America

NOVEMBER 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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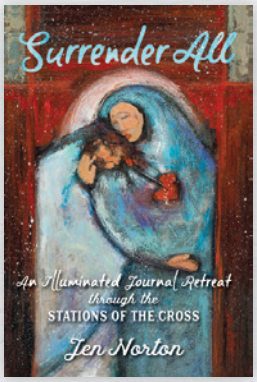

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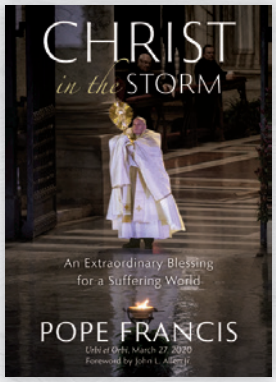

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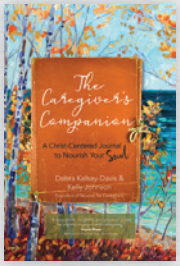

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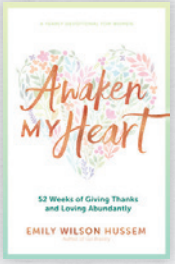

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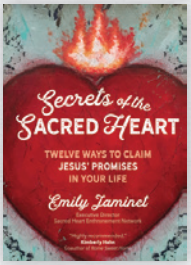

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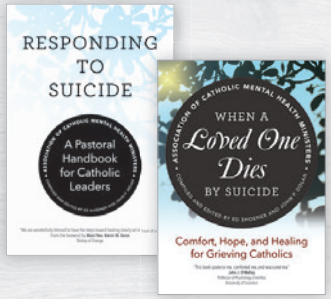

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Looking Back to the Future

No doubt, the president and the U.S. Senate should have waited. No one denies that the president enjoys the constitutional prerogative to nominate someone for a vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court, a prerogative he may exercise at any time, all the way up to the final hours of his term of office, as John Adams (in)famously did. And no one denies that the U.S. Senate enjoys the constitutional prerogative to tender advice on the appointment and to consent, or not, to the nomination.

It is, however, a basic presupposition of any ethical calculus that one should not do something simply because one has the power to do it. Judge Amy Coney Barrett is undoubtedly qualified to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court and, as a committed textualist, she is **America**'s kind of judge.

But all of that is really beside the point. The president's decision to nominate a replacement for Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg just a few weeks before the presidential election is a sucker punch to a body politic already gasping for nonpartisan air.

I have been making this point in conversations over the last several days. The responses, from both Democrats and Republicans, go something like this: "Well, they started it."

Democrats say Republicans started it by not holding hearings for the eminently qualified Judge Merrick Garland and concocting some historical precedent to justify what was merely a tactical bet. Republicans say that Democrats started it by turning Judge Robert Bork's surname into a verb, meaning "to thwart for partisan ends," and then by nearly Borking Judge Clarence Thomas.

The problem here is twofold: First, "they started it" is not an argument but an excuse. It also represents the moral reasoning of an adolescent, which any parent will tell you, as my parents told me, is not even a good excuse. Second, this tit for tat blame-assigning never ends. How far back do we go? How about Abe Fortas? (Remember him?) How about past the Warren Court to the Taney Court, the Marshall Court, to the Constitutional Convention itself and the bitter fight between federalists and anti-federalists? If we had the time, we could trace this conflict all the way back to Cain and Abel.

Blaming is pointless, and the only way to win the game is not to play it. It is also a poor substitute for the actual debate we need: We must decide as a country whether we are going to continue to treat our courts as a third house of the legislature; whether the most contentious social and moral issues of our time will be decided, not by voters or their elected representatives, but by nine unelected men and women who mostly attended Harvard or Yale.

Or is it nine? The latest move in this escalating conflict is the suggestion that in response to the Republicans' naked aggression, the probable Democratic majority should add seats to the Supreme Court, what an earlier generation called court packing. The trouble is that the Republicans would presumably follow suit when they are next in the majority. Where would that end? 25? 535?

As I indicated, court packing is not a new idea. Franklin Roosevelt tried it in 1937. It was a bad idea then, and it is a bad idea now. When F.D.R. attempted this trick, the editors of this review opposed him, as did a number of Democrats and Republicans, the kind of adult bipartisanship we need now.

I'll leave you with what **America**'s editors said about the matter in 1937. They put it better than I could:

> The President's motives are not the issue, nor is the welfare of the Democratic party. We are asked to consider a proposition which, as all agree, is of supreme importance to the Republic....
>
> [The proposal] sets a precedent which in time will be enlarged by ambitious politicians in the White House, and so bring to an inglorious end Government under the Constitution established by our fathers.
>
> We have been assured that nothing of the sort can possibly happen. The answer is that no guarantees can be given for these assurances. In every country in which a dictatorship has been established, the first steps were taken by undermining the authority of the judiciary, on the plea that it prevented the enforcement of absolutely necessary reforms.
>
> [The president's proposal] impairs the independence of the Federal judiciary and leads to its destruction. It overthrows the system of checks and balances between the three coordinate branches of the Federal Government. It puts into the hands of the Executive a power which "no good man should desire and no bad man should possess...."
>
> [It] should be so emphatically rejected that its parallel will never again be presented to the free representatives of the free people of America. On that position we take our stand.

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

THE ISSUE

GIVE AND TAKE

DISPATCHES

FEATURES

AP Photo/Moises Castillo

A migrant is helped by fellow migrants onto the back of a truck in Rio Dulce, Guatemala, Oct. 2. A caravan of about 2,000 migrants was travelling from neighboring Honduras in hopes of reaching the United States.

Cover: The opening session of the Second Vatican Council in St. Peter's Basilica, Oct. 11, 1962.
CNS photo/Giancarlo Giuliani, Catholic Press Photo

FAITH & REASON

FAITH IN FOCUS

IDEAS IN REVIEW

POEMS

THE WORD

LAST TAKE

Single-issue voting has corrupted Christian political witness

Bishop Mark Seitz of the Diocese of El Paso weighed in on Catholic voting and single-issue political strategies in an analysis published on **America**'s website that is sure to become recommended reading for voters of faith ("Bishop Seitz: Single-issue voting has corrupted Christian political witness"). He addresses society's ills through the viewpoint of faith, not politics, and criticizes "single-issue political strategies disconnected from an integral ethic of human life."

"Catholics who wish to take the demands of our faith and social teaching seriously have long had reason to feel politically homeless at election time," the bishop writes. "Neither party and neither presidential candidate reflects in a consistent way the ethic of love and life expressed by Jesus in the Gospels."

The article continues to generate feedback from our audience. The following in a sampling of online reader comments, edited for length and clarity.

This article should be required reading and discussion in all Catholic parishes, schools, colleges and universities, religious education programs and seminaries. It should be analyzed for its capacity for moral reasoning, how to apply Catholic social doctrine to the injustices that prevail, and to understand what goes into the intellectual formation of a bishop. Obviously, we need more like Bishop Seitz. Single-issue voting is another reason young people are leaving the church.
Gabriel Marcella

As a pro-choice American Catholic, regarding a woman's right to determine whether and how she prevents pregnancy and whether she carries a pregnancy to term, I just want to say this: In no way do I read Bishop Seitz as having endorsed or supported or turned a blind eye to my position. He is calling all Catholics, pro-choice Catholics included, to wake up every morning to recall [their faith] not only in mind but in practice. I, for one, am profoundly grateful for his trust that we are capable. He didn't give anyone a pass here. He shared his faith and his hope.
J. Jones

This is a brilliant article, naming many of the frustrations I faced as a single-issue conservative voter for decades. The complexity of our current politics makes a perfect decision in this election impossible. So we are faced with choosing the lesser of two evils, or pragmatically choosing our preferred red or blue while holding our nose, or maybe going third party (yet again). But we are called, at every moment, to do what love requires. This article will be a big part of my discernment for this election.
Paul Pfaffenburger

This is a very helpful guide as I struggle with my vote this year. I note that Bishop Seitz ends up saying that it is my decision and not making a blanket statement about a Catholic cannot vote for [fill in the blank] because of a single issue. This article is giving me some consolation and a direction for my prayer as I approach my vote when my mail-in ballot comes. May God grant us right judgment and holy wisdom!
Daniel Leetch

Thank you for a nuanced view of our political problem of single-issue voting. One aspect of preventing abortion that is given little attention is understanding why women seek abortions. It is a decision based on both emotion and practical considerations. If we could find a way to teach about choosing wisely before pregnancy occurs, we would be doing good in the world. And such teaching would be far more subtle than "keep your legs together." In the meantime, we need to consider the welfare of our government when we vote in this election. We are in a dangerous place.
Lisa Weber

The issue of abortion is out of the hands of either the Democratic Party or Mr. Biden, should he be elected. The issue is in the hands of the Supreme Court. If the court decides not to overturn Roe v. Wade, the only way to change the law is by constitutional amendment or by packing the Supreme Court with justices who, contrary to judicial ethics, have committed to a decision before hearing the case.
Arthur Menu

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‘Fratelli Tutti’ Is a Challenge to Our National Conscience

Pope Francis devotes the second chapter of his new social encyclical, “Fratelli Tutti,” to a meditation on the parable of the good Samaritan. In doing so, he offers a compelling theological and moral lens for understanding our world, examining our conscience and finding a pathway to universal fraternity and social friendship.

He describes the various characters in the parable: robbers who beat and leave a man to suffer in the street, priests and religious types who step to the other side so they do not have to walk by him. Then comes the foreigner—a total stranger—who gives his tenderness, money and time to care for the wounded person.

The pope asks, “Which of these characters do you identify with? This question, blunt as it is, is direct and incisive. Which of these characters do you resemble?”

If the people of the United States were to answer the question honestly, they would be filled with contrition.

The pope writes, “The true worth of the different countries of our world is measured by their ability to think not simply as a country but also as part of the larger human family.”

How exactly, then, does the United States measure up?

Who are the people beaten in the street today? It seems impossible to list every social injustice that plagues our society, but Francis comes close. The list of ills that plague our broken and divided world includes: war, climate change, the death penalty, poverty, abortion, inequality, unfettered capitalism, racism, nationalism, and unemployment.

And Francis reminds us that it is always *people* who suffer from these injustices: the poor, the disabled, women, racial minorities, migrants, refugees, the elderly, prisoners, the unborn, the lonely.

The events of 2020 and the failure of our leaders to meet the moment have exposed and exacerbated deep-seated social injustice. Racism, our nation’s original sin, has proven to be “a virus that quickly mutates”; the Covid-19 pandemic has affected all communities, but people of color and the elderly have suffered disproportionately; the economic devastation that followed has forced millions of low-income workers to the brink of desperation, while at the same time billionaires’ wealth has grown more than 25 percent.

Pope Francis devotes a significant amount of attention to the plight of migrants and refugees. In 2019, there were more than 272 million migrants worldwide, according to the United Nations. “We can then say that each country also belongs to the foreigner, inasmuch as a territory’s goods must not be denied to a needy person coming from elsewhere,” writes the pope. The Trump administration has consistently sought to curb immigration, legal as well as illegal, setting obstacles for asylum seekers fleeing violence, attempting to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program and making it more difficult for green card holders to maintain legal residency in the United States.

The pope identifies the plague of political polarization and the collapse of genuine public discourse as a primary reason for our failure to respond to the moment. Francis warns that “[t]hings that until a few years ago could not be said by anyone without risking the loss of universal respect can now be said with impunity, and in the crudest of terms, even by some political figures.”

“Fratelli Tutti,” then, beyond serving as an excellent primer on Catholic social teaching, reminds all people of good will that work against the structures of social sin goes hand in hand with personal, individual growth in virtue. This pope has constantly encouraged believers to follow Christ to the peripheries of society, and he reminds us in this encyclical that “some peripheries are close to us, in city centers or within our families.... It has to do with our daily efforts to expand our circle of friends, to reach those who, even though they are close to me, I do not naturally consider a part of my circle of interests.”

While most Americans agree that our national politics are broken, it sadly goes too often unnoticed that our personal neighborliness is also decreasing. As David Brooks put it recently in an essay for The Atlantic, “interpersonal trust is in catastrophic decline.” Only 30 percent of Americans believe that “most people can be trusted.” We are at high risk of not knowing what afflicts even the person next door to us. Most Americans know few of their neighbors, and hardly any know them all. It is a problem that Americans have lost trust in institutions. But this country will be ungovernable if we all lose trust in one another.

