at least equally often serves as a means of rendering impossible any kind of conversation that could establish shared parameters of perception or a shared search for truth. Language in these cases cannot rise to the level of art, as it has been instrumentalized to serve not the needs and perceptions of the human person but instead the purposes of ideology.

Before we establish that all true art is by nature anti-ideological (which does not necessarily mean that it avoids articulating or wrestling with ideas), it is worth noticing that the word *ideology* itself is undergoing a lexical shift and has been for some time. Mark Shiffman, a writer and scholar in San Francisco, traces the development in a recent essay, "What Is Ideology?"

Shiffman's arguments are eloquent, precise and yet wide-ranging, but it may help the present conversation about literature to distill and expand on some of his conclusions here. An ideology, he says, in the modern sense is not simply, as the word is sometimes lazily used, a set of coherent ideas. Rather, it is a totalizing oversimplification of complex reality, whose proponents seek to take control by means of sweeping and overstated claims about the ideology's ability to solve perennial problems: or, in Shiffman's words, "an intellectual scheme that is full of enthusiasm and confidence about its imagined benefits, but which suffers from a lack of any clear vision of relevant practical realities."

Ideology in this sense seeks not to explain reality, but to melt down and re-forge reality; not to appeal to conscience, but to replace conscience. Ideology does not inspire or create or sustain art; ideology is opposed to real art. Ideology poses the greatest single challenge the fourth wave of Catholic literary revival is facing, because it is the greatest single challenge *all* literary artists are presently facing.

Ideologies call for sweeping, drastic, urgent revisions of human language and behavior. They may start as attempts to redetermine truth by majority vote, but if once they grab hold of the tools of power, they prove to have little concern for the subtlety, complex honesty and necessary generosity of disposition needed to preserve a successful democracy (or any other form of *polis*, for that matter). Above all, ideologies are inherently totalitarian. They promise easy solutions to all problems if we will just reinvent ourselves according to their revisionary demands.

But ideologues lie. And artists cannot countenance lies. The lie of ideology, like all lies, costs too much and promises what it cannot deliver.

By contrast, nonideological thinking seeks to trace the contours of things as they are and to account for experience in all its vast complexity. Nonideological practices of community formation and guidance create steady, sustainable, transformative change as they encourage prudence, practice subsidiarity and cherish truth. Only where truth is valued and freedom is real can art flourish; as St. John Paul II said, "Truth and freedom either go together hand in hand or together they perish in misery."

An authentically Catholic approach to truth and freedom strengthens our vision and brings daylight into murky situations, where ideology offers smoke and mirrors—often in the form of occlusive, overheated verbiage.

The centuries-long, hard-won wholeness of vision offered by Catholic Christianity, made present in its art and its successful examples of common life, is anything but ideological. I would make the bold claim that Catholicity is instead the most faithful available description of reality. The reinvention, the transformation Christ offers our souls through his church is not human-made or bootstrapped, but rather God-given, graced.

Where our faith's boundaries block movement in the direction of the times we live in, this is because they pull us back in reality's direction in an unreal age. How could this not be true when God is the ground of all reality, the *most real* of all the realities we ever encounter, the ultimate source of every other experience we have that has anything at all good in it?

Pope Benedict XVI said that if what the church proposes is true, the evidence will be in her art and in her saints. How much are we doing to cultivate one or the other—or both at the same time?

Taking Sides

The "culture war" is over, and everyone has lost. We have lost the ability to know, understand and hear each other. We have lost a context where seeking common ground was considered common sense. What we have in its place now are twinned and monstrously doubled ideologies locked in

agonistic struggle. If not stopped, they will rage on until, like mythic dualist gods, they have destroyed each other and everything else—including us. And all we have to stop them with are the nonideological modes of thought, conduct and relationship that alone can restore a culture of life and a civilization of love.

We are going to have a hard time stopping them, and a hard time repairing the destruction they have already wrought, because both of the monstrous doubles have assiduously sought to swallow up good, true and beautiful influences that they now claim as their own sole property. Because all of the labels given to these monstrous doubles are now not only shopworn but vacuous, reducing our collective intelligence each time they are used, I am going to call these evil twins neo-Puritanism and neo-Nietzscheanism—but let's hold those terms lightly lest they distract from the central point.

Even the act of positing alternate terms, and the immediate shrinking reaction some readers will experience to those terms—"Wait, does that mean *my side*?!"—reveals much about the decayed state of language and conversation. Because for an ideologue, any suggestion that the ideology may not be perfect and can be described in ways it didn't envision is considered as evidence of insufficient conformity to its goals of upheaval and disruption. For the ideologue, anyone not sufficiently conformed must undergo struggle and renounce their recalcitrant (read: human) desires before they can be accepted into the Party and frog-marched into a "glorious" (read: dystopian) future.

In order to resist, rebuild and restore, we do not need to disengage from efforts to stay informed, to stay involved, to do what good we can in the secular realm. Very much the opposite: We cannot afford to renounce these efforts. And while it is true that no human city will be able to make possible the perfect fulfillment of every human potential, we must not make some cultural goods the enemies of others, or waste our vanishingly brief time arguing about whether the cultural goods I pursue are better or more worthy of attention than the ones you pursue.

Casting Out Into the Deep

If the perceptual ground on which I had built my belief in God and the church Christ founded were sourced from the reduced and flattened bitstream of internet commentary about God and the church, I would not still be a believer. My faith has its roots in encounters with God in Scripture, tradition and the Mass, but it has also been profoundly nourished by reading the work of authors who had also experienced direct encounters with grace and whose scale of humane values had been built in reference to those experiences.

The books I spend my time talking about were to me the fishing net that pulled me out of a sea of felt meaninglessness and into the realm of what Henry James calls "felt life." Fiction writers like Sigrid Undset, François Mauriac, Shusaku Endo and (yes) Flannery O'Connor, and in our own time Margaret Ogola, Jon Fosse, Alice McDermott, Edward P. Jones, Ron Hansen and Christopher Beha, among others, have successfully resisted the reductive pressures of their own cultural moments in order to cast out into the deep. What they have caught is me, and thousands of readers and would-be writers who are, like me, on fire to do what they did: to dispel the mist of lost illusions, to set out in search of lost souls, to get real.

The writers and curators who make up the fourth wave already know their business. To do it, they need only to ask God continually for new courage and fresh hope. To everyone who may be now concerned about the goods and the future of human culture, I issue a challenge: Let us do what we can to build a culture worth having—not only to preserve the goods (and leave behind the evils) found in its past, but also to renew and hand on whatever we have found good and worthy of keeping. In this spirit, may we swear off despair and take up our part of the hard but necessary work of restoration.

Katy Carl *is editor of Word on Fire Luminor and writer in residence at the University of St. Thomas–Houston. She is the author of* As Earth Without Water *and* Fragile Objects.

Wonder and Gratitude: The Faith and Fiction of Deborah Johnson

By John F. Feister

Deborah Johnson is not your typical Mississippi book author. For one thing, she is an African-American Catholic. There are few Catholics in most of Mississippi. For another, she came to Mississippi after living for 18 years in Italy, working part of that time at Vatican Radio. "This must be where I was supposed to go," this woman of faith says. Now in her 60s, it would be safe to call her one of a kind.

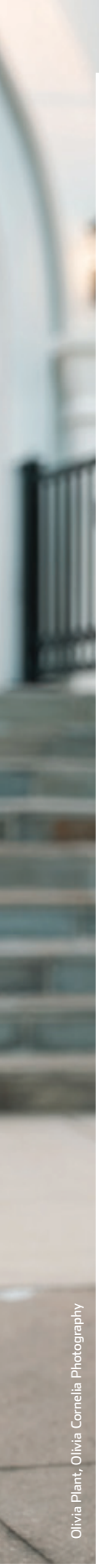
Her first novel, *The Air Between Us* (2008), about boyhood friends, Black and white, in Mississippi in the 1950s, was awarded the 2010 Mississippi Library Award for fiction. Her second, *The Secret of Magic* (2014), about the racist murder of a Mississippi Black soldier returning from World War II, was winner of the 2015 Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction, among other awards.

The final book in her Mississippi historical-fiction trilogy, her forthcoming *Washington and Leigh,* tells the story of exploited Black musicians in 1950s Mississippi (think of the mere $500 in royalties that Big Mama Thornton received for her recording of "Hound Dog," the song that later made Elvis Presley famous). If everything stays on schedule, it will be available for this coming spring release season (alongside the paperback reissue of *The Secret of Magic*).