In a pandemic that has shown how limited the protection is that is offered by national borders, the pope’s words strike a chord. But his views could also prove prescient. Nationalism remains on the rise; the world is threatened by weapons of war in the hands of bombastic leaders whose false populisms thrive on conflict and division. Francis

warns, "We may often find ourselves succumbing to the mentality of the violent, the blindly ambitious, those who spread mistrust and lies."

But, like Jesus, who was no stranger to political strife and violence, Francis is resolutely hopeful: "Others may continue to view politics or the economy as an arena for their own power plays. For our part, let us foster what is good and place ourselves at its service."

Surely, the United States has done much that is good in the world. But all this is for nothing without a national reckoning with the political and spiritual crisis that has befallen us. "Fratelli Tutti," read during an election year, is a reminder that Catholic social teaching offers a profound challenge to the national conscience—but also contains the seeds of national conversion.

During the presidential candidacy of John F. Kennedy, voters fretted that Rome would infiltrate the top levels of our government. Now, one presidential candidate proudly touts his Catholic faith while embracing policies that ignore some core Catholic moral teachings; the other proclaims himself a champion of Catholic values but would likely reject most of the pope's encyclical. And yet Americans—including American Catholics—do not seem worried that Catholicism's influence will upend their way of doing things. In "Fratelli Tutti," the pope has sent a reminder: Perhaps we all should be.

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Reform has repeatedly failed. Abolish the police.

Calls to abolish or defund the police have exposed questions about the morality of our crime-fighting model.

The evidence does not support mere tweaks to the way police are trained and do their jobs as solutions to police misconduct. Anti-bias training has no discernible impact on deterring police violence. "Community policing" boosts petty arrests of poor people. And regarding body cameras, a survey conducted by George Mason University researchers in 2016 found that 93 percent of state prosecutors had reported using body camera footage in cases against civilians, but only 8 percent had used such footage to prosecute police.

We must examine the moral legitimacy of policing itself. There has never been a time when it has not crushed the weak and promoted the interests of the powerful. In 1829, when Sir Robert Peel founded the first modern police force in London, he may have made superficial changes, but he still modeled it after the Irish Peace Preservation Force, created to put down insurrections by Irish peasant-farmers starving under English colonial rule.

An essay by Charles Dickens from 1851, "On Duty with Inspector Field," sheds light on what preoccupied early and subsequent urban police forces. The author recounts night raids in a London slum: "Inspector Field's hand is the well-known hand that has collared half the people here.... Every thief here cowers before him, like a schoolboy before his schoolmaster." The message to Dickens's upper-class readers is clear: The police keep London's filth out of sight and under control through the threat of arrest.

Policing in the United States has its origins in a system that the church now regards as evil. In the South, "slave patrols," aimed at quashing resistance to slavery, were among the first official law enforcement bodies. In the North, policing was a way to discipline disgruntled workers and prevent them from effectively organizing.

The interests of colonizers, slave masters and property owners set the trajectory of police work. Today's outcomes still reflect those interests. Wealth, race and ethnicity are the greatest predictors of outcomes in the criminal legal system. Descendants of enslaved and colonized people are imprisoned or killed by the police at the highest per capita rates in the country.

Policing legitimizes itself, in part, through the creation of an "other" that threatens the white middle class. People do not make community with a menacing outsider. The other can only be dominated, beaten back or cordoned off.

The abolition movement asks us to consider whether we need the police to deal with disorder. It seeks to make policing, prisons and surveillance obsolete by solving social problems head-on. It calls on us to rethink punishment as justice and to extend hospitality rather than harm to those who deviate from social norms.

To address homelessness, for instance, we do not invest in affordable housing or build public restrooms that would benefit us all. Rather, we use the police to harass and arrest the homeless to "solve" the problem. They enforce municipal bans on sleeping in cars or on the street, effectively making homeless people's lives illegal.

Abolitionists recognize the contingency of our social arrangements. We did not always respond to social problems or even real interpersonal harm by putting people into cages. We did not always have a police force three and a half times the size of the British military patrolling our streets. We can change this arrangement if we choose.

Abolition does not mean giving up state-provided safety; it means giving up the delusion that the state provides safety through violence, surveillance and imprisonment. It will not be instantaneous. What can begin now, though, is shrinking the resources and scope of the institutions incompatible with that vision. We can instead fund things that promote human flourishing, like universal housing and humane mental health treatment, thereby making crime less likely.

At last count, there are only 924,107 staffed hospital beds, compared with over 2.3 million occupied prison beds. One need not be an abolitionist to suspect that only a moribund society would produce such disordered spending. These priorities have always been unsustainable. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed for many that they are deadly, too.

The value of Black history and collective experiences is at stake in the still-controversial phrase "Black lives matter." Black people have been here for every attempted reform of the policing system, and at every turn have again suffered unjust violence thereafter. Reformists would not only have us ignore this record, but they demand we bet our lives on it, too.

For a longer version of this article, go to **americamagazine.org.**

Dwayne David Paul *is an educator and writer and the director of the Collaborative Center for Justice. Twitter: @DwayneDavidPaul.*

No, we can still reimagine and reform the police.

After the deaths of George Floyd and others at the hands of police, the righteous refrain "Black Lives Matter!" is clearly justified. Less clear are the movement's expectations for policing in the United States. Michael Jaycox, a Catholic ethicist, wrote, "We must imagine a world without policing," and the journalist Josie Duffy Rice wrote in Vanity Fair that it is time to "eradicate this Jim Crow system of public safety" and "policing as we know it."

I would emphasize *as we know it.* Although much or most of the history of U.S. policing can be connected to racism, there is more to the story.

The police as a modern institution began in 1829 with Sir Robert Peel and the "New Police" of Metropolitan London. Prior to this, the military was used to quell major disturbances like riots. Peel wanted to avoid any association with militarism, insisting on a subdued uniform of a blue coat with white buttons, rather than the British military's red coat. In addition, he emphasized that the police were to use persuasion, keeping physical force as a last resort to prevent a crime. Because of such restraint, the Metropolitan Police came to be accepted by the citizenry.

This model of policing was transplanted to the United States, beginning in New York City in 1845. No doubt part of the reason for their inception was to protect the wealthier class's property. Still, police in most cities remained unarmed, and departments maintained a civilian orientation.

That changed after the Civil War, when a surplus of firearms found its way into the hands of the police. It is also true, as Ms. Rice writes, that "Northern police often parroted their Southern counterparts" during the Jim Crow era and were not "unsullied by white supremacy." My point is that "policing as we know it" neither had to be this way nor has to continue so. Not all police in other nations are armed like American police, and not all recruits are as untrained in de-escalation techniques as their U.S. counterparts.

For years criminologists have imagined alternatives to the military model of policing. The philosopher John Kleinig, for example, in his book *The Ethics of Policing,* argues for the "social peacekeeper" model, which retrieves Peel's community-oriented approach and "acknowledges the nonnegotiable force at police disposal without transforming it into the police *raison d'être.*"

Thus I am more supportive of the calls for defunding the police when this means the reallocation and redistribution of funds to community-oriented programs. The collaboration between the police department and the mental health first-responders organization Cahoots in Eugene, Ore., is a prime example. Cahoots still needs the support of police in dangerous instances, including suicide attempts and domestic violence cases. But involving the police in peacekeeping activities serves to contextualize, moderate and restrain that use of force, ensuring that it is a last resort.

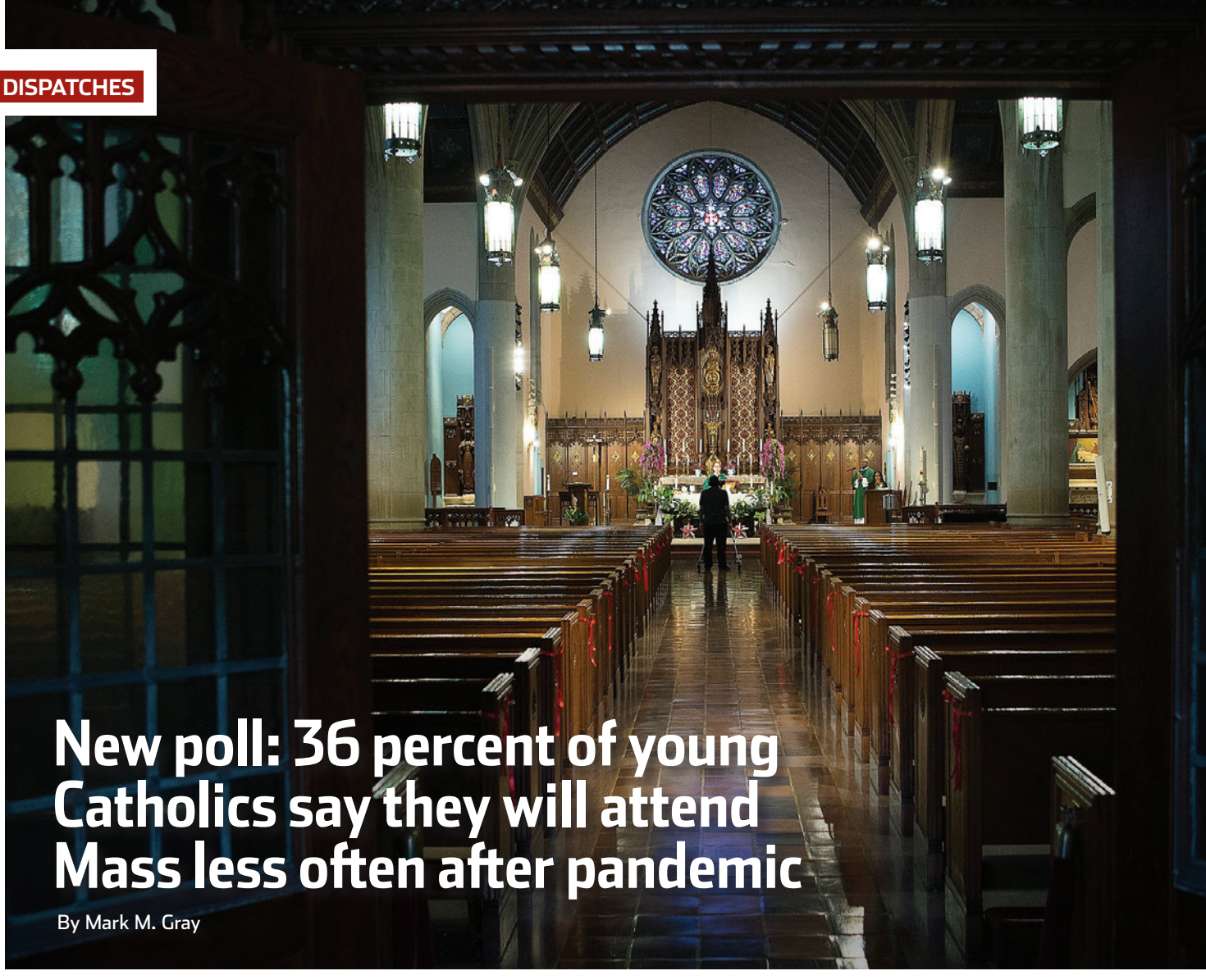
Other policing reforms are moving in the right direction. The city of Louisville passed a new law earlier this year, named after Breonna Taylor, that rightly bans the use of no-knock warrants. Other significant reforms include: banning choke holds, prohibiting racial profiling, establishing citizen police review boards, providing officers housing credits to live in the neighborhoods where they police, designating that the state's attorney general be the one to investigate police shootings and reconsidering the legal doctrine of qualified immunity as law and policy. We can also prevent officers who have been fired for using excessive force from being hired at another police department.

Some abolitionists might say that police reforms are only "surface-level remedies," as Mr. Jaycox writes. I agree that the deeper problem is cultural and systemic. Recently, when called to jury duty for a criminal case involving the testimony of three police officers versus a Black female defendant, I was asked by the prosecutor during the *voir dire,* "As a former law enforcement officer, you know that there's always some bad apples, right?" "This may be the case," I replied, "but sometimes the tree itself is diseased."

This does not necessarily mean the entire orchard is so diseased. But to reimagine and cultivate a culture of *just* policing will require significant changes in academy and field training, as well as recruiting from the community. The social peacekeeping model, in my view, is consonant with Catholic social teaching on protecting human dignity and the common good. I believe that reforms guided by this vision can uphold that Black lives matter.

For a longer version of this article, go to **americamagazine.org.**

Tobias Winright *is associate professor of theological and health care ethics at Saint Louis University. His articles on policing span 25 years, with several included in his forthcoming book* Serve and Protect: Selected Essays on Just Policing.



New poll: 36 percent of young Catholics say they will attend Mass less often after pandemic

By Mark M. Gray

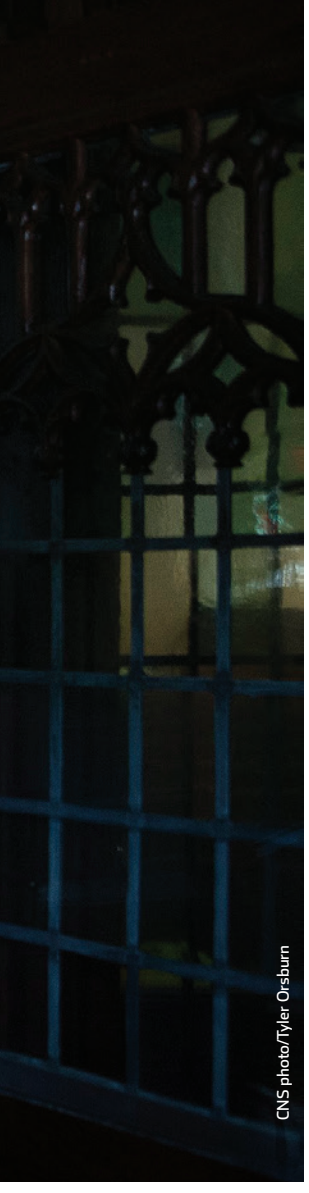
Not many young adult Catholics are tuning into Masses on television or online, according to a survey conducted in July and August for the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. A more troubling finding is that 36 percent said they plan to attend Mass less frequently when stay-at-home orders related to the Covid-19 pandemic end and churches fully reopen.

Another 51 percent said they will return to their normal pattern of attendance after the pandemic, and 14 percent said they plan to go to Mass more often.

The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago surveyed 2,214 self-identified Catholics between the ages of 18 and 35; only 25 percent said they participated in Mass online or on television during the pandemic "somewhat" or "very" often. (The CARA-commissioned poll, conducted by phone and email, has a margin of error of 3.6 points.) Another 22 percent said they watched Mass "a little," and 54 percent said they had not watched at all.

This breakdown looks somewhat like physical Mass attendance before the pandemic, when 13 percent of Catholics said they attended Mass weekly, another 20 percent attended at least once a month, and 67 percent attended no more than a few times a year. Sixty-three percent of young adult Catholics who used to attend Mass weekly said they now watch Mass on television or online "somewhat" or "very often," as did 36 percent of those who attended Mass at least once a month before the pandemic. Of those who used to attend no more than a few times a year, 13 percent said they watch Mass on television or online "somewhat" or "very" often.

The respondents saying that they plan to attend Mass less often in the future cut across all categories of prior attendance. Of the weekly attenders, 31 percent said they will be attending Mass less often when things return to normal, compared with 42 percent of monthly attenders and 35



CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn

A cameraman photographs the Rev. Kevin Kennedy at the altar during a live-streamed Mass in St. Gabriel Catholic Church in Washington, D.C., on July 11.

percent of those who used to attend a few times a year or less often.

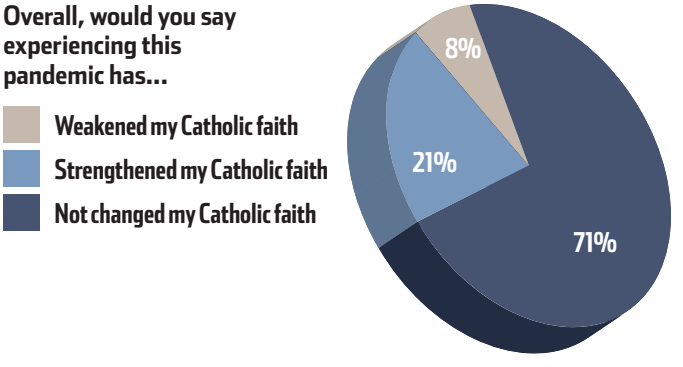
There are few demographic differences between those who say they will return to normal frequency, attend more often or attend less often. Non-Hispanic white young adults are among the least likely to say they will attend Mass less often after the pandemic (29 percent). Black and Asian Catholics are among the most likely to say they will attend less often (45 percent and 44 percent, respectively). Plans to reduce attendance are more common among divorced (41 percent) and separated (46 percent) young adults than among those who are married (34 percent).

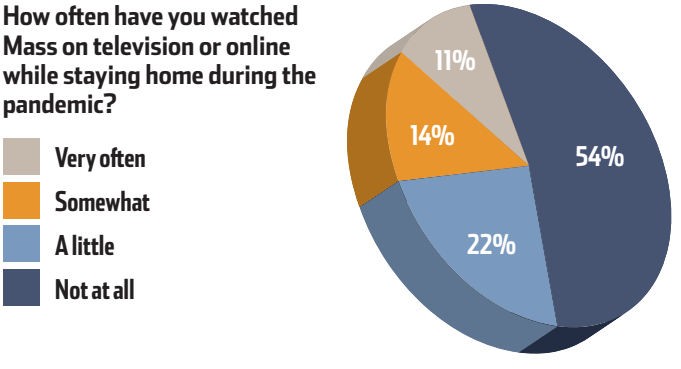
CARA uses its polling and Google search data to estimate Mass attendance by the week. Each year, searches for Mass-related terms peak at Christmas, which is known to have the highest attendance of the year (approximately 64 percent of all self-identified Catholics). In 2019, that meant about 44.1 million attended Masses at the church's 16,914 parishes. Weekly Mass attendance in 2020 had been averaging 16 percent of self-identified Catholics before Ash Wednesday and the first day of Lent, on Feb. 26.

We estimated Mass attendance on March 1 to be about 18 percent. On March 8, it fell to 15 percent, then on the following two Sundays to 10 percent and 6 percent. Attendance for Easter services was more difficult to estimate, as the uptick in Google searches may have indicated people looking for a way to watch Mass on television or online. As of the end of August, weekly Mass attendance was still averaging an estimated 6 percent.

While Mass attendance has been and will likely continue to be low, prayer at home has increased during the pandemic. While 57 percent of young adult Catholics said they pray just as often as they used to, 28 percent said they pray more often now. Only 14 percent said they pray less often.

When asked in an open-ended question how they were practicing their faith at home, respondents indicated praying, watching Masses online or on television, reading the Bible and participating in religious discussions. Some noted celebrations of Easter at home, and a few indicated praying the rosary. Many included helping others as one of their ways of practicing their faith while home. Eighteen percent said they had not done anything to practice their faith while at home during the pandemic.

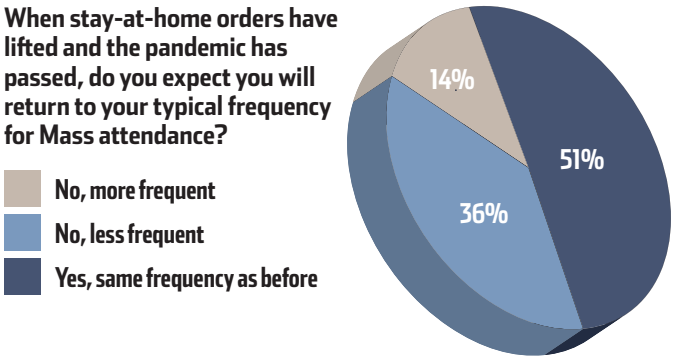




CARA also asked respondents if their parish had done anything to reach out to them during the pandemic. Among those who were aware their household was registered with a parish, 34 percent said they knew of their parish reaching out to them. Seven percent who said their household was not registered indicated that their parish nevertheless had contacted them during the pandemic in some manner. Asked about the nature of contacts from their parishes, many said they were asked to donate money or to help distribute food or Bibles. There were also efforts by parishes just to make sure everyone in a household was well. The outreach took the form of emails, phone calls, texts and posts on social media.

Only 29 percent of the Catholic young adults in our survey said that their households had been regularly con-

When stay-at-home orders have lifted and the pandemic has passed, do you expect you will return to your typical frequency for Mass attendance?



tributing to their parishes before the pandemic. But note that many young adults still live with their parents and may not be fully aware of their parents' pattern of giving. (Before the pandemic, CARA surveys had indicated that 45 percent of self-identified Catholics in the United States resided in a household that regularly gave to their parish's weekly offertory collection.) Only 13 percent of respondents said their households have been regularly contributing since the pandemic began.

Data from CARA's most recent National Survey of Catholic Parishes, conducted in 2014, revealed that about half of the responding parishes provided their parishioners with the opportunity to contribute online, a share that presumably has increased during the pandemic. CARA estimated in April that weekly giving to parishes was likely only about 42 percent of what it was prior to the pandemic shutdowns.

Once the pandemic is over, 53 percent of young adult Catholics say they will give as they did before, and 13 percent say they will give more frequently than they used to. Thirty-four percent say they plan to give less often. This may reflect people assuming the pandemic will be over but the economy will take longer to recover and they may not be as financially able to give as they used to.

While the pandemic may be leading some young adult Catholics to consider attending Mass or giving donations less often when things return to normal, more say the pandemic has strengthened their faith than weakened it. Overall, 71 percent say the pandemic has not changed their Catholic faith. Twenty-one percent say it has been "strengthened," and only 8 percent say their faith has been weakened.

Mark M. Gray, *senior research associate at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate and director of CARA Catholic Polls.*

Mass with masks at St. Jude the Apostle Church in Lewes, Del., on Sept. 26.

CNS photo/Chaz Muth

Source: CARA-commissioned poll of U.S. Catholics between ages 18 and 35, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, July-Aug. 2020.

American Catholics Have Tremendous Impact on Hunger by Empowering Two Effective Missions Serving the Poor

Families in rural Guatemala face terrible living conditions and extreme hunger. We can offer them help and hope.

Isolated deep in the rural mountains of Guatemala, a child cries for food — but there is nothing for her to eat. As her impoverished parents watch helplessly, the little girl's hunger pangs grow stronger, and within days, her physical condition deteriorates further. Her muscles begin to atrophy and patches of her hair fall out. Soon, her mother knows, she will even lose the strength to cry.

Many miles away, a similar situation unfolds, but this time, the home isn't a rustic mountain hut. It is a patchwork shack of wood, plastic and sheet metal built on the outskirts of the city. The location is very different, but the poverty and hunger are the same.

The children in both places are suffering and their parents are desperate to find answers — but they lack the money and influence to provide any relief.

"Thank God, Catholic missions in these developing countries are doing something to help. Those outreaches can make the difference between life and death," explained Jim Cavnar, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, a U.S. based ministry founded to support Church-run outreaches to the poor around the globe. Cavnar's team works with compassionate American donors to supply the food, medicines and other resources Catholic missions need to save lives and restore hope.

Among the many projects they assist are a program for malnourished infants and children in Mazatenango, Guatemala, and The Franciscan Social Center in Cochabamba, Bolivia, which operates a lunch program to feed the area's poorest individuals lunches several days a week.

Both outreaches, run by devout Catholics, demonstrate the power of the Church to save lives and restore hope in desperate communities.

In the case of the Guatemalan mission, the focus is on children, and the needs being addressed are severe.

In the department of Suchitepéquez, Guatemala, poor families typically rely on farming for survival. The villages are remote and isolated, so many families become very dependent on the success of their local harvest. This can become a dangerous gamble in years when nature does not cooperate.

The region is already extremely vulnerable to both flooding and drought, and in recent years, crops have been devastated several times by inadequate rainy seasons.

In cases like those, the poorest families resign themselves to eating one small meal of tortillas each day, and some watch in anguish as their malnourished children languish on the brink of starvation.

The program Cross Catholic Outreach supports with donor contributions is a godsend to these families because it helps feed those at greatest risk. Its staff also makes a special effort to provide the comfort only a loving, spiritual embrace can provide.

"This mission is working hard to transform lives with food and unconditional love," Cavnar said, "but, like many Catholic ministries operating in developing countries, it operates on a shoestring budget. That's why the support of U.S. Catholics is so important to them. It fuels their great work, and in the case of their outreach to children, it provides food to stop malnutrition and ensures that recovering kids remain healthy."

Donations from U.S. Catholics are just as critical to the outreach in Bolivia — and to the many other worldwide missions Cross Catholic Outreach supports. In the case of The Franciscan Social Center in Cochabamba, the contributions are essential to cover the expenses of its special feeding program serving destitute children, their families and the at-risk elderly.