In this trilogy, she explores the themes of Southern culture that sparked the civil rights movement and that in many ways remain destructive across the United States today. For example, *The Secret of Magic* is about the post-World War II South. "It is essentially about a murder of a Black person," Johnson explained in a phone interview with **America** in July. "We know who did it right away, but since the South was such an oligarchy at that time, the question becomes, 'Is the person who did it going to be brought to justice?'" It is actually inspired by the famous case of Isaac Woodard, who was taken off a bus in South Carolina and beaten blind by the police chief for arguing with the bus driver. Historians call the chief's acquittal by an all-white jury an awakening for President Harry Truman, who consequently desegregated the U.S. military.

Johnson's story is built around an assistant to Thurgood Marshall, who, before becoming a justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, was head of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Marshall's fictional assistant, Regina Robichard, is inspired by the real Constance Baker Motley, a young

Deborah Johnson outside Annunciation Church in Columbus, Miss.


Olivia Plant, Olivia Cornelia Photography

Black New York lawyer and an assistant to Marshall who became prominent in legal work for racial justice in the 1940s and '50s. She later served as a judge in New York City. In Johnson's story, Ms. Robichard comes to Mississippi to investigate the murder. There's a lot of polite-society veneer to cut through for Regina to investigate the case.

"This was the time when the NAACP Legal Defense Fund would put out a sign many times during the year, 'A man has been lynched today,'" said Johnson. The organization would learn details and publicize the cases to gain national attention and sympathy for the civil rights cause. In the novel, Robichard is looking for such a case.

A Different Time

It might be hard for younger readers to imagine that within the lifetime of older people today, public lynching, terrorist torture and the hanging of Black people and some others was a regular, unpunished occurance in the United States. But memories such as these are integral to Johnson's storytelling. Although she focuses on Mississippi, there were recorded lynchings in all but seven states, including her state of origin.

Deborah Johnson was born south of the Mason-Dixon line, she likes to say, in Joplin, Mo., but was raised further north, in Omaha, Neb. She is one of five siblings, four girls and one boy. "Daddy went to medical school at Creighton, so that's where we moved, and that's where we stayed," she told me. As a child in the 1930s, he had been hospitalized with rheumatic fever and placed in isolation because he was considered contagious.

Deborah Johnson the storyteller told me the family story:

> His mother couldn't come in. She would look at him through the window, which had chicken wire. But they discovered that at the age of 3, Daddy could read. There was a doctor who came in every night and would just sit with him and just talk about his day and stuff like that. He was the only person besides nurses who could come, and he'd bring in Little Golden Books too. And because of that, Daddy decided that he wanted to be a doctor. Now he was born on a dirt floor, so that was essentially the equivalent of saying that he wanted to walk on the moon.

Eventually, he and Creighton University made it happen. He completed his degree in 1955 and went on to be a pioneering doctor and surgeon, with a deep commitment to community service. He became Catholic as a young man; later he served as a deacon at his parish. "Our family wasn't Catholic before Daddy, but he was ardent," Johnson said. She and her siblings are cradle Catholics.

About her mother, she said, "Back then, women weren't supposed to work. So she was a housewife. She would've been much better working." She added, laughing, "I'm doing a book about that, too!"

Johnson attended Duchesne Academy in Omaha. "A fabulous school, run by the Religious of the Sacred Heart," she said. "My sisters and I integrated the school. We were the first Black students. But I never felt isolated or unwelcome."

"'You have a talent for history,'" she recalled Mother Margaret Mary Miller telling her. "'You could probably never be a scholar, but you can tell a story.' She was one of the first to encourage me to be a writer, along with my mother."

That idea, she said, "was beyond what my father could imagine. He wanted me to be a doctor. We were a medical family." But there was an impediment: "Let me say that I had no talent whatsoever in science or math."

More seriously, though, she adds, "My parents were both very supportive. It's just that, for African Americans, in that class that pulled themselves up, education was the acme of achievement. They both were very, very focused on education. I can say that! We all went to Catholic schools. My brother went to Creighton Prep, too. My father was devoted to the Jesuits."

"There were very few Black Catholics in Omaha. So we were socially mobile. However, my daddy was the kind of doctor who—I remember him crying over lost patients. And he was very, very involved in the community. There were little parks named after him."

A Sojourn in Rome

Fast forward. Johnson married and moved to San Francisco, where she and her husband eventually had one son. Her marriage ended there after 13 years with an "amiable divorce," she said.

She had always wanted to go to Rome, and this was her opportunity. "We were brought up with the idea of Rome; the Religious of the Sacred Heart had their motherhouse there on Trinità dei Monti. I wanted to see it," she told me.

Her young son came along for what she thought would be a year. "I liked it so much that I ended up staying for 18 years." Perhaps hearing a muse within, Johnson wanted to study Latin. She wound up in the Latin classes of the famous Carmelite friar Reginald Foster. "I snuck in," Johnson said. (Father Reginald, world-renowned Latinist for four popes and countless other Ro-

‘I’m a walking miracle,’ Johnson says. ‘So many times, I’ve seen that God gave me a big helping hand.’

man church figures, let nonpaying students into his classes—he used to say he wanted serious students.) Rubbing shoulders with so many clerics there, she found freelance work copy-editing doctoral theses for graduate students for whom English was a second language.

“I was in a really good prayer group, and—it’s a God thing—one of the women in it was in charge of English-speaking Africa at Vatican Radio,” she said. “She asked me: Did I want to come to work there? And I did!”

“Aside from the BBC, Vatican Radio was the most listened-to radio of any sort of media in English-speaking Africa,” she recalled. “It went into the bush, everywhere. If the radio took up a subject, we could see changes in it as we were reporting on it.”

She offered the example of child soldiers, which Vatican Radio covered extensively. “When we started talking about child soldiers in Uganda, it started bringing more attention to the subject everywhere. We could see that the atmosphere change. We saw this with women’s health, a lot of different things. You could actually see that there were benefits from what you were doing.” Clearly she relished the work.

Her job was to watch the media for stories and develop them for Vatican Radio’s audience. “I would put together stories, occasionally reading them on the air. I did a lot of youth programs,” she recalled. “It was interesting work. I met all kinds of people, and it was right down from St. Peter’s Basilica. It was kind of a magical experience.”

What was her best story? “My masterpiece, for which I deserve an Academy Award, I do believe, was the piece I did for the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.”

She also tried her hand at writing historical romance novels set in Italy during the Hundred Years’ War, and actually wrote a few. You won’t hear her talking about the Rev. Andrew Greeley’s “sacramental imagination,” though; she just writes with it, and lives it.

Finding Her Voice

In 2002, Johnson decided to return to the United States. Her son was in college, at Princeton; she would find her voice at home writing stories around injustice among her own people. But she needed a job, too. She became director of the Colom Foundation, in Columbus, Miss., a small foundation that supports literacy and other human development programs. She devoted early mornings to writing novels.

You learn something of her curiosity and faith when she explains how she got to Columbus, in the heart of Mississippi. “By that point in my life, I was so used to doing strange things that I said, ‘OK, this must be where I’m supposed to go.’” She looked at the map and saw the similarly named Columbia, Miss., about two hours from New Orleans. “Then, maybe a week before, when I found out that I wasn’t going to go near New Orleans, but up near Birmingham, it took my breath away. We all know Birmingham from the ’60s. But I came anyway. And here I am.”

The alluvial soil of the Pearl Valley turned out to be fertile ground for this writer. But why fiction? “It works because I like to tell stories. And I love to listen to stories. And this has been true my whole life. Even in Mississippi. Most of the stories that I tell are connected to stories that people told me, especially in *The Air Between Us*,” she said.

Her next novel after *Washington and Leigh* will focus on something closer to home: “It is actually talking about being a Black Catholic.” She’s developing the plot now—and keeping it to herself. “Get your first draft together before you start talking to too many people about it. Everyone will have an opinion!”

She has blossomed in the post-50 stage of her life, not only as a novelist but now also as a faculty member in Stanford University’s online Continuing Studies program. “I like being able to inspire people,” she says of her teaching work. “I like to be able to tell people they can do this. A lot of times people don’t get the support that I got from my family—and from the nuns at my school.”

And once again she is back to talking about Catholicism, which for her is more like the adage about good writing: Show, don’t tell. She came from a Catholic family, attended Catholic schools, became enamored of her Catholic faith, now worships at a parish where she appreciates the pastor, and has an abiding sense that being Catholic is a driving part of her identity.

“I’m a walking miracle,” she says. “So many times, I’ve seen that God gave me a big helping hand. Every day when I wake up it’s with a sense of wonder. And gratitude.”

John F. Feister *is a longtime journalist in national Catholic media. He is co-author, with Charlene Smith, of* Thea’s Song: The Life of Thea Bowman.

MAGDALENE: BEFORE

By Rachel Lott

God is always previous. Before
the serpent in the garden or the bite
my mother took to damn my unborn soul—
before my father's foolishness and flight,
before the curse and coats of skins and all—
God meditated thus within his heart.

God is always previous. Indeed,
they say we are his children. So. Then why,
why sow his seed where it will surely spoil?
A father's matter and a mother's mud:
deep roots decaying in unhallowed soil!

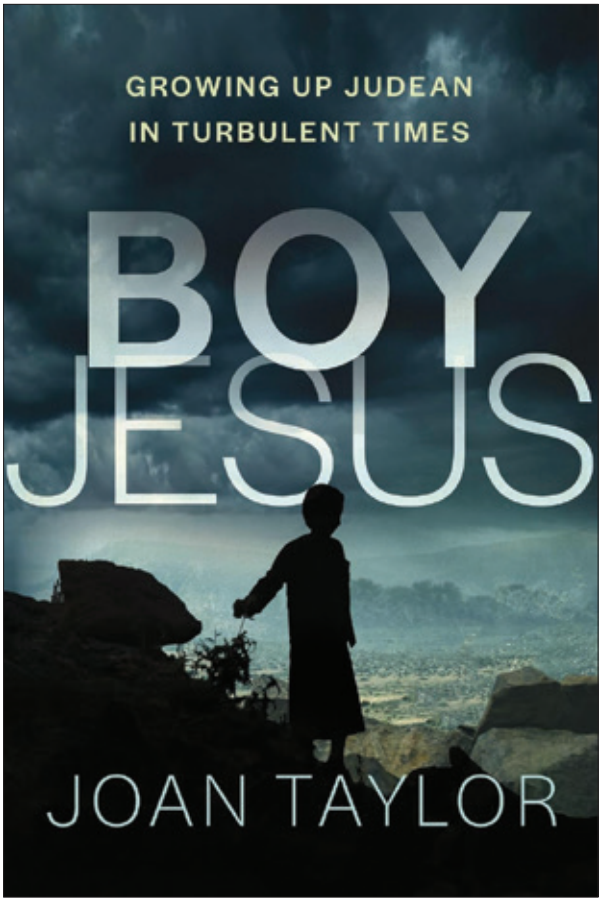
God is always previous. Before
I came to birth, my seed was in decay.
The shootling sprang, the leaves were thin and ill,
the blighted blossoms chilled and fell away.
The stem put forth a single withered flower,
and of my fruit—who can deny but say
its scent is bitter and its taste is sour?

God is always previous. Before
a tomb I stood and raised the deathly cry.
And from the mud and from the thistled earth
the hyssop sprang. The early morning sky
begot a dew upon the grudging ground.
The rocks sang out. A gardener passed by
and said "Whom do you seek?"
The world around
turned over on its old decaying crust
and he—since He was previous—drew nigh
and caught me as I fell into the dust.

———

Rachel Lott's *poems and translations have appeared in First Things, Christian Century and Classical Outlook. Her book of translations,* The Sorcerers' Stone: Alchemical Poems by Angelus Silesius, *was published in 2022.*

THE YOUNGER YEARS



Zondervan Academic / 368p $30

Over the past 40 years, I've tried to read as much as I can on the topic of the historical Jesus, the study of the life and times of the man known as Jesus of Nazareth. This branch of scholarship is usually distinguished from reflections on the Christ of faith—that is, theological inquiry and meditations on the one who rose from the dead and who is present to us today through the Holy Spirit.

Of course, they are one and the same. Jesus did not die and then rise as a new person. As Stanley Marrow, S.J., wrote in his commentary on the Gospel of John, for Jesus to rise as anyone other than the man whom the disciples knew would "void the resurrection of all its meaning."

Over the years, as a nonscholar and nonacademic, I've plowed through fine books by the Rev. John Meier, Amy-Jill Levine, Jonathan Reed, John Dominic Crossan, Paula Frederickson, Ben Witherington III and other New Testament scholars, theologians, archeologists and historians to try to understand as much about Jesus of Nazareth as I can. And I'm always surprised by Christians who downplay, ignore or even dismiss these studies, saying, in essence, what really matters is belief in Jesus now.

That is certainly true: Belief in the risen Christ matters. But the more we understand about the man who walked the dusty roads of first-century Judea and Galilee, the more we can understand about the one who is present to us through the Spirit.

So I opened Joan Taylor's *Boy Jesus* with great anticipation—and I am happy to say I was not let down. Her new book is a model of careful scholarship that relies on old sources but breaks new ground. It is, in some places, riveting. (The book's title may be jarring to American ears; we might have preferred *Jesus as a Boy* or *The Boy Jesus.* It seems to be a Britishism, like the name of the amusing character Boy Mulcaster from Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited.*)

Boy Jesus focuses on the incidents in the Gospel narratives relating to Jesus' younger years, from the Annunciation to the finding in the Temple at age 12. But even before Taylor considers Mary and Joseph, she begins by describing the *mise-en-scène*, or as German scholars would say, the *Sitz im Leben*, the "setting in life." This means a discussion of Jesus as a Jew (his religious background, broadly speaking), a Judahite (coming from a certain ethnic group, homeland or *patria*) and a Judean (from the geographic region of Judea). The three terms are often used interchangeably—and incorrectly. This is one reason why so many scholars tear out their hair (or rend their garments) when preachers substitute "the Judeans" for "the Jews" while proclaiming the Gospels, in an otherwise laudable effort to avoid giving offense.

Taylor also advances a fascinating if unorthodox reading of the virgin birth. She suggests that people of the time who called Jesus "Son of David" might have read the story of the Annunciation very differently from the standard interpretation today—while still leaving room for the miraculous. It was Joseph's "seed" that was implanted in Mary, so that Jesus could rightfully be called David's heir. Taylor writes, "All in all, then, Matthew's conception and birth of Jesus can well be read as indicating that Joseph is the actual father of Jesus, whose seed (of David) was miraculously implanted in Mary's womb from the action of the Holy Spirit of God."

One of the themes of this rich book is that some of the Gospel narratives concerning Jesus' birth and childhood that even reputable scholars sometimes label as ahistorical have more basis in history than we may initially think. As one example, Taylor examines the story of the Massacre of the Innocents and the flight into Egypt, both of which are often thought of as embellishments, if not constructed from whole cloth. She convincingly situates the story

within the historically based reports of King Herod's acts of "great cruelty towards those he considered disloyal." Herod murdered his own sons and "had few qualms about killing anyone else's," she writes. Taylor repeats Augustus Caesar's quip, "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son."

Moreover, she notes, these ruthless actions by Herod would have been widely known, something that the Jewish historian Josephus confirms. "The story of Herod is therefore the story of current events as they would have affected Jesus's family," she writes. And with Egypt "long a place of refuge and settlement for Judeans," is it so hard to believe that Joseph might at some point, out of fear of the murderous Herod, move his family into that part of the world, and become a refugee? There was even a large Jewish community in Alexandria at the time. "Fleeing to Egypt to avoid danger was a reasonable idea," Taylor suggests, "and Joseph was probably not the only man in Judaea who decided on this path."

Another surprise, at least for me, was reading about the town of Sepphoris, a short distance from Nazareth. Most books will tell you that the large town (known by the Roman name Autokratoris) had been destroyed after a rebellion was crushed by Varus, the Roman legate to Syria, which included the murder and enslavement of much of its populace. Afterward, Herod set about to rebuild the city into what later became known as the "ornament of all Galilee," around the time of Jesus' young adulthood.

It seemed likely to many scholars (and to me, something I mentioned in my book *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*) that Jesus the *tekton* (carpenter) perhaps along with Joseph (if he was still alive) would have traveled there to seek work. The Greek theater at Sepphoris, some have suggested, might even have been a place frequented by Jesus. After all, he freely uses the Greek term *hypocrite*, which comes from theater.

But Taylor reminds us that the destruction of Sepphoris would have been a horror for the young Jesus:

> From the hills above Nazareth, the whole horror could have been watched. Loud noises would have carried. The smoke from burning buildings would have been seen, and smelt. The inhabitants of Nazareth would have known that the Roman army was inflicting terrible things on the nearby city. Some inhabitants would have managed to escape to tell the tale.

Sepphoris, then, far from being a place of possible employment, was probably a place that Jesus avoided. It is unlikely, says Taylor, that any "Son of David" would have "wished to be involved in construction work for the Roman client ruler Herod Antipas, 'that fox,'" as Jesus described him.