"When Jesus Christ walked the earth, he addressed both material and spiritual hunger. Were he to travel to Guatemala or Bolivia today, he would certainly be heartbroken to see so many of its people suffering from extreme poverty and so many facing intense hunger on a daily basis," Cavnar said. "Hunger and poverty clearly remain a challenge for the poor, just as they were in Christ's time on Earth. As Jesus' followers, we can and should see ourselves as God's instruments of mercy to end suffering and restore lost hope."

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. AC01567, PO Box 97168, Washington DC 20090-7168. The brochure also includes instructions on becoming a Mission Partner and making a regular monthly donation to this cause.

If you identify a specific aid project with your gift, 100% of the proceeds 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.

Sixth-graders at their desks on the first day of classes at Our Lady of Victory School in Floral Park, N.Y., on Sept. 8.

CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

In-person classes during pandemic boost enrollment at some Catholic schools

With the Covid-19 pandemic forcing millions of students in public schools into online learning, some Catholic schools that resumed in-person teaching report sometimes significant bumps in enrollment. At St. Paul of the Cross School, in suburban Chicago, just over 600 students have begun the new school year in person as area public schools started the year in online mode, a situation Principal Erika Mickelburgh said prompted about 30 families to switch to St. Paul's.

"We had to completely re-envision the way the school day looks," Ms. Mickelburgh said, pointing to a 35-page reopening plan posted on the school's website this summer. Opening safely required the purchase of ample amounts of hand sanitizer, working with parents to ensure that students have face masks and creating procedures for keeping classrooms safe.

The same phenomenon has been reported by various dioceses across the country. In Detroit, several Catholic schools report longer waiting lists than normal, and some Catholic schools in New Jersey anticipated losing students over the summer but instead reported increases. Catholic school enrollment in Virginia jumped about 8 percent.

But these increases may reflect only a temporary reprieve for many Catholic schools. The pandemic has already hastened the demise of other schools that were struggling before the coronavirus.

Kathy P. Mears, the interim head of the National Catholic Educational Association, said, "That bump is being seen in suburban Catholic schools, not so much in urban or rural schools."

Ms. Mears said schools that are financially stable may be able to weather the uncertainties associated with the pandemic, but others may not survive the slowdown in the economy. Catholic school closures in fact are up this year; about 150 shut their doors for good in recent months, according to the N.C.E.A.

If parents lose their jobs and cannot pay tuition, overall enrollment will continue to decline. "Next year, we'll probably see a lot of closing," Ms. Mears said.

Still, the bump this fall has been a shot in the arm for some Catholic schools. In the Archdiocese of Boston, schools last year experienced one of the worst enrollment drops on record. About 5,700 students, or more than 15 percent of the total student enrollment, left the system's 110 schools.

But some of those losses were made up this year, according to Thomas W. Carroll, the superintendent of Boston's Catholic school system. He said that when Catholic schools announced in-person teaching, Boston parents scrambled to enroll their children.

"Every single principal and everybody who was part of the conversation wanted to open the schools live," Mr. Carroll told **America**. "The conversation became 'How do we get there? What do we have to do? What do we have to buy?'"

Some public school teacher unions have called for remote learning because they say administrators have not taken adequate steps to ensure the safety of students and staff. But teachers in many Catholic school systems, including Boston, do not belong to unions. Mr. Carroll acknowledged that not everyone was on board with the return to in-person instruction.

Nearly 4,000 new students enrolled in Boston's Catholic schools this summer. The majority are students who have not been part of the Catholic school system before. He believes that parents and students will be impressed by their experience in the archdiocese's schools, which he hopes will keep enrollment steady whenever public schools return to in-person learning.

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

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Threatened by crime and Covid-19, asylum seekers remain trapped at border

While the U.S. public turned its attention to other pressing issues this fall—the coronavirus pandemic, racial justice, the presidential election—the plight of asylum seekers along the U.S.-Mexico border, where thousands have been waiting in border communities and makeshift camps, continues unaddressed.

The Migration Protection Protocols, known as the Remain in Mexico policy, empowered immigration officials to return asylum seekers to Mexico while their cases are decided in U.S. immigration courts. In July, D.H.S. suspended those hearings because of the pandemic.

Now "asylum on the border is pretty much impossible," Luis Guerra, a legal advocate with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, told **America**. "Covid is being used as an excuse to close the border."

U.S. immigration courts denied asylum applications at a record rate last year; 69 percent of asylum appeals were rejected. "Our asylum process is not meant to help people get asylum," Mr. Guerra said.

On Sept. 21, a group of about 60 asylum seekers and immigration advocates gathered on the Mexican side of the border at the Parque de las Golondrinas, just south of the main port of entry in Nogales, Sonora. The group began a socially distanced march in front of Nogales shops near the border, holding signs that read "Todos tienen el derecho de solicitar asilo" ("Everyone has the right to ask for asylum") and "La migración es un derecho humano" ("Migration is a human right").

Yolani Sánchez, one of the speakers at the rally, described how her family had been tormented by gang members in Honduras, who attempted to kidnap one daughter and then threatened her husband for defending the family. After those family members fled, gang members sexually assaulted another daughter and murdered her brother after he intervened.

"My only option was to leave the country," said Ms. Sánchez, breaking into tears as she addressed those watching on Facebook. "Please open your hearts. We only want to, in some small way, be as blessed as you are."

Mardoqueo López left Guatemala with his 9-year-old son in January. They have been waiting in Nogales to ask for asylum since February. Members of the infamous Mara Salvatrucha gang, MS-13, threatened him. "They beat me and left me for dead," he said. "Even after we fled, they would drive by my home and shoot bullets into the walls."

His wife and two daughters abandoned the house and are living with a family friend.

Photo by J.D. Long-García

Xiomara Martínez, pictured here with her two children, both U.S. citizens, and her brother, Sergio, have been waiting six months to petition for asylum.

"We just want to be treated humanely by the United States," he said. "We come looking for protection for our families. I'm a family man. I never wanted to be separated from my family like this."

During their indefinite wait on the border, asylum seekers have to contend with criminal threats, including kidnapping, torture, rape and sexual assault, Mr. Guerra said. "Organized crime focuses on the migrant population because they often have connections in the U.S.," he said. "They target asylum seekers. They can kidnap them and get extortion money."

Some who fled persecution in their home countries are found by their persecutors, he said. "There are few shelters, so they are easy to find," Mr. Guerra explained.

But crime is not the only threat to people here. A lack of testing makes precise Covid-19 infection rates in Mexico's border towns difficult to estimate. With space running out at official shelters, many migrant families live in makeshift tents and shelters that make social distancing impossible.

J.D. Long-García, *senior editor.*
Twitter: @jdlonggarcia.

Photo by Vy Barto

Rev. John Grace on the roof of Immaculate Conception Church in Hampton, Va.

GOODNEWS: Richmond seeks to become the 'greenest diocese in the country'

The Diocese of Richmond has responded to the call to care for our common home with a project that will soon generate 1.6 million kilowatt-hours of solar electricity every year. "My goal is for the Diocese of Richmond to be the greenest in the country," Charles Mikell, the diocese's director of real estate, said.

Richmond's solar energy production at current levels will offset over 45,000 metric tons of greenhouse gas over the next 25 years, about the amount of gas produced by 100 million miles of driving. The diocese teamed up with Catholic Energies, a program of the Catholic Climate Covenant, and began converting its properties to solar energy in 2019. The Immaculate Conception Church in Hampton, Va., was the first to undergo the transformation. The parish has saved nearly $2,500 in electricity costs over the past year.

The Rev. John Grace, who led the initiative at Immaculate Conception, is known to parishioners as Father Sunshine. Although he welcomes the monthly savings, that was never the main goal of his project, he said.

"The first question in Scripture is Cain and Abel, when God is looking for Abel [and Cain responds]: 'Am I my brother's keeper?'" Father Grace said. "And we're still wrestling with that question. The answer is 'Yes, we are our brother's keeper.'"

Playing that role for this parish has included seizing the opportunity to offset 133 metric tons of carbon dioxide since its conversion to solar energy began.

That outcome has inspired other parishes. The Rev. John Goertz, pastor of Sacred Heart in Danville, Va., thought replicating the effort could save money while setting an example of environmental stewardship. "What a great situation," he said. His parish's solar conversion should be completed by December.

Erika Rasmussen, Joseph A. *O'Hare fellow.*
Twitter: @erika_razz.

INSIDE AMERICA

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photo: Claire Marie Vogel

Julianne Moore portrays Gloria Steinem in "The Glorias," directed by Julie Taymor.

Photo by Dan McFadden

EDITORS' PICKS

A few of our latest arts and culture features, selected especially for you.

Review: 'The Glorias' portrays a feminist icon in four ways (and with few flaws)

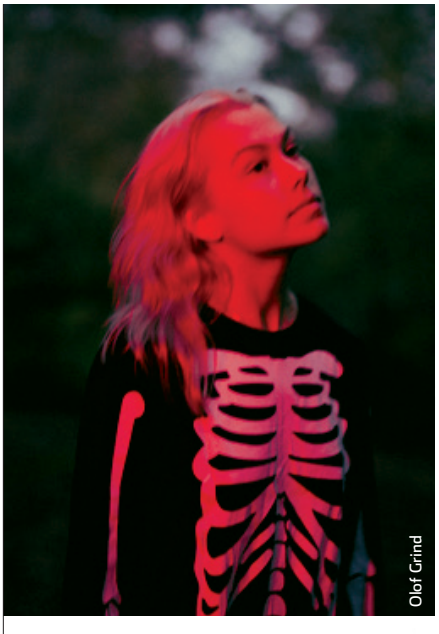
Molly Cahill

Review: Flannery O'Connor meets Quentin Tarantino in Netflix's 'The Devil All the Time'

John Anderson

Robert Pattinson as Preston Teagardin in 'The Devil All the Time'

Photo Cr. Glen Wilson/Netflix © 2020



Olof Grind

The death-haunted music of Phoebe Bridgers

Jack Nuelle

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PRODUCT HIGHLIGHT

JESUITICAL

Jesuitical is a weekly podcast featuring Ashley McKinless and Zac Davis—two "young, hip, lay editors" of America Media. On each episode, they discuss the Catholic news of the week and speak with an interesting guest from the world of faith, politics or culture. Drawing from the insights of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the hosts create a fun, relatable atmosphere that invites young adult Catholics to become part of an interactive online faith community.

INSIDE THE VATICAN

Each week, Colleen Dulle goes behind the headlines of the biggest Vatican news stories with *America*'s Rome correspondent, Gerard O'Connell. They break down complicated news stories that have a whole lot of history behind them in an understandable, engaging way. Colleen and Gerard will give you the inside scoop on what people inside the Vatican are thinking, saying—and planning.

LISTENER PROFILE

***Jesuitical* is totally unique. Zac and Ashley share their perspectives on news and faith in a way that both challenges us and puts us at ease. Their preparation makes for provocative, enjoyable interviews with a diverse slate of guests covering topics that are relevant for our times. We only find this combination with *Jesuitical*.**

John and Maureen Tomczak

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Our Fractured Communities

Piecing together American society in the wake of Covid-19

By Emma Green

I spent the early months of the coronavirus pandemic feeling desperately claustrophobic. Quarantined in a one-bedroom apartment in New York, I would sometimes imagine my fire escape was a creaky porch in the woods somewhere as I sat outside in the early evenings, listening to my neighbors cheer and bang pots for the essential workers carrying the city on their backs. Life felt stuck: no way to plan, nowhere to go, nothing to build toward. The calendar had been emptied of weddings and dinners and reunions; the comforting rhythms of weeks and seasons disappeared. I found myself alternately plotting wild adventures and pining for a quiet, communal life.

A professor of mine used to call this kind of musing "Jesuit daydreaming," his description of the rich Ignatian tradition of spiritual discernment. I should pay attention to daydreams, he said, because they can be more revealing than I might first assume. In this case, I think he is right: My pandemic mind loop was tracing the problem I have come to see as one of the great dilemmas of modern life.

In my work as a religion journalist, I often offer a mental

image to explain the importance of the beat to secular colleagues and readers. While not everyone describes themselves as having faith or even feeling spiritual, everyone has those searching moments in the middle of the night, covers pulled up high as they are lying in bed wondering how to have a good life. More often than not, people's descriptions of what a good life looks like depend on a single factor: the strength of the community around them. As a reporter, it is my job to follow along as individuals and communities try to figure out who they want to be and how they want to live.