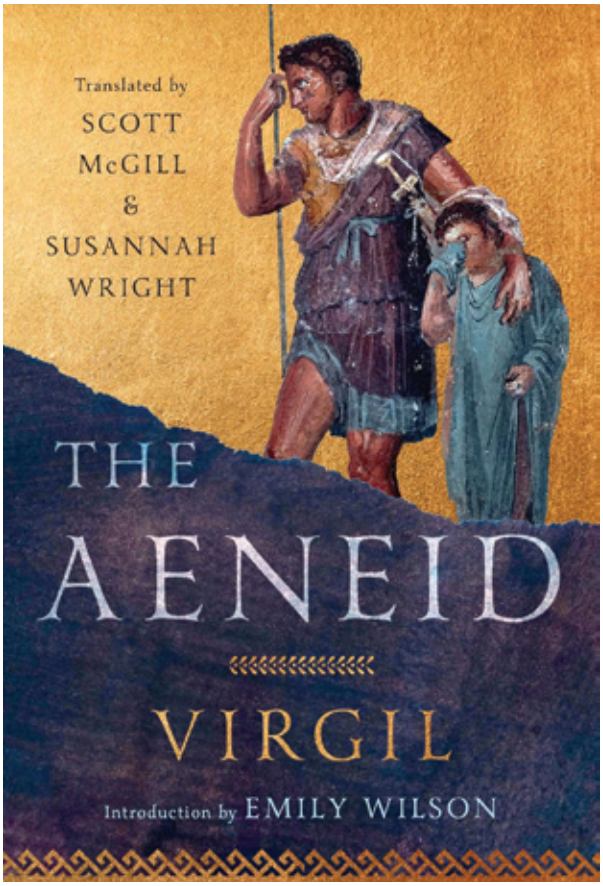
Taylor situates Jesus not only in his time, but in his violent times.

This is one of Taylor's most important contributions to literature on the historical Jesus, situating him not only in his time, but in his violent times. She argues that given the political climate, the persecution of the populace (who, as a result, sometimes constructed hiding places in their homes), the bloodthirsty rulers and the ruthless putting down of insurrections (not to mention the widespread poverty), Jesus' early life might have been marked with trauma.

Taylor's fine book is in places quite dense, but for Bible nerds and historical Jesus nerds like myself, that density was comforting. All the Greek and Hebrew words, all the quotes from Josephus (and extracanonical Gospels and writings) and all the maps (many of them drawn by Taylor herself) make for a reliable study. And toward the end of her book, somewhat akin to what both John Meier does in the first volume of *A Marginal Jew* and what Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., does in her book on Mary, *Truly Our Sister*, Taylor offers a lovely precis of what Jesus' daily life in Nazareth would have been like, in a chapter called "Growing Up Jesus."

As a nonacademic, I will go out on a limb and say that *Boy Jesus* is a significant contribution to the study of the historical Jesus. As a Bible nerd, I will say it was an engrossing, even fun read. Finally, as a believer, I will say that it was in many places consoling and moved me to prayer, as I came to know the Son of David even more deeply.

James Martin, S.J., *is editor at large at* ***America*** *and the author of* Jesus: A Pilgrimage.



Liveright / 512p $40

"I will be the first, should my life continue, to lead the Muses back with me to my homeland from the Aonian summit." So boasts Virgil in his "Georgics," claiming his prize as the poet who will adopt, adapt and surpass the achievements of his Greek predecessors—a claim to fame that has inspired generations of authors to stake their literary turf: *primus ego*, "I before all." But such authorial status is hard for anyone to claim, much less for a translator of the "Aeneid," the masterpiece that Virgil heralds in the line above—a poem published in 19 B.C.E. and continuously reread and rewritten since then—a true instant classic. What more can be said?

In their compelling new translation of the "Aeneid," Scott McGill and Susannah Wright offer a dynamic, poignant and thought-provoking take on this classic poem. They address the question of novelty head-on in their translators' note, citing no less than 11 other contemporary translations. According to the authors, the distinctive features of their version are its metrical awareness, the style of its diction and, perhaps most important, its collaborative origin. This work is the product of six years of sustained conversation between McGill, Wright and Virgil.

The great gift of the "Aeneid" is its power to create meaning-making resonance between Rome's past and future, and to bring the present urgency of the historical past to readers across time and space. It does so in a surprisingly sympathetic fashion, representing not only its protagonists—Aeneas and his Trojans—but their opponents with great nuance.

As McGill and Wright remark: "Although on one level the *Aeneid* celebrates Roman power and its imperial mission, the greatness of the poem lies in its ability to counterbalance this with a prominent other voice that sympathizes with the victims of power and registers the costs of conquest to victor and vanquished alike." As they convey Virgil's delicate balance of epic achievement and human consequence, McGill and Wright aim "to bring [Aeneas's] brand of melancholy heroism to vivid life.... Our hope is that not only Aeneas, but also the other characters, major and minor, feel real."

Their self-awareness is visible and invigorating, recreating a distinctly Virgilian connection between textual and linguistic minutiae and the larger themes of empire, justice and humanity. In their note, the translators spend much time unpacking their thought processes about how to render Virgil's hexameter verses and the perennial question of scale. Latin's concise and flexible syntax almost inevitably expands when translated into English, so Book 1's 756 Latin lines become, variously, 907 lines (McGill and Wright), 1,053 (Mandelbaum) and 908 (Fagles) in different translations. McGill and Wright adhere to a precise scale, adding a sixth line to every five of Virgil's Latin. In terms of meter, they have chosen unrhymed iambic pentameter (more commonly known as blank verse) to capture Virgil's rhythm and elevated tone.

This structural ethos informs one of my favorite aspects of this translation—namely, the authors' consistent efforts to capture the wordplay built into Virgil's Latin verse: sound effects such as alliteration and assonance; verbal patterning (for instance, chiasmus, an ABBA pattern, or interlocked order, ABAB); and polysyllabic or truncated lines. Virgil's poetry is a master class in the meaningful integration of such stylistic features that are normally (and necessarily!) lost in translation into English, which—unlike Latin—offers minimal flexibility in word order.

The authors' labor here is truly Herculean, and the results well worth their effort. An example from Book 6 will show how effective this commitment to style is.

As Aeneas traverses the underworld, he comes upon his deceased father, Anchises, surveying his future descendants:

omnemque suorum
forte recensebat numerum, carosque nepotes
fataque fortunasque uirum moresque manusque.
(6.681-2)

By chance, he was surveying his own people—
his dead descendants and their destinies,
their ways and works, the things they would achieve.
(6.816-18)

With "dead descendants...destinies" and "ways and works," McGill and Wright beautifully replicate Virgil's alliteration of "f" and "m." Likewise, they substitute asyndeton (a lack of conjunctions) for Virgil's polysyndeton (overuse of conjunctions), recreating the abundance of the line through a comparable device. Walking, as they put it, "a tightrope between foreignizing and domesticating translation," these translators largely succeed in representing Virgil's verbal artistry in both arrangement and tone.

One of the most famous passages in the "Aeneid" well illustrates McGill and Wright's distinctive focus on poetic style. In Book 8, Aeneas's mother, the goddess Venus, gives him a wondrous set of arms forged by her husband, Vulcan, for his forthcoming battle against the Italians. The shield contains scenes not only of Rome's past, but of its Augustan present—both, in a strange chronological leap, still in the distant future from Aeneas's perspective. At the very center is the Battle of Actium—Augustus's final showdown against the Roman general Mark Antony and Cleopatra, the last Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt.

The significance of this passage is hard to overstate. Facing the monumental task of rewriting Augustus' victory in civil war as a story of triumph over barbarian enemies, the writers of this period—Virgil, Horace, Propertius—portray the battle as a cosmic showdown between East and West. Virgil's iteration, presented on the shield, verbally and visually structures the opposition between these two ancient superpowers (bold type my addition):

hinc *Augustus agens Italos in proelia Caesar*
cum patribus populoque, penatibus et magnis dis...
hinc *ope barbarica uariisque Antonius armis,*
uictor ab Aurorae populis et litore rubro... (8.678-9, 685-6)

These lines set at odds the two principal combatants: Caesar (the future Augustus) and his erstwhile brother-in-law, Mark Antony. Virgil's strong spatial markers *hinc... hinc* ("on this side...on that") indicate not only the antagonists' positions on the field of war but also on the surface of the shield and, further, in the political landscape of Virgil and his audience. Art imitates life while at the same time recreating recent history as future prophecy within the timescape of the "Aeneid."

To say nothing of the scene's political significance, the sheer number of this scene's representational layers present an intimidating challenge to translation. McGill and Wright render these lines as follows:

Augustus Caesar, leading the Italians,
was sailing with the Senate and the people,
their household gods and great divinities...
Antony ***faced them****, fresh from victory*
and bearing foreign wealth and varied arms
from the Red Sea and nations of the Dawn.