Over the past eight months, however, the path toward a good life has become obscured for many Americans. As I sat inside my apartment daydreaming about the future, dozens of people on my street were getting sick, losing family members or navigating the anxiety of being immunocompromised during a public-health crisis. Many Americans, especially in New York, have spent their last eight months mostly alone, and mostly at home, sometimes unable even to wave hello to loved ones from a distance.

The unemployment rate in New York City this summer reached 20 percent; many beloved businesses will likely never come back after the shutdown. The basic ingredients of a good life—decent health, the warmth of family and friends, economic stability—are now out of reach for far more people in our country than at the start of 2020.

But the pandemic has also revealed the extent to which a good life felt elusive for countless Americans far before any of us had heard of Covid-19. This is not just a matter of money or resources. In my reporting, I constantly find evidence that Americans feel isolated and unmoored from their communities, unsure of their place in the world.

I am thinking of a Black Southern Baptist–trained pastor who could not stomach taking his kids to church within his denomination anymore because of his fellow

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> It is hard to be a man or a woman for others in culture that is dominated by us versus them.

church members' reluctance to talk about racism. A longtime staffer at a major American archdiocese who feels daily rage at the Catholic Church's inability to address the clergy sexual-abuse crisis. A young woman fired from her job at a conservative Christian advocacy organization because she spoke out against President Trump. A Catholic professor who bitterly wishes the Democratic Party had room for his pro-life views. These are all examples from the world of religion and politics, but they speak to a deep and expansive truth: In many parts of American life, people feel the institutions that were supposed to guide their lives have failed, and that there is no space for people like them.

The result is a widespread sense of mutual mistrust. Last year, the Pew Research Center found that fewer than one in five Americans say they can trust the government. Nearly two-thirds of Americans have a hard time telling the truth from lies when elected officials speak, and even more believe the government unnecessarily withholds important information from the public.

I have encountered plenty of mistrust in the course of reporting stories. People believe they know my politics, suspect me of bias and assume I will be hostile to religion because of where I work. Religious leaders may be the most distrusted group of all. As one influential Catholic businessman in Boston told me a couple of years ago, following the sexual-abuse scandal, "I go to Mass about three or four days a week. I'm not into Vatican politics. I'm not into Vatican museums. I'm not into people who wear red slippers and fancy robes. I bought into this as a kid, because of the life of Christ. So I'm in. But I'm not drinking any Kool-Aid."

This year I have been reporting on the way political and spiritual alienation plays out in northeastern Pennsylvania, a historically Catholic area important in national politics. The mayor of Scranton pointed out to me that people in the city and region were devastated by the 2018 grand jury report that detailed dozens of instances of child sexual abuse in their diocese. Taken together with the Penn State sexual-abuse scandal and widespread corruption among public officials in the area, she said, local residents had effectively lost their government, their football team and their church. Versions of this story are playing out across the country, leaving Americans feeling unsure of who they are and who they can trust.

And we certainly do not trust one another. Our lives as Americans are increasingly sorted by partisan identity, in ways that are frankly shocking. Researchers have found that Republicans and Democrats drive different kinds of cars, watch different television shows and listen to different music. We tend to live next to neighbors who share our political beliefs and often pick our friends and communities based on shared convictions.

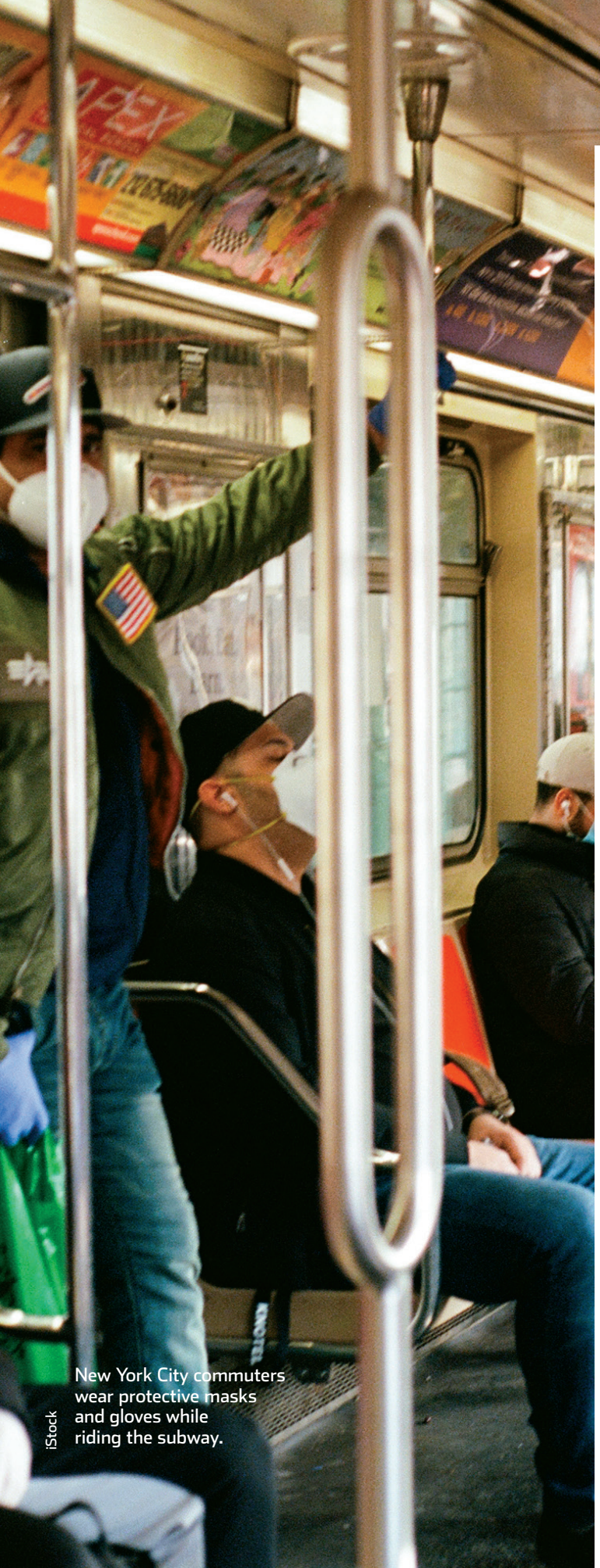
Surveys show that a significant minority of Americans basically never encounter people with different worldviews from their own and would be unhappy if their son or daughter were to marry someone from the opposite political party. This sense of tribalism is exacerbated by political officials who intentionally sow division, seeing chaos and animosity as a political strength rather than a collective weakness. As President Trump said on the grounds of the White House during this year's Republican National Convention, apparently referring to Democrats, liberals or just people who do not support him: "We're here, and they're not."

Journalism Facilitates Encounter

I am offering this litany not as general doomsaying, but to paint a backdrop showing why it is that some Americans might feel unsure of how to build a good life at this distinctive moment in our history. In pandemic times, we spend our days literally isolating from one another, shut away and alone. In spirit and identity, however, Americans were already isolated, feeling sold out by their leaders and dissatisfied with the implicit contract of American life.

My Jesuit professors did not just teach me to daydream. They hammered home how important it is to be a man or woman for others, that this is the point of education and a simple guideline for how to live out our lives. In my travels through American communities, the most joyful and peaceful people I have met are doing just that. Their lives are entwined with the lives of others, and they happily embrace their obligations to their community. But as a broader culture, I think we have lost our knack for building this kind of civic utopia. It is hard to be a man or woman for others in a culture that is dominated by us versus them.

As a journalist, I see it as my job to be a kind of guide,



New York City commuters wear protective masks and gloves while riding the subway.

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or perhaps a mapmaker. I plot landmark moments and trace the direction of currents, showing readers places and people they would otherwise never encounter. I think the widespread sense of mutual suspicion and total isolation in our country is the most urgent, big-picture story of religion and politics right now. In my reporting, I see two major kinds of reactions to this kind of cultural frustration. One is an attempt to repair America. And the other is an attempt to build something new.

Much of what I cover in the world of religion and politics falls into the realm of the culture wars: efforts to win over our culture and shape our politics with a specific vision of the good life. I routinely interview political organizers, writers, legal advocates and politically active clergy persons from the left and the right who describe an existential battle for the soul of America, to borrow a phrase from former Vice President Joe Biden.

When I speak to pro-life activists who have dedicated their lives to ending abortion, they describe this year's presidential election, and the Supreme Court appointments associated with it, as generation-defining events. They speak of abortion as being evil and are horrified by the rhetoric and convictions of their opponents.

Or take the progressive Black pastors who have staged protests at state capitols across the South over lack of access to health care and cuts to social safety-net programs, calling these life-or-death policy decisions that define who we are as a nation. One such set of protests, led by the Rev. William Barber in North Carolina, was explicitly framed as a fight over morality in public life. In the view of these activists, there is no morally or biblically sound argument for government policies that leave poor and working-class Americans struggling to make it.

Perhaps most powerfully, the massive protests we have seen unfolding across America this year are a cry to change the status quo of racism and police violence toward Black people in this country. I have watched as religious group after religious group contends with its own history of racism and bigotry, at times participating in those marches for cultural change. I met an octogenarian sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Scranton who described the backlash to a giant Black Lives Matter poster erected on the campus of Marywood University, the college her congregation oversees. In her mind, there is no question that the sisters should be joining this kind of movement for racial equality.

These struggles over what it means to be American—our greatest sins, the lives we value, our political ideals—are critically important. To many, these fights are a matter

American life is not possible, or does not work, for so many people—it is either unattainable, unaffordable or uninspiring.

of survival. They may be exhausting. And for good reasons, they may exacerbate Americans' sense that there are people on their side, championing the right values, and people on the other side, pushing for a country they do not recognize or believe in. These fights are necessary.

And yet, I cannot seem to get rid of my sneaking suspicion that these abstract debates over who we are as a nation of 330 million people do not actually get us very far in our search for the good life. So much of America's cultural attention—on social media, in the news, in pop culture—is directed toward life at a grand, almost unfathomable scale. I am personally responsible for helping create this sense that life only matters at the national level, and so are my colleagues at large in the media. We report on trends sweeping the nation, on the latest drama surrounding the president, on the hashtags trending on Facebook and Twitter. Two things are true at once. These national political debates matter. And they may actively make it harder to be a human with a sense of fellowship, personal direction and a meaningful life.

Countercultural Communities

That is why I have been following a sort of countercultural movement that seems to be blossoming now in America. People are seeking to build vibrant alternatives to the mainstream, versions of the good life that are idealistic, intense and built around the mutual dependence only possible in small communities. The people I am interested in have often gone through some sort of personal awakening—perhaps they discovered faith or became dissatisfied with the 9-to-5 monotony of workaday life. They are religious converts, hard-core environmentalists, skeptics of consumer capitalism. And they are willing to radically alter the way they live in search of the good life.

There are small networks of Black schools, community gardens and food-distribution centers that fashion themselves after the work of Marcus Garvey, the 19th-century thinker and activist who argued that freedom for Black people can only be won through self-reliance and independence from existing, white-dominated institutions. Or, to consider something radically different, there is St. Mary's, Kan., a little Catholic town almost exactly in the middle of the country, where parishioners of the Society of St. Pius X (a priestly order that is considered canonically irregular by the Vatican) have built a community where they can worship, play, work and teach their children surrounded by people who share their theological convictions. The priests celebrate Mass in Latin, the families have tons of babies, and the life cycle of the town runs on a Catholic liturgical calendar.

Vibrant, largely young communities like St. Mary's, whose members see themselves as stewards of true faith and tradition against the secularization and liberalization of American society, have been the subject of much discussion in elite, conservative circles. An unexpected theater hit in 2019, "Heroes of the Fourth Turning," centered on a fictional Catholic college in Wyoming whose students and faculty had created a mini utopia of conservative values. Notably, Rod Dreher chronicled these kinds of communities in his 2017 book *The Benedict Option*, in which he called on Christians to gird themselves for a long period of cultural marginalization. Mr. Dreher imagines and observes people building their own schools, developing rich prayer practices and, above all, insulating themselves from the toxic influences of secular American culture. Much of his book focuses on the expansion of L.G.B.T. rights and acceptance in America, purporting to show why conservatives should anticipate cultural rejection in the years to come. In Mr. Dreher's telling, at least, one motivation for opting out is fear. He is convinced that mainstream America no longer celebrates, or perhaps even tolerates, people who share his beliefs.

But I think this focus on conservative retrenchment misses the richness of this countercultural moment. American life is not possible, or does not work, for so many people—it is either unattainable, unaffordable or uninspiring. The choice to live differently does not have to be motivated by terror or anxiety. It can also be driven by a search for broader horizons.

American history is littered with examples of utopian projects, built out of religious zeal or an idealistic vision for

the common good. Members of the mid-19th century Oneida community in upstate New York believed Jesus had already returned and that sinless perfection was possible in present-day times. A little closer to the mainstream, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin founded Catholic Worker houses out of a desire to model Catholic social teachings: living in community, forfeiting personal wealth, offering hospitality to the poor. People in these communities believed that to live well, you have to give up nearly everything: your privacy, your claim to personal property, your assumptions about the structure of life. They had a vision for what was true and righteous, and they were willing to radically transform their lives to obtain it.

Perhaps, if people were left alone to build their little ideal communities, there would be less fodder for the culture wars. No side would need to defeat the other in a battle for the soul of America. We could each define the soul of America as we wish. And yet, the challenge is in doing this without losing a kind of civic vocabulary, an ability to empathically imagine the life and perspective of our neighbors. No matter how much we may fantasize about a world perfectly crafted to reflect our beliefs, surrounded by people who share our taste and convictions, the truth is that America works only if starkly different people are willing to vote in the same precincts, to respect each other's rights and traditions, and to remain civil at city council meetings. We are caught between the demands of nationhood that lock us into dangerous cycles of conflict and the search for a small, good life that may tempt us to neglect our duties to engage as citizens.

We are living through a period of crisis in American life, in which it is no longer obvious that Americans share a sense of stewardship over our democracy. Our disunity is evident in the biggest news stories of the day. Crowds of protesters faced off against police night after night in cities listed off like war zones on the front page: Portland, Kenosha, Minneapolis. Culture-war fights bloom over the smallest impositions on our daily lives, like wearing a mask to diminish the spread of Covid-19. And our collective anger over politics has spiked dangerously. While polling is a rough and unrefined tool for understanding how Americans are feeling and thinking, the numbers are stark. A New York Times survey from early this summer found that voters are mostly feeling scared, anxious and exhausted about the state of affairs in our country. A CNN poll in August found that nearly 80 percent of Americans say they are angry about how things are going in this country, including more than half who say they are very angry. Previous CNN surveys asking the same question never found levels of American anger anywhere near this high.

It will be months, years even, before we fully understand the way American communal life has been affected by Covid-19. No in-person gatherings for months on end. Donations drying up as families struggle with unemployment or salary cuts in this economic drought. People moving away from cities in an attempt to find more affordable housing or to care for sick parents or siblings.

The biggest megachurches and richest organizations will be fine. It is the fledgling communities that will founder: the small churches with bi-vocational pastors, the vibrant grassroots groups that do not own a building or have much by way of savings, the communities of women religious whose numbers have literally been cut in half because of Covid-19 deaths. Zoom is no replacement for praying together in person, hands joined as voices rise together in hymns. New babies deserve to be feted with communal meal trains and passed from person to person in the back of a social hall. Mourning demands long hours of sitting together in quiet, a parade of neighbors showing up with aluminum trays of rosewater sweets. This quotidian form of togetherness is not to be taken for granted. It is one more painful thing to lose in our pandemic times.

This year will be remembered for many things—Covid-19, mass protests, the presidential election. But the theme lingering behind it all will be communal breaking, the further fracturing of an already isolated and angry nation. Community seems like a long-lost indulgence. Any kind of collective gathering feels like a precious treat that might be taken away at any moment. Pain, struggle and anxiety are the language of this year. When I ask my neighbors how they are doing, they mostly say, "Hanging in there." It is a strange time to be thinking about radical new forms of community, to be questioning our assumptions about how we need to live in order to live well. But maybe that is a small gift in an otherwise lost year. Perhaps pandemic times will give us the freedom to question everything, and to commence new experiments in living.

Emma Green*, a staff writer at The Atlantic, is the 2020 laureate of the George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize for Excellence in Journalism, Arts & Letters for outstanding work in the category of journalism. The prize is co-sponsored by America Media and the Saint Thomas More Catholic Chapel & Center at Yale University.*

BACK TO WORK

Is the church losing touch with blue-collar Catholics?

By Kevin Clarke

Charles Perko admits it will not stand up well as an excuse, but he does offer it up as an "explanation." Too many Sundays he has missed Mass, he says, because he was too tired after a 12-hour shift the night before to make it to church. Workweeks loaded with overtime have not helped, of course. "After 60- or 72-hour weeks, I'm absolutely exhausted," he says.

Despite the physical grind and the impact on his family, he, like most of his fellow steelworkers, is reluctant to turn down overtime. "You can't live on 40 hours a week," he explains.

Bouncing back and forth between day and night shifts also weakens his resolve to get to Mass. "I think a lot of people in the bottom 40 percent work jobs that have rotating

Participants recite the Lord's Prayer during Mass at the Labor Day Encuentro gathering at Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington, N.Y., on Sept. 3.
CNS photo/ Gregory A. Shemitz, Long Island Catholic

shifts," Mr. Perko says.

He has other reasons for an at-times tenuous connection to the church. He is a bit annoyed by those Catholic bishops who denigrate Pope Francis, whom he holds in high esteem as a risk-taker and truth-teller. And as the president of a United Steelworkers local in Pueblo, Colo., he has bristled when church leaders attempt to dictate how he should vote, pushing parishioners toward candidates who may share the church's position on abortion but otherwise fail to check any political boxes for this union leader.

"When you have someone reading a letter telling you that you're going to hell because you support the candidate who wants people to eat—that doesn't jibe with me," he says.

"I've never lost my desire to be in the church," Mr. Perko adds, "but I had no desire to be part of a growing conservative movement that I saw in the church."

No Time Off for Mass?

Mr. Perko's disaffection reflects an ongoing challenge for the contemporary Catholic Church in the United States. Attendance and affiliation have been eroding steadily since the 1970s for all income brackets, but the sharpest decline has been among the two bottom economic quartiles, according to data gleaned from the U.S. Census American Community Survey.

When Ryan Burge, an assistant professor of political science at Eastern Illinois University, ran the numbers for **America**, he located the greatest drop-offs in Mass

> ‘I worry that people think you have to have your life together before you show your face at church,’ Mr. Carney says. ‘That’s backward.’

attendance among self-described Catholics in the lowest income bracket. Those who said they “never attend” Mass jumped from 6 percent in 1972 to just under 25 percent in 2018. In the bracket just above these Catholics, Mr. Burge found another significant leap in never-attenders, from just over 1 percent to 21 percent.

Meanwhile, at the top income quartile, never-attenders went to 13 percent from 4 percent, and in the quartile just below the top, the percentage jumped to 17 percent from almost 2 percent.

Mr. Burge reports that in 2018, some 30 percent of white Catholics who earned $50,000 to $100,000 annually said they attended Mass weekly, similar to the 33 percent of those who earned more than $100,000. Weekly attendance among non-white Catholics in the same income groups was about five percentage points lower.

At the same time, only 23 percent of white Catholics who earned less than $50,000 said they were were attending Mass each week, and non-white Catholics in that income bracket slipped six percentage points in just two years, falling to 21 percent from 27 percent between 2016 and 2018.

Church attendance “is a luxury for many people who are low-income,” Mr. Burge says. “They have to work long hours at multiple jobs, and they just have scheduling conflicts or are just too tired to do one more thing.”

Crunching a different data set at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, Mark Gray, the director of Catholic polls and a senior research associate, found drops in weekly Mass attendance since the 1970s among all income groups but separated by only a few percentage points between economic groups. A few other numbers stood out, however. The share of “lower class” Catholics who maintained “a great deal” of confidence in the church declined to 21 percent from 49 percent between the 1970s and 2010s; and the retention rate, measuring the share of people raised as Catholic who still identify with the faith, declined to 59 percent from 92 percent for this quartile.

At the upper end of the income spectrum, confidence in the church, after dropping sharply during the 1970s, has actually been on the rise, to 38 percent in the 2010s from 28 percent in the 1980s, while the retention rate among the highest-income Catholics has remained steady, at about 70 percent.

The numbers suggest that a once largely hardscrabble church is losing touch with its working-class members. Is the U.S. church in danger of becoming a spiritual enclave for middle- and upper-class Catholics?

Essential Work

In normal times, Caroline Black is a weekly Massgoer who seeks out confession at least once a month. But, as for many others, her routines have been completely thrown off by the coronavirus pandemic. After a busy week as a supermarket cashier, she has been too tired for even live-streamed Mass these days, she says in an email, describing her life as a working-class Catholic in rural Georgia. She does not own a car, so she has been unable to attend drive-through confession.

At her parish, she says, she joined “a lot of women’s group things that required money to attend, and I was lucky to have the fees waived. But it seems to me that the vast majority of my acquaintances from such events were middle- to upper-class.” She notes “the throwing of rather lavish parties and the invitations to large homes” as something

CNS photo/Chaz Muth

Aleisha Lee, a chef for Catholic Charities, prepares sandwiches at the St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families facility in Avondale, Md., on July 14.

"very different" from what she experienced growing up in the Methodist Church.

"Pay to play" activities that "just reek of bourgeoisie" are beyond her reach. Near-annual pilgrimages, for example, "that are almost always overpriced" take fellow parishioners to "some fancy part of the world," she says. Fundraising drives for a new organ, vestments and hymnals are another source of anxiety. She describes a church "constantly renovating and materially 'improving' itself so that it is more appealing to the eye," while she sees the material needs among the people of the parish as more pressing.

"I think the church has a long history of caring for the poor and, with people like Dorothy Day, a history of caring for workers' rights," Ms. Black says. "But I think that it has grown lax in its vision and in its action and has rested on the laurels of the past without wanting to do much for the present and the future.

"It relies too much upon the pockets of the wealthy for everything," she adds, "and...sort of pushes away the working-class people who want to be a part of it but can't afford [to contribute] above their tithes."

Finding Meaning Outside the Parish

Aimee Shelide Mayer is a representative for the Catholic Labor Network in Nashville, Tenn. Catholics are a minority in her part of the United States, and union organizers an even rarer commodity. But she has little trouble bumping into tentative or former Catholics in her outreach among Latino immigrants who increasingly call Nashville home. The state's Latino population has leaped nearly tenfold since 1980, to more than 328,000.

Ms. Shelide Mayer has previously worked "on the church side" in parish ministry and has made a career out of building connections between labor and church. She notes a few practical issues that affect the relationship.

Many of the working-class people she meets, single moms or parents in busy double-income households, "are barely able to make it to Mass and are not able to be involved beyond that because of their work schedules. And because of that, they don't really feel like they belong."

At work during parish meetings that are held in daylight hours and too exhausted to attend meetings at night, they do not see themselves represented in parish leadership, she says. Also, for those without cars, churches can be hard to reach if they are not located along bus routes, and harder still on Sundays when those bus lines are running limited schedules or shut down completely.

Some have drifted from the church, she speculates, because they are finding more meaning and opportunities for leadership elsewhere.

An immigrant from Mexico who settled in Nashville in the 1990s, Julio Fernandez has acquired English-language skills and is frequently asked to mediate disputes with police, landlords or employers. He has learned a great deal about the commonplace discrimination and exploitation experienced by Latinos in Nashville.

Young Latinos in Nashville are regarded with suspicion by police, who treat them uniformly as gang members, he says; and undocumented and even resident immigrants from Central and Latin America are often robbed of wages by restaurant owners, factory supervisors or construction subcontractors. He has been troubled to discover fellow Catholics among these abusive employers.

He was once deeply involved in his parish; now he devotes more time to labor and secular justice campaigns like Jobs With Justice, the Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition and the National Guestworker Alliance. He still connects with Catholic parishes to recruit people for demonstrations but wishes he could count on local pastors and parishioners as allies. He has struggled even to get permission to hand out informational pamphlets about worker rights at parishes in Nashville. They were deemed too political, he says.

"Learning English is a skill; it's a tool" that can help

‘I think the church has a long history of caring for the poor and, with people like Dorothy Day, a history of caring for workers’ rights,’ Ms. Black says. ‘But I think that it has grown lax in its vision.’