Eschewing spatial indicators, the translation instead emphasizes the prominence of the two leaders and the nationalities of their troops. By way of comparison, the 2021 translation by Shadi Bartsch offers this:

Here *Augustus Caesar led all Italy*
to war: the Senate, people, gods of sky and hearth...
Antony ***was opposite****, with Asian wealth*
and hodgepodge troops, victor over Eastern hordes
and the Red Sea.

And the 2006 translation by Robert Fagles:

On one flank*, Caesar Augustus leading Italy into battle,*
the Senate and People too, the gods of hearth and home
and the great gods themselves...
And opposing them *comes Antony leading on*
the riches of the Orient, troops of every stripe—
victor over the nations of the Dawn and blood-red shores...

Set side by side, these versions show the depth of interpretation built into the act of translation. Like Fagles, McGill and Wright prioritize Virgil's syntactical emphasis, placing names and titles at the beginning and end of lines. Bartsch's version is compressed, focusing on the opposition of ethnicity and individuality. McGill and Wright perhaps come closest to the letter of the Latin, but it is up to the reader to assess what degree of moral judgment is built into terms like "barbarian," "Eastern" and more, and whether, therefore, Bartsch or Fagles may be truer to Virgil's intent.

Even the phrase *litore rubro* takes on a very different nuance when translated (as in Fagles) as "blood-red shores" (its literal meaning) rather than "Red Sea" (its vernacular meaning).

By allowing readers to make up their own minds, rather than have them shaped by a markedly pro- or anti-Augustan translation, McGill and Wright offer invaluable opportunities for reflection, close reading and productive discussion.

Likewise, their commentary is thorough, instructive

and particularly strong on the cultural intricacies of Virgil's poem. Each book receives a brief summary, followed by (on average) two to four pages of line notes that explain names, etymologies, historical and mythological references, geography (places, but also phrases like "to the Ocean" in terms of ancient geographical theory), and key concepts (Golden Age, Gates of War, Penates). The authors helpfully gloss terminology alongside discussion of the text: At lines 1.181-7, for instance, they explain an epic simile before explaining the unique features of this particular example. This sort of explication gives the reader not just information about the "Aeneid," but also the tools to read epic in general.

McGill and Wright's ancillary materials are equally helpful. The commentary is preceded by a table of the gods, including Greek and Roman names along with their main epithets (Roman names are used by default) and a list of alternate terms for Trojans, Greeks, Italy and more; it is followed by genealogical tables and a glossary with a pronunciation guide.

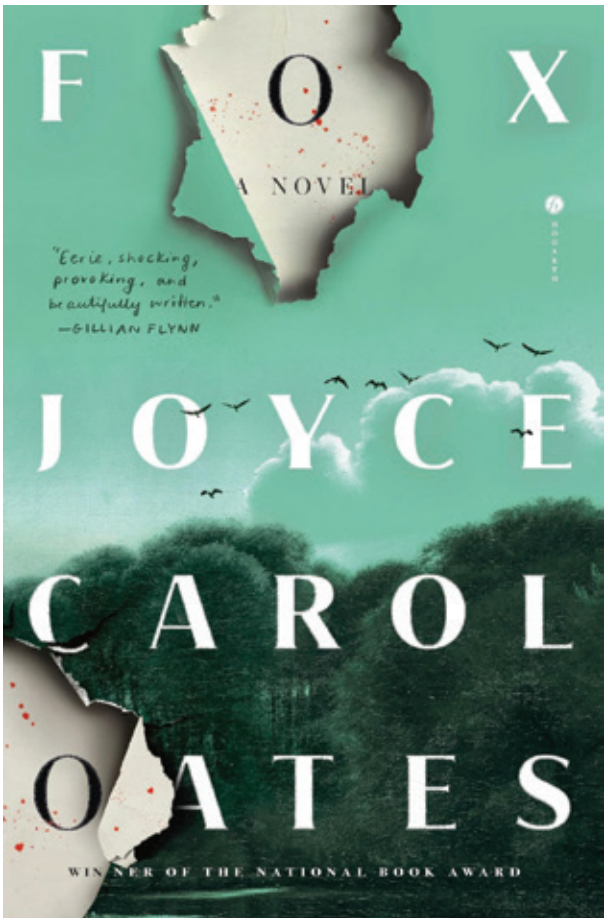
Emily Wilson's introduction is a tour de force in its own right, situating Virgil's masterpiece not only in its historical context and literary tradition, but also in its full resonances for modern readers. Tackling the question of the origins of the "Aeneid" as a product of imperial sponsorship, she traces Virgil's lived experiences of civil war to the questions his epic explores, showing how Aeneas's mythological distance "allows Virgil to explore the profound theme of how history is shaped by ordinary people, making choices whose consequences they do not and cannot understand."

Wilson offers the reader a thorough discussion of Virgil's use of Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey," showing how his intertextual style enables the construction of layers of meaning. Over and over again, Virgil uses these well-known stories to offer possible pathways down which his own poem and characters might travel. Most compellingly, Wilson expands on "perhaps the most provocative element of Virgil's epic: the startling juxtaposition of poetic myth with the specifics of recent history and contemporary events" to extend this resonance to contemporary issues of immigration, the impact of rumor, environmental disasters, war, poverty, displacement and more.

Coupled with McGill and Wright's translation, Wilson's introduction succeeds in showing us that "Virgil's great poem makes us feel the tears of things, reopening the fiery wounds of history and igniting our hearts with the traces of forgotten flames."

Jessica Blum-Sorensen *is an assistant professor of classics at Providence College. Her research focuses on imperial Latin poetry and the epic tradition.*

AN ABSENT TEACHER



Hogarth Press / 672p $32

At close to 700 pages, Joyce Carol Oates's new novel *Fox* can seem like a task, meant to be considered at a deliberate pace over weeks. When I finally closed the book at 3:40 a.m. on a Saturday, breathless and tired, I felt almost as if I had been running for days.

Reviews of the novel have repeatedly mentioned its use of suspense. Oates is well versed in furor, in getting blood rushing through your ears while you're just reading about an interview, an appointment or a hallway conversation.

The book's setup is simple enough: The prestigious Langhorne Academy hires Francis Fox as their new English teacher for seventh and eighth grades. He quickly wins over the administration and commands an enthusiastic following among the students. When he is mysteriously absent, questions arise, panic sets in, and the sleepy New Jersey town of Wieland is rocked.

What might be tersely summarized in a news report as the "collective mourning" in the aftermath of tragedy is, for Oates, a chance to limn a New Jersey community that should be familiar to those living in nondescript, relatively affluent suburbs.

The whodunit suspense in *Fox* emerges as readers make the same evaluations of character that they see the cast making. New information about each character is always around the corner, making the mere reading of the book a notably political exercise. Oates hits on all the big buzzwords of the contemporary culture: Fox's inward contempt of *feminists* and outward decrial of *pornography*; Fox's status in the eyes of the hiring committee as a *white male*. Her liberal use of italics manifests the significance of connotation to the story. Social life, especially among those with *appearances* to keep, rests on inference, on mutual understanding, on tradition, on suggestion. In other words, ignorance and pride. Throughout the novel, people repeatedly ask some version of "Did you hear about that? How awful."

Dialogue rarely flows in the novel; comments from characters are interspersed with reflective asides, impulsive condemnations or cautious hypotheses. The pace is sometimes ponderous—Oates likes to show her characters thinking, judging and feeling. It is a third-person narrative but with a heavy dose of indirect discourse, especially disquieting as the intractable divides between characters are accented later in the book. Watching the characters process each other and their circumstances is more than enough to keep a reader enthralled. Scenes unfold and are later replayed from a different perspective.

The initial meeting between the town's detective, H. Zwender, and the local prep school headmistress, P. Cady, is tense—precisely because Cady evaluates Zwender as a *local*, a "brute among brutes," and Zwender, upon revisiting his first impression, resents being treated "like a tradesman or deliveryman" but thinks of her as an "innocent fool."

Oates takes care to build out the community around the prep school. She portrays the interactions between Langhorne and the community, in fact, far more than the internal dynamics of the school itself. Some of the drama takes place on school property, but it is all correlated directly to Francis Fox: the meek librarian's quiet pining for him, the students' adoration, the administration's acceptance. Everyone has their own reasons for liking him; he caters to all.

Fox's students love him; they would *die* for him. Langhorne parents explain away their daughters' rapid weight loss and emotional distress with an adage—*You know how girls are*. Adult ignorance is born from conventional wisdom. Conversely, masculinity in particular confers *authority*; one Langhorne mother insists Fox "wasn't like that...he was a gentleman." Fox can be the English teacher everyone wants him to be, and no one will think otherwise. How could they?