Latino workers in Tennessee, he says. “So is learning their rights.” He adds that too many workers in this right-to-work state, especially those who are undocumented, remain deeply vulnerable to unscrupulous employers and believe they cannot defend themselves because of the threat of deportation.

Mr. Fernandez notes all the “romantic” words the church uses about justice and human dignity but says he has learned that the fight for justice is battled out in small victories and losses every day. He would be overjoyed, he says, to feel that the church was consistently at his side in that struggle.

Out-of-Touch Homilies

Bishop John Stowe, O.F.M.Conv., who leads the Diocese of Lexington, Ky., notes that receiving the Eucharist is not the only source of spiritual sustenance at Mass. But he worries that homilies that get bogged down on theological issues and infrequently reflect the everyday lives of the lower-income parishioners could be a cause of working-class drift.

He warns that a church that does not take seriously “the concerns of working mothers” or take a stand on the struggles of the working class, like “lacking health care insurance or lacking the basic necessities,” is a church running the risk of “losing people because they are not fed.”

Because of parish closings, consolidations and mergers, and the ongoing vocation crisis, priests are ministering to larger and more complex church communities. This makes crafting the weekly homily a challenging proposition. “It probably was easier to make homilies relevant when there was some kind of cohesion among the congregation to begin with, whether it was the same ethnic group or socioeconomic level,” Bishop Stowe acknowledges. “So you have to work harder at it. But isn’t that what it means to be Catholic—the universal church?

“That’s where the old ‘comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable’ comes to play,” he adds. “The church has to be both, and the homily has to be both.” It should prompt an examination of conscience for everyone in the pews, regardless of class, he says.

There are, of course, larger issues affecting the relationship of working-class people with the church. The sexual abuse crisis has damaged esteem for the church across all income classes, says David Spesia, the executive director of the Secretariat of Evangelization and Catechesis for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He wonders what a study of the socioeconomic background of the thousands of victims of sexual assault by priests might reveal. “Did they tend to be lower-income?” What might be the ripple effect, he asks, “to any given family where that occurred and their [extended] family and friends?”

Another possible issue: The sacrament of marriage can be a key introduction to a parish community and the beginning of a life connected to the church; and while marriage rates have dropped substantially across all classes of Americans, they have fallen hardest among lower-income Americans. According to a report from the Institute for Family Studies, low-income and working-class Americans experience higher rates of “family instability, single parenthood and life-long singleness” than do higher income groups. Many are simply not forming families, which would presumably draw them closer to the church.

Suburbanization has been another contributor to the lack of connection. “The church is in some ways following the money,” says John Russo, a visiting scholar at the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University. U.S. dioceses followed white Catholics as they moved to the suburbs. As these newly middle-class Catholics departed, urban dioceses struggled to keep churches and schools open, limiting access to the church for Catholics who remained behind or new immigrant Catholics.

The declining economic status of U.S. workers since the 1970s, following massive job outsourcing to countries with lower wages and the diminishing political might of the labor movement, is part of the puzzle, Mr. Russo argues. He had an unwelcome front-row perspective on the process of U.S. deindustrialization in Youngstown, Ohio, where his family has deep union roots. “One of the problems with deindustrialization is you lose faith in institutions—political, religious, corporate,” he says.

The children and grandchildren of that economic dislocation are now among the contemporary Catholics joining the great atomization of U.S. life, abandoning parish

halls and retreating to man caves and she sheds, Netflix and social media. Timothy P. Carney, who wrote about the phenomenon in his 2019 book, *Alienated America*, worries that these nominally Catholic members of the working class are not achieving a kind of emotional self-sufficiency but are instead engaging in a less wholesome withdrawal from everything—civic, social and spiritual life.

"It's one of the manifestations of that deinstitutionalization, but the church should be the outlier, if we are what Jesus wants us to be," he says. "The church should be the place the poor turn away from last."

Mr. Carney is convinced that the expanded role of government has played a part. "[Government] crowding out is a real thing," he says, arguing that as federal and state governments step in to assume larger roles in responding to economic need, the parish—once a hub of spiritual and social life and material assistance—loses relevance. "When you've got food stamps, why do you need the church?" he asks.

Government's interstitial presence, he argues, disconnects from the church not only people who might have turned to it seeking charity but also those church members willing to step in to help. "They're losing the poor and the people who want to volunteer to serve the poor.

"The real crime is if you would give the poor person all the support for food and rent that they need, they are still losing by not going to church," Mr. Carney says. In the contemporary United States, he says, "we have a decent safety net, but what we don't have for poor people is for them to belong to something."

Listening to Christian radio in Washington, D.C., he frequently hears testimonials from men and women who had their struggles but were able to find sustenance and recovery at church. "All stories of people who had something really broken, but it was Jesus that helped them," he says. "That really drove that point home that Pope Francis is making, that church is a field hospital."

But a sense of church as being a refuge seems to have diminished among many who have become too "embarrassed" to participate. "I worry that people think you have to have your life together before you show your face at church," Mr. Carney says. "That's backward."

Solidarity Forever?

But if, as Mr. Carney believes, the local parish has been deprived of a relationship-building role as an agent of charity, could the church find renewal by standing up as an advocate for justice and equity? Joe McCartin thinks so.

CNS photo/Karen Callaway, Catholic New World

Bishop John E. Stowe of Lexington, Ky., prays over a migrant worker following Mass with Auxiliary Bishop John R. Manz of Chicago on Sept. 21 at Ashford Stud Horse Farm in Lexington.

The executive director of the Kalmanovitz Initiative, mentioned above, Mr. McCartin says that in order to reconnect with the working class, the church should "prioritize its social teachings on issues of work, workers' rights, power and structural inequality."

Commenting by email, he said, "These teachings have been there for decades, but recent U.S. church leaders have—with some notable exceptions—generally marginalized...and grown distant from them." The church has certainly continued to speak out on issues that affect the poor, he says, but it has "soft-pedaled its teachings on the dignity of work and the rights of workers to organize and bargain collectively over their working conditions." It lost its voice on such matters, according to Mr. McCartin, at a crucial historical moment, as wealth and power became increasingly concentrated in the top economic tier in the United States.

Contemporary immigrant parishes may prove exceptions, he says; but the vibrant connection between the church and the working class evident in the mid-20th century, "when labor priests and Catholic labor schools provided a material witness to the church's commitment to a

U.S. Latinos: A Fluid Catholic Identity

Carmen Nanko-Fernández, the director of the Hispanic Theology and Ministry Program at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, thinks the issue of working-class Catholics falling away from the church is an important concern that warrants deeper study. But she resists drawing broad conclusions from slim demographic information—especially when it is applied to the U.S. Catholic Latino community as if it were an ethnic and economic monolith. That multinational, multiethnic and multiclass community is too dense and too varied to be easily characterized, she argues.

Ms. Nanko-Fernández says Catholic identity among U.S. Latinos is fluid, shifting according to income and region. Some Latino Catholics identify firmly with their local parish. Others, embracing "popular religion," may maintain a looser connection but one that remains identifiably Catholic. And with so many Latino Catholics working in service industries that require them to work on Sundays, Mass attendance makes a poor marker of Catholic identity, she argues.

In majority-Latino parishes, she adds, a complex mix of issues and motivations prompts the presence of individuals in the pews. Borderland parishes may include undocumented members, who endure the lowest incomes, alongside Latino doctors, judges and border patrol agents, people who are multigenerational members of U.S. society whose roots are so deep, "the border moved over them."

faith that does justice," has "atrophied severely."

"If the church hopes to increase the engagement of low-income Catholics, I think it must show that it will accompany them and encourage them to struggle for justice," Mr. McCartin concludes.

Such "paths of justice" represent opportunities to re-engage "with those who are not religiously affiliated," Mr. Spesia adds. But burdened with large, costly institutions, the church is not as "nimble as maybe we once were."

"It's almost like we need to rediscover what we once knew. It's going back to the beginning and rediscovering the church in the early centuries," he says.

"Maybe we were a little too eager to embrace the so-called American Dream," he adds. "There is a certain level of comfort that a lot of American Catholics have settled into." Fortunately, a "return to the core Gospel that Pope Francis keeps bringing us to challenges a lot of that. Pastoral and missionary conversion...[are] absolutely what we need at this moment."

The church has a treasury of social teaching to help guide it in a possible revived stand with working people, Bishop Stowe says. But he wonders if its priests and laypeople are equipped to share the tradition.

In many seminaries, Catholic social teaching is "too often treated as a specialty or a special-interest kind of class," he says, rather than a subject that must be "integrated into what it is to be Catholic." He adds that the same can be said of much of the preparation for lay ministries.

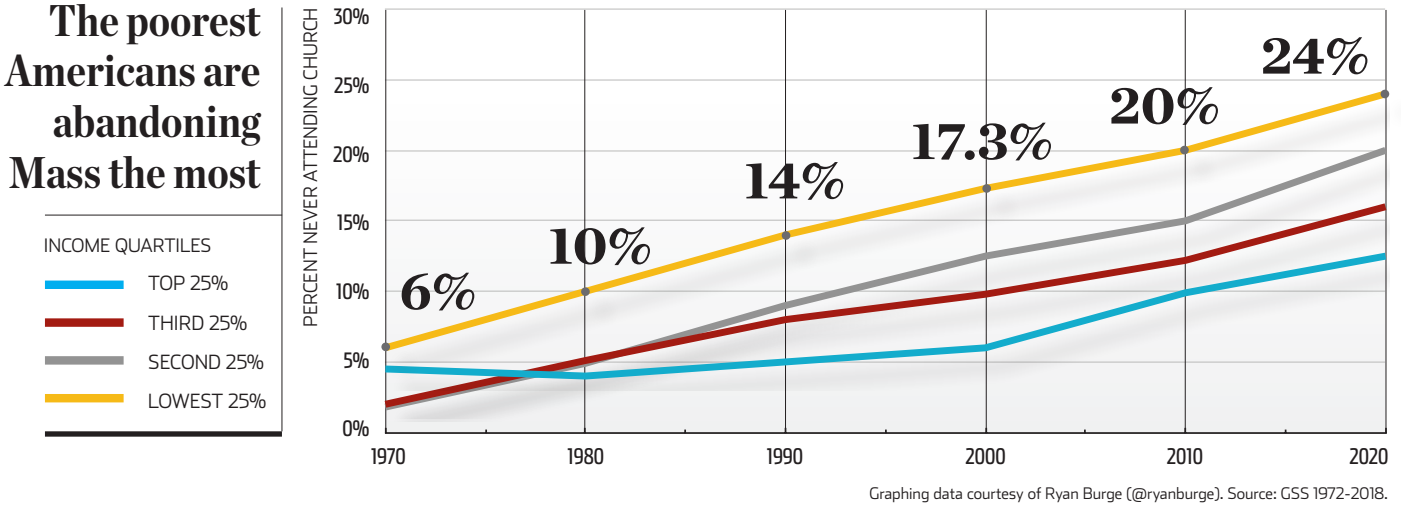
The topic comes up frequently in his work on the subcommittee for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, where bishops have expressed concerns about young clergymen disinterested in learning about social and economic justice but immersed in a curriculum that promises to equip them to serve as "spiritual fathers."

"How can you be a spiritual father if you are not interested in the whole person?" Bishop Stowe asks.

Rebuilding the Relationship

Pope Leo XIII's "Rerum Novarum," the encyclical that began the church's tradition of social teaching in 1891, was written partly out of concern that the church was losing 19th-century Catholic workers to socialist movements. Surveying today's political and economic landscape, Bishop Stowe wonders if the church faces the same risk now, this time losing Catholics to "populism rather than communism."

Mr. Russo suggests that a great place for the church to start rebuilding its relationship with low-income and



Graphing data courtesy of Ryan Burge (@ryanburge). Source: GSS 1972-2018.

working-class people would be to stand up for workers facing the greatest hardships during these extraordinary times—workers abandoned to unemployment because of the coronavirus pandemic and those, often ill-prepared and undercompensated, forced to stand on its front lines.

Ms. Black, the cashier, would welcome the church coming to her aid right now, as a suddenly "essential" worker in a job that previously had not been held in such high esteem in American life. Can she count on her church leaders to back demands for protective gear on the job, hazard pay and, over the long haul, a wage that would eliminate some of the insecurity in her life? She is still waiting for an answer to those questions.

Across the country in California, Maria Linder is one of the pandemic's employment casualties. As the coronavirus lockdown began in March, she was abruptly terminated from a housekeeping position she had held for 26 years at the Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles, along with more than 250 other workers.