Fox loathes *Lolita*. He finds the book "*pornographic*" and "*indefensible*," all the while bloviating to Langhorne's young librarian, Ms. Hood, about Nabokov being gay. The young librarian defers to Fox's "*Moral core*. A kind of old-style, intrepid manliness rarely seen today." *Fox* the novel is clearly in oblique dialogue with *Lolita* (as Fox is with his fellow teacher, Quilty). That said, while Nabokov invites one to read, interpret and then question reading and interpretation, Oates prefers to exhibit Fox's posturing and have the reader re-examine interpersonal interpretations they might have already made. Oates, who taught at Princeton for nearly four decades, wrote *Fox* having waded through male-dominated academic circles for a long while.

Oates limns a New Jersey community that should be familiar to those living in nondescript, relatively affluent suburbs.

The arc of all the characters in *Fox* is credible, even that of Fox; it's a great credit to the book. Fox might seem to carry an unnatural sway, but attentive readers witness the particulate elements of manipulation. Good old American manipulation, but perhaps with some flair. Cryptic verse in italics appears throughout the book, and Fox's web of trite literary references insulates him perfectly. He lures students in with heady, romantic quotations from Poe and Yeats. Fox readies for his classes "like one preparing for a fight which, he has no doubt, he will win." He smiles, wears tweed and has "sandy hair."

He's the consummate English teacher because people in Wieland agree he sorta seems like one. He fits arbitrary expectations, archetypes that were decided long before him and that will outlive him. Zwender, reflecting on Fox, decides that "*charisma* is just another word for *bullsh-t*."

We all perhaps have had the feeling of having our perception of a person, perhaps a public figure, completely upended by scandal. In this case, Fox's acts of abuse are established quite early; how the town deals with it, and what exactly they know, is quite another matter. *Fox* consistently takes on those dinner-table appraisals of people, a hallmark of human society, and shows just how flimsy they can be. The book does not necessarily moralize against such judgments—they are inevitable in social beings—but plays on the tensions these judgments introduce to daily life. They can even be fun, as when Headmistress Cady muses to herself: "Why do men wear *rings*?" When the stakes are highest, you realize just how similar life is to a middle school classroom.

In an age defined by snatches of information and snap judgments about people's personal lives shared widely online, Oates does well to get beyond a headline and paint a nuanced picture of each character. Everyone has quirks, flaws and pathologies; no one quite lives up to their reputation. Reputation itself is a collection of microscopic assumptions about a person's traits or nature, made by people with biases and kinks in their own natures. Those who had harbored private suspicions of Fox from the beginning are vindicated, but does that necessarily justify their intuition? What is the essence of an abuser?

Investigative journalism in the past two decades about the sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church has typically featured reporting about cover-ups, all the way up to the Vatican. For church institutions, it seems that the practice of reassigning abusive priests relied on people's intuitions—people assumed the offending priest was "not that kind of man." You can't really blame people for having positive opinions of those who are kind to them (if they don't know any better), but that is precisely how abusers get away with it. Information lags, and people go on what they have.

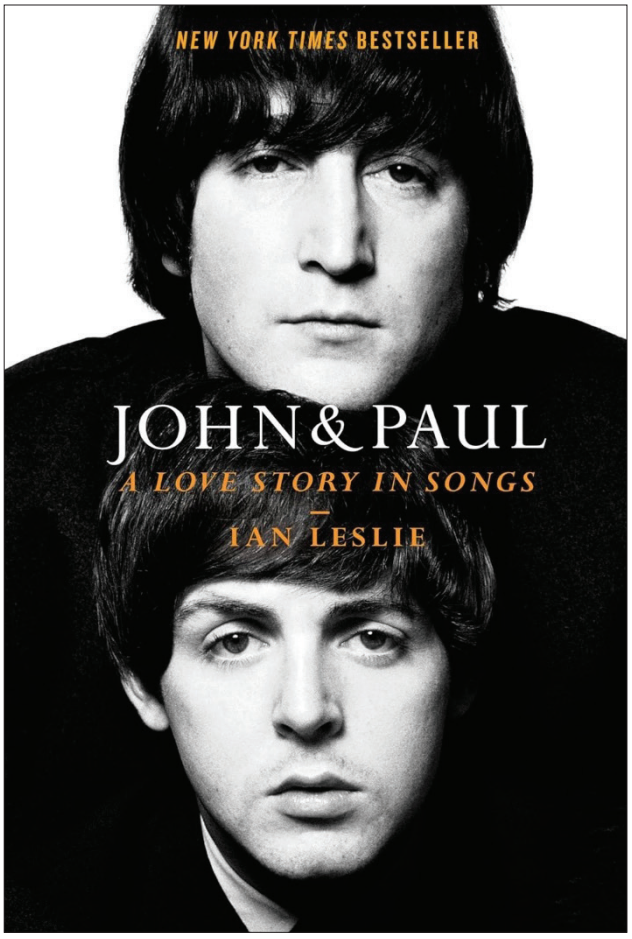
Christianity figures into the novel: Oates is herself an ex-Catholic. For better or worse, her suburban American portrait would not be complete without religion, and the particular brands of Christianity in the story add to the accuracy of the novel as a picture of America. Detective Zwender's assistant, Odom, is a devout Christian. As the investigation of Fox's disappearance goes on, revelations of the extent of his abuse are grim, and Odom's strict piety starts to slip. The whole town is slipping, and Langhorne has slipped up as well.

In a striking moment near the end, Zwender and Odom are in a particularly tense interview with a person of interest to the investigation. As Zwender continues his questions, Odom breaks procedure and offers to pray with the suspect, to "Ask Jesus the best way forward." In the suspect's mind, Christ is a comforter rather than a judge, whose way is "not to lead but to allow you to *feel what must be done*."

A contemplative note rings clearly through the thrills of the book, and *Fox* makes readers examine and re-examine their intuition. In a time when people prefer internet-led snap judgments, it is critical to wonder how and why we make them. The novel offers a perfect counterpoint to contemporary reasoning—an alternative to all that is hasty, sweeping and solitary.

William Lee *is a student at Fordham University and a former intern at* ***America.***

A TALE OF TWO SOULS



Celadon Books / 448p $32

Francis and Clare. Ignatius and Xavier. Felicitas and Perpetua. Some saints we know better because of their friends. The same is true for John and Paul.

Ian Leslie's new book looks at two "extraordinarily gifted young men," John Lennon and Paul McCartney, and what happened when they met as teenagers. Their decades-long conversation played out in songs we all know by heart. Leslie takes a long, deep look at their relationship, which began when Paul was only 15 and ended just 23 years later with John's shocking death.

It was a friendship first, of course—John the slightly older, cooler one, who recruited Paul for his band. They spent so much time together that they developed their own language. George was part of the picture too, and Ringo came a little later, but John and Paul shared a connection that set them apart from the others.

Sometimes, when they sang or when they were just hanging out, they stared into each other's eyes. What were they looking for? For John, it was surely something he missed out on as a child. His mother was emotionally distant, his father not around. Paul's mother died when

he was just 14, a year before he and John met. They found something in each other. They were more than mates; they were soulmates.

Even after the Beatles broke up and John and Paul lived an ocean apart, they seemed to circle each other "like entangled particles," Leslie writes. Consider, for a moment, that in 1969 John and Yoko Ono got married just eight days after Paul and Linda Eastman.

"[W]e have trouble thinking about intimate male friendships," Leslie writes. "We're used to the idea of men being good friends, or fierce competitors, or sometimes both. We're used to the idea, these days, of homosexual love. We're thrown by a relationship that isn't sexual but is romantic: a friendship that may have had an erotic or physical component to it, but doesn't involve sex."

John and Paul were friends, yes—competitors, too. John may have even been attracted to Paul. But their connection was more profound than any single word can describe. And as proof, we have their songs.

Leslie surveys 43 songs from the Lennon-McCartney catalogue. He begins with "Come Go With Me," a song Paul first heard John play with the Quarrymen in 1957, and ends with "Here Today," one of the first songs Paul wrote after John's death. He alternates between John songs and Paul songs, so "Strawberry Fields Forever" (John) segues into "Penny Lane" (Paul), the two sides of the same 45, released in February 1967. Both songs "show us Liverpool from the perspective of altered minds," Leslie writes in a typically astute bit of analysis. "While 'Strawberry Fields Forever' takes us down into the netherworld of the unconscious, 'Penny Lane' takes us up into the sky, from where we swoop into the world below."

The chapter on "Hey Jude" dives deeper. Written by Paul, the song is addressed to John's son, Julian (Jules became Jude), following his father and mother's divorce. But it is also, Leslie notes, directed at John, making it one of the few pop songs about a close male friendship. The line "You're waiting for someone to perform with," for example, is about "how any of us wait for the person who makes us feel more alive," Leslie writes. For Paul, obviously, that was John, and with "Hey Jude" he found a way to talk to him in a heartfelt way without sounding "corny and contrived." This is something that both men strove for in their songwriting. They wanted to write from the heart, but in a way that people would really hear, and not dismiss as saccharine.

There are lessons here for evangelization. This is, I know, strange to say. John once declared the Beatles "more popular than Jesus," and he famously sang about a world with "no religion." But they spoke from the heart, and they left us with the miracles of their music. (Aug. 15 is the 60th anniversary of their 1965 concert at Shea Stadium—arguably the peak of their stardom.) And it's a short step from speaking from the heart to speaking to the creator. As Pope Francis writes in "Dilexit Nos," his encyclical on the Sacred Heart, "Accepting his friendship is a matter of the heart; it is what constitutes us as persons in the fullest sense of that word."

'We're thrown by a relationship that isn't sexual but is romantic,' writes Leslie.

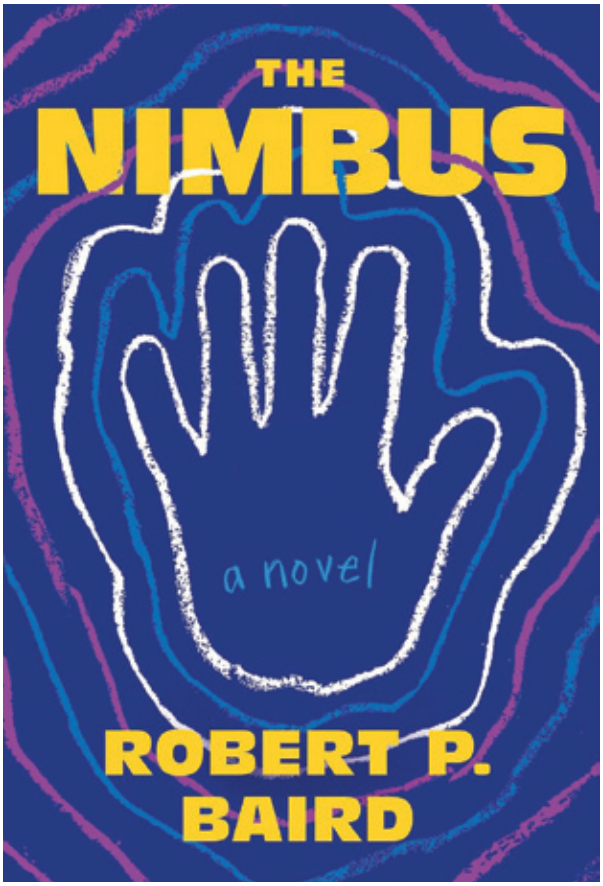
If John and Paul, by meeting and collaborating on such a deep level, showed us what true friendship can look like, then they also give us a hint of what this most important relationship can be. Their relationship, despite all their well-documented troubles, was fundamentally creative and—I would argue—life-giving. In that too, we can spot the outlines of the creator.

In "Dilexit Nos," Pope Francis writes that the "interior reality of each person is frequently concealed behind a great deal of 'foliage,' which makes it difficult for us not only to understand ourselves, but even more to know others." Seeing two souls in conversation—whether it's Ignatius and Xavier or John and Paul—is to see the foliage stripped away. It's rarer and rarer these days, and worth celebrating.

In 1978, eight years after the Beatles broke up, the Catholic Church welcomed Pope John Paul I, and then John Paul II. The double name—the first in the history of the papacy—was chosen to honor Popes John XXIII and Paul VI. But the yoking of John and Paul in the public imagination may have secretly pleased those Catholics who knew the exact sequence of songs on "Rubber Soul." Then and now, there are those who would divide the world into John fans and Paul fans. But someone, somewhere knew that their names belong side by side.

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

A THEOLOGICAL THRILLER



Henry Holt and Co / 352p $30

What would you do if your toddler started glowing?

This isn't a riddle. It's the premise of Robert P. Baird's startling debut novel *The Nimbus*, which begins with exactly this scenario and proceeds to unpack everything we think we know about faith, sight and the stories we tell ourselves. A child named Luca emits a soft, inexplicable light that some people can see and others cannot. His mother, heartbreakingly, is among those who see nothing at all.

If this sounds like science fiction, think again. Baird has written something far stranger: a campus novel that doubles as a theological thriller, a domestic drama that questions the very nature of reality. Set in a university divinity school, *The Nimbus* asks what happens when the miraculous intrudes on the mundane, when the thing you've spent your life studying suddenly shows up in your living room, glowing.

Universities, with their pride in rational inquiry, become inadvertently comic in *The Nimbus*. The writers studied by Luca's father, Adrian, parcel out Luca's inexplicable glow into typologies—Zoroastrian *khvarenah!* prophetic aureolas!—only to find themselves patterning meaning out of what defies categorization. Yet Baird shows them as human attempts to hold the chaos at bay.

In John 20:29, Jesus offers a paradoxical blessing: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Baird's novel recasts that maxim in a secular age, asking whether belief requires proof. Thomas, you will remember, was the Apostle who needed to touch Christ's wounds to believe in the resurrection. He got his proof (lucky him). The rest of us make do with stories, with partial glimpses, with the unsettling possibility that the miraculous might be real but visible only to some. Baird's modern Thomas is anyone who encounters Luca's nimbus: the doctors who run every test imaginable only to find that, as one physician puts it, "Nothing registers." The religious scholars who scramble to contextualize the inexplicable. The believers, who believe Luca has been imbued with powers straight from God, and the skeptical journalists, who think this all must be an elaborate hoax.

The uneven distribution of the nimbus—who can see it and who can't—becomes a testing ground for questions of spiritual privilege and cultural capital. Baird refuses to provide easy answers, instead using the nimbus as a lens through which to examine how we construct meaning in an age that demands evidence for everything. Who gets access to wonder? Who is excluded from the very experiences that might make existence bearable?

The novel's most moving passages explore these questions through the lens of parenthood. Renata, Luca's mother, faces an impossible choice: believe in something she cannot see or accept that she might be blind to her own child's essence. How do you mother a miracle you cannot perceive? How do you anchor your love in absence of proof?

Meanwhile, Adrian, Luca's father, seems willing to exploit his son's supernatural glow—if not directly to the media camped outside their house, then at least by refusing to keep it private. Reddit users claim to have seen the nimbus and been healed; Adrian does not discourage the attention. This creates devastating tension in his marriage with Renata, who wonders if everyone else has lost their minds. Baird suggests that all parenting is an act of faith, requiring us to believe in realities we cannot fully grasp or control.

But *The Nimbus* isn't content to explore faith in the abstract. Baird grounds his inquiry in contemporary anxieties, where traditional authority has crumbled and people cobble together meaning from whatever materials they can find. We see this in Paul Harkin, Adrian's graduate student, whose rootlessness has led him to religious studies not because he believes in God but because he needs to believe in *something*. As Baird writes, Paul has discovered that "what the practice of religion had done for his mother, the study of religion had done for Paul." Both offer "a thread, however slender, however fragile, that helped him find his way out

of his drifting isolation."

This insight cuts to the heart of what makes *The Nimbus* so compelling. Paul's turn to academic theology isn't about finding divine truth but about organizing experience, feeling connected to something larger than his own uncertainty. "Religion was culture. Religion was history," he realizes—a way to "reach across continents and centuries, to feel like he was part of something durable."

The novel's academic setting provides both comic relief and philosophical depth. When Adrian suggests Paul write about "people who shine," Paul discovers that "there was a whole long history of people glowing.... The glow showed up everywhere, in just about every significant religious tradition you could think of." Soon Luca's nimbus is transformed from lived mystery into scholarly commodity, something that can help a Ph.D. student write a dissertation or a former Div School student strike a bargain with the devil, or at least a dangerous loan shark who believes in miracles.

The tension emerges from this mismatch between experience and analysis, between the thing itself and our attempts to explain it away. Academic institutions end up circling their own jargon, creating elaborate theoretical frameworks that miss the point entirely. Yet Baird reveals them as touchingly human attempts to make sense of an incomprehensible world.

The novel's tragicomic tone acknowledges both the absurdity and necessity of such meaning-making. As Baird writes, "the bad answers were also, in their way, beside the point. As long as there was longing there would be disappointment. As long as there was love there would be heartbreak. As long as there was life there would be death." This isn't cynicism but realism—an acknowledgment that the search for meaning persists because we're human, and humans need more than facts to survive.

The genius of *The Nimbus* lies in its refusal to solve the mystery it presents. We never learn why Luca glows, never discover the scientific explanation that would make everyone comfortable. This isn't narrative failure but philosophical triumph. In a world where "nothing registers" on our instruments, belief becomes an act of interpretation, a choice about how to orient ourselves toward uncertainty.

Baird's prose is elegant and precise, marked by the careful attention to language one might expect from a former editor at The New Yorker or Harper's. His satire of academic pretension is affectionate rather than cruel.

The Nimbus arrives at a moment when American culture is grappling with questions of truth, authority and meaning. What makes Baird's contribution so valuable is his refusal to choose sides in the battles between reason and faith, skepticism and belief.

Like the Thomas story it echoes, *The Nimbus* asks what kind of faith is possible without proof. But unlike Thomas, we don't get to touch the wounds. We must make do with glimpses, with stories, with the possibility that the miraculous might be real but visible only to some. The novel's final insight is both humbling and hopeful: In our age of data and evidence, belief persists not because we're irrational but because we are humans who need more than facts to make existence bearable.

The Nimbus makes a quiet yet profound argument, that mystery is not a flaw in the fabric of faith but a feature. Some truths flicker just beyond our grasp, and our capacity to look becomes the measure of our humanity. It is a novel that trusts its readers to sit with uncertainty, to find meaning in the questions rather than rushing toward answers.

Baird has written a beautiful argument for the necessity of mystery, a reminder that some truths can only be glimpsed, never grasped. Whether you see the glow or not, you'll find yourself changed by the looking.

Ellen O'Connell Whittet *teaches in the writing program at U.C. Santa Barbara. She is the author of* What You Become in Flight *and the forthcoming* Book of Hours.

A House With Windows

Last month, the Sunday readings recalled a condemnation of injustice by the prophet Amos. In October, words from the visionary Habakkuk follow in this prophetic tradition.

Only in Habakkuk is the entire length of the composition concerned with God's governance for the world. Questions of justice or lack of justice pierce through with poetic blaze.

On the 27th Sunday in ordinary time, Habakkuk begins his writing with a lament. "How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen! I cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not intervene" (Hb 1:2). The verse presents a classical formulation of lamentation found throughout the penitential psalms, with a focus on the individual's suffering, isolation from community and sense of personal doom. Within Habakkuk's lament, however, the concern shifts away from personal endangerment. At stake are questions of integrity for the belief in a just God who delivers divine help for the community. God's response to the prophet remains unflustered, "If it delays, wait for it" (Hb 2:3).

The following Sunday provides readings steeped in restorative healings. A virtuous commander of armies, Naaman, was instructed by Elisha to plunge into the Jordan seven times. Naaman's skin disease was removed; he was cleansed and inspired to comment that "there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel" (2 Kgs 5:15). The Gospel recalls the story of 10 lepers standing outside a village crying out for pity from Jesus, their Master (Lk 17:13). All are healed, but only one realized what had happened and returned to give thanks at the feet of Jesus. What happened to the other nine? We are left to imagine their fate. Meanwhile, the one with gratitude becomes an example of faith that others may practice: petition, grateful awareness and response.

The opening lines of the poem "Be Thankful," by Victoria Chipps, an Oglala Lakota elder, come to mind: "You have to say a prayer of Thanksgiving./ You have to be thankful./ Otherwise it's like a house without windows./ It's dark."

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), OCT. 5, 2025
Waiting for justice delayed

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), OCT. 12, 2025
Practicing faith is like living in a house with windows

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), OCT. 19, 2025
Keeping your hands lifted in prayer as the battle rages

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), OCT. 26, 2025
Praying with the haughty and humble alike

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

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Worried but Ready

Facing the new challenges for nonprofits

By Mary Beth Powers

In more than 30 years of nonprofit work, I cannot recall a time when I have had to rely so heavily on planning for the worst. I also can't recall a time when my faith has been so essential to my service—a guiding light for me and my organization as well as a light at the end of the tunnel that defines our current age of uncertainty.

I am not alone in this. Nonprofit leaders in every sector—many of them with faith-inspired missions—are operating in a world turned upside down, their federal funding cut or threatened by the unprecedented and unpredictable priorities of a new federal administration.

Is it possible for nonprofits not only to withstand the turmoil but to thrive? I believe the answer is yes, if we resolve to do two things: prepare rigorously for worst-case scenarios and reflect deeply on why we exist in the first place.

My organization is a case in point. The Catholic Medical Mission Board was founded in 1912 to advance human dignity by caring for the sick. A global health nonprofit, we deliver approximately $300 million worth of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies annually to people in need worldwide. We also lead the development of community health care programs in five developing countries. Much of our work is in preventing and treating infectious and noncommunicable diseases, such as H.I.V./AIDS, cancer, tuberculosis and diabetes.

So we were near the epicenter of the Trump administration's recent decision to halt foreign aid funding, including for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS (Pepfar), which was founded in 2003 under the Bush administration and has saved millions of lives.

We were worried but ready. Several years ago, CMMB began to envision the consequences of an end to Pepfar and AIDS funding, and we played out scenarios accordingly.

This February, our worst-case scenario became a reality. Yet we weathered the administration's initial funding freeze and stop-work order thanks to our board's decision to cover the salaries of project staff who were not allowed to work while the administration's review was underway. Two of our three federally funded H.I.V. treatment programs resumed after the freeze, and both run relatively smoothly today because we avoided furloughs and layoffs faced by other organizations.

Our third program, which helped continue treatment for young people who contracted H.I.V. at birth, was inexplicably canceled. We recently entered into a contract with another partner of the U.S. government to restart it; the funding is lower, but we are able to care for these youth throughout this year. Meanwhile, longer-term planning to care for H.I.V.-infected young people beyond 2025 is underway.

We want to be prepared to help should the operational costs of local clinics, hospitals and health ministries—many of which rely on donated pharmaceuticals and medical supplies—shift from the U.S. government to financially strapped local governments in other countries. Will the need for donated supplies become even greater?

We are also considering the impact of tariffs and Medicaid cuts in the United States, asking whether CMMB's core competencies in distributing critical medical supplies will be needed in parts of this country.

Our focus on scenario planning is exhausting, but it is paying off—shoring up our existing programs while making us flexible and resilient. But perhaps the most gratifying outcome of our risk-containment strategy has been a deepening commitment to our faith-based purpose. As we guard against "black swan events"—unprecedented occurrences that may have catastrophic consequences—we also are contemplating why we do the work in the first place.

We are doubling down on a model that is a response to the call of the Gospel to serve others. To quote a CMMB donor who was extrapolating from the New Testament, "We must love our neighbor. And all of humanity is our neighbor."

And we are building new partnerships with like-minded organizations to address the needs of our neighbors, exploring ways we can amplify our impact despite fewer dollars. Some of these organizations share our Catholic faith. Some are affiliated with other denominations, and some have no religious affiliation at all. We can still see each other as allies.

Here is what we all share: faith in people. And so we will forge ahead together, come what may.

Mary Beth Powers *is the chief executive officer of the Catholic Medical Mission Board, which rents space from America Media.*

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Laudato si' @ 10: The Promise & Peril of Technology with Eugene McCarraher and Christine Rosen

October 15, 2025 | 7:30–9PM
In Person on Lakeshore Campus and Live-streamed

For our mid-October dialogue, the Hank Center will convene (in partnership with John Carroll University) the sixth installment of our year-long celebration of Pope Francis' landmark encyclical, *Laudato si'* on its 10th anniversary. We welcome Eugene McCarraher and Christine Rosen to discuss "The Promise and Peril of Technology: *Laudato si'*, AI, and the Experience of Being Human." Are there forms of technology that can help us, if not save us? What was Pope Francis on to in his critique of "technocratic paradigm"? What are the spiritual and social risks of a saturated digital culture? Of the "enchantment" and fetishization of AI? As ever, technology gives so many gifts, but digital technologies are a markedly different version in that they transform our sense of self and warp the boundaries between virtual and real. What are the costs? Who are we in an increasingly disembodied world? **Register for online event link.**

Annual Teilhard de Chardin S.J. Lecture featuring Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF

October 30, 2025 | 7–8:30PM
In Person on Lake Shore Campus

The Hank Center welcomes Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF as our 2025 Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. visiting Fellow in Catholic Studies. Professor Delio, who specializes in the area of science, technology, and religion, will offer this year's Teilhard lecture: "Incarnation and Evolution: The Catholic Vision of Teilhard de Chardin." The lecture will engage Teilhard's theological vision as a framework that offers valuable orientation for navigating contemporary challenges marked by rapid technological and social transformation. All are welcome as we contemplate and discuss a future characterized by hope and active participation in the ongoing creative process, grounded in a threefold faith: faith in God, faith in the world, and faith in God in and through the world.

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