The current plan of the hotel owners is to transform the former celebrity enclave into a private club, dodging an obligation to rehire terminated employees should business return to something like normal. Ms. Linder has no idea what comes next for her. At 67 years of age, "Nobody wants me now," she says. "I am too old."

A native of Guadalajara, Mexico, she came to the United States as a young widow with four children. She has always felt welcomed at her parish in the city of Hawthorne, but following its Masses on livestream now, she has yet to hear any commentary about her plight or the struggles of other workers during the pandemic.

She is not sure if she can turn to her church for material support; she has never had to seek assistance before. "I try to always go to Mass, but it is not the biggest focus of my life because I work a lot and I have a child with special needs," she says. Even with its doors closed, she says, "the church could really help us with our struggle."

A recent letter from the Jesuits West Province urging Governor Gavin Newsom of California to require employers to restore terminated workers when the crisis inevitably concludes was a welcome practical expression of support, and a union organizer for Unite Here Local 11 reports that streaming Masses offered for the benefit of hotel and hospitality workers by Dolores Mission in Los Angeles have been great spiritual and morale boosts for the industry's laid-off and terminated workers.

But to have representatives from the church joining her in the fight against her former employer would simply fill her with happiness, Ms. Linder says. It would feel "like God were blessing our struggle," she says. "In this time, with so many difficulties and sadness, [if] the church could accompany us, it could help us find a solution to our problems," she says.

Ike Michael Udoh, S.J., a pastoral minister at Blessed Sacrament Jesuit Parish in Hollywood, Calif., describes such accompaniment as an essential aspect of "a faith that does justice."

"There is something that makes your faith so alive," he says, "when you are able to just share in the joys and the struggles and the trials of the body of Christ—the people who make us the same community of faith."

From its earliest days, Father Udoh points out, the church has been threatened with conflict and division because of its economic, social and ethnic complexity. "But," he says, "we are always being invited through our faith in him to remember that we are one."

Kevin Clarke *is* ***America****'s chief correspondent and the author of* Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out *(Liturgical Press).*

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Until the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), councils were essentially legislative and judicial bodies.

Who Governs the Church?

By John W. O'Malley

History shows that authority in the church has taken many forms.

As every Catholic knows, the pope runs the church. Is it not exceedingly strange, therefore, to call church governance an open question? Yes, it is strange, but I feel compelled to do so for three reasons. First, I have just published a book, *When Bishops Meet,* in which the third chapter is entitled "Who Is in Charge?" That question arose with unavoidable force as I compared and contrasted the last three church-wide councils: Trent, Vatican I and Vatican II. That review of the councils showed clearly that, historically speaking, the question of who runs the church is complex—and cannot be reduced to the papacy.

Is this simply an academic issue of no immediate import? I think not. The sexual-abuse crisis has moved the question of who runs the church from the peaceful groves of academe to the public square. This is a second reason to examine the question of church governance. The crisis first broke in Boston in 2001 but soon revealed itself as a church-wide problem of profound import. The many measures already taken by the bishops of the United States to deal with this crisis have had good effect. We hope and pray that the rigorous measures Pope Francis has mandated will have a similar effect worldwide. Much remains to be done, but a good beginning has been made.

We must not forget that. We also must not forget that, as the years have passed since 2001, it has become clear that at its roots the crisis is a crisis of leadership. The leaders of the church, the men in charge of the church's well-being, failed to take the measures we had every right to expect them to take.

The third reason I feel compelled to address that issue is the emergence of synodality—the promotion of synods as an appropriate and needed component in the life of the church in today's world—in recent documents from the Holy See. It in essence promotes a modification of the current processes of church governance and polity. Unfortunately, theologians and the Catholic media in the United States have paid scant attention to this development. In that regard, we lag behind other parts of the church.

What's a Council for?

What do ecumenical councils do? What are they for? Why do we need them? Up until the Second Vatican Council

Editor's note: This essay is adapted from a symposium at the Lumen Christi Institute in Chicago, Ill., on Nov. 4, 2019.

> In their impact, the councils were often as much cultural institutions as ecclesiastical ones.

(1962-65), councils were essentially legislative and judicial bodies. They made laws and rendered judgment of guilt or innocence on persons accused of the ecclesiastical crime of heresy. They acted thus as a legislative assembly and a court of criminal justice.

In that regard, Vatican II is utterly different because it did not see itself as primarily legislative and judicial. It had a different purpose because it had adopted literary forms different from law-making and verdict-rendering. Although good order in the church was of course a concern of the council, Vatican II was a meeting in which the bishops explored and articulated anew the church's identity, recalled and developed the church's deepest values and proclaimed to the world the church's sublime vision for humanity. Until we understand that shift in definition of what Vatican II intended to accomplish, we search in vain for a satisfactory grasp of what it was all about.

Who is in charge at a council? Who are the persons constitutive of councils and who holds the decision-making authority? I suggest there are four groups: the popes and the Roman Curia, the theologians, the laity and other influences—that is, those persons (like Luther) or those larger realities (like the modern world) that very much influenced a given council even though they were not Catholic and not physically present. These entities played different roles in each of the three councils. In the Council of Trent, for instance, the Roman Curia played no direct role, which is altogether different from its major role in both the First Vatican Council and Vatican II. There is a dynamism intrinsic to the synodal aspect of church governance.

Even with that dynamism, the councils have shown remarkable stability through the two millennia of their history. They show stability and continuity with one another because the bishops have from the beginning constituted their essential and core membership and have unfailingly exercised in them the decision-making authority. That holds for the 21 councils Catholics generally recognize as ecumenical, or church-wide, and for the hundreds upon hundreds of diocesan, regional or national councils/synods that have flourished through the centuries.

What difference did they make? This question includes what we normally mean when we ask how successfully a council was implemented but also goes beyond to such things as a council's unintended consequences. These were often more important than the intended consequences. In their impact, the councils were often as much a cultural institution as an ecclesiastical one.

Trent and All That

By the fourth century, three agents shared responsibility in church governance: popes, bishops with their synods and secular authorities. After the Great Eastern Schism of the 11th century, when the Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking churches decided to go their separate ways, the popes began to assume ever-greater authority, including the right to convoke councils.

Moreover, as national monarchies developed at about that time in France, England and elsewhere, the Holy Roman Emperor's authority lost much of its political punch, even though the prestige of the office remained high. Other than that, by the time of the Council of Trent in the 16th century, the three agents had changed little in their essential functions regarding church governance. In that regard, they acted sometimes as partners, sometimes as rivals.

Trent was the last council in which this trinity was fully operative. The cry for a council to resolve the issues raised by Luther broke out almost immediately after his excommunication in 1521. Holy Roman Emperor Charles V took up the cry and became the most consistent, insistent and authoritative advocate for it over the next 25 years. Pope Clement VII, fearful that a council might try to depose him, slithered out of every corner into which the emperor forced him, but the next pope, Paul III, agreed to convoke a council at Trent, hundreds of miles from Rome. Had it not been for the emperor's constant pressure, the council might never have taken place.

Pope Paul III wanted to restrict the council's agenda to answering the doctrinal questions Luther raised, hoping to

keep reform of the church, especially reform of the Roman Curia, in his own hands. The emperor insisted the council also undertake church reform, and do so before addressing doctrinal issues. Caught between these two pressures, the council decided on the sensible course of doing both, and doing them in tandem.

For the Council of Trent, the rulers chose most of the theologians. In 1551, Queen Mary of Hungary, for instance, sent eight. The pope sent two. At Vatican II, in contrast, Pope John XXIII or Pope Paul VI chose every one of the almost 500 theologians officially accredited to the council. At Trent, moreover, all rulers and political entities of any size sent envoys to the council to represent their concerns. Even if they were laymen, the envoys had the privilege of addressing the council when they presented their credentials. In 1562, for instance, Sigismund Baumgartner, a lay envoy of the Duke of Bavaria, addressed the council and pleaded for the ordination to the priesthood of married men of proven integrity—for German-speaking lands, at least.

In its closing measures, the council mandated that the three traditional agents in church governance see to the proper implementation of its decrees. It reminded the princes of their duty to enforce them. It decreed that every bishop should hold a synod annually in his diocese to do the same and to care for the ongoing needs of the local church. It handed certain tasks over to the papacy. This seeming recipe for conflict worked out reasonably well for the next century or so.

The Council to End All Councils

The next ecumenical council (1869-70), Vatican I, was the first council in history in which the laity did not play an active part. The cardinals organizing the council did not, in principle, want to exclude the secular authorities; but the political situation of Europe after the French Revolution was so volatile, so shifting and such a seesaw between monarchy and republic that they did not know how to proceed. Thus, rulers lost their role more by default than by deliberate choice.

The council also famously defined papal primacy and infallibility. Just how that decree was to be interpreted was a matter of great controversy at the time, but it had the effect of persuading people that the pope could and should make all decisions. Thus, there was no need for further councils. Although Vatican I said not a word about them, the collegial tradition of synods was badly sidelined. For example, in the United States, there were no more Councils of Baltimore after 1878.

Third, after the council, the pope gradually acquired exclusive control over the appointment of bishops. This was not so much an effect of the council as it was of the changed political situation in Europe. When in 1870 the new Italian monarchy finally united Italy, the concordats of the Holy See with the former Italian states like the Kingdom of Naples became dead letters. Every one of those concordats had granted the state a right in the nomination of bishops. Because the Holy See deemed the new Italian monarchy utterly illegitimate, it made no concordat with it to replace those that had disappeared.

Therefore, Pius IX had a free hand in episcopal appointments. During 1870 and 1871, he appointed over 100 bishops to Italian sees. No pope ever before had that power. After Italy, the same pattern began to prevail elsewhere. Finally, in 1965, the young Juan Carlos of Spain surrendered the privilege of the Spanish Crown in that regard. For the first time in the history of the church, the appointment of bishops became an exclusively clerical process.

Opening the Windows of the Church

When Pope John XXIII announced a new council in 1959, he put to flight the idea that Vatican I was the council to end all councils. Not only that: The council's most important enactment was its affirmation of the synodal or collegial tradition of the church in the form of episcopal collegiality. That provision in the third chapter of the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" ("Lumen Gentium") stated that the college of bishops with and under the successor of St. Peter governs the church. The provision reaffirmed the ancient and fundamental ecclesiological tradition that the governance of the Catholic Church is both hierarchical and collegial.

In other documents, the council applied the collegial principle to bishops' relationships with their priests and priests with their flocks. Episcopal collegiality most obviously comes into play in an ecumenical council, but is not restricted to such rare occasions. The council recognized the need to find an institution to make collegiality operative as an ongoing mode of church governance.

Before it could begin to address that issue, Pope Paul VI intervened and created the Synod of Bishops. By making the Synod of Bishops a purely consultative body, the pope redefined the word synod so that it was no longer synonymous with council, which is a decision-making body. In any case, after the council some bishops complained that the Synod of Bishops sometimes seemed

> Among the council's teachings that Pope Francis has especially taken to heart is collegiality.

merely a rubber stamp for decisions reached even before the bishops met.

Walking Together

Let us now fast-forward from 1965 to 2001 and the explosion of the sexual-abuse scandal—and to 2018, when it intensified with the report of the attorney general of Pennsylvania and the defrocking of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. A perennial question took on new urgency: Who will guard the guardians? While the measures now in place have been reasonably effective, I have begun to think that we need to fit the crisis and its solution into the larger tradition of church governance that Pope Francis is proposing.

Pope Francis is a complex man, not easily understood. Nonetheless, three influences upon him have been paramount: his life in the Global South, his Jesuit vocation and his understanding and appropriation of Vatican II. He is the first pope in 50 years who did not take part in the Second Vatican Council. In a paradoxical way, his nonparticipation has been an advantage, because he is not on some deep psychological level still fighting the battles of the council.

Among the council's teachings that he has especially taken to heart is collegiality, as was clear while he was still archbishop of Buenos Aires. At that time, he persuaded Pope Benedict to restore authority to Celam, the Conference of Bishops of Latin America. As pope, he has most clearly advocated for collegiality in the way he handles the Synod of Bishops. Under him, the synod has in theory retained its consultative function, but he has given the bishops a new freedom of expression, has regularly introduced laypeople as active members of the meetings and has arguably seen to it that the final document represents the true outcome of the debates.

In the past few years, however, the synodal issue has risen to a new level of prominence and articulation. On March 18, 2018, the International Theological Commission issued an extraordinary report entitled "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church." Pope Paul VI established the commission in 1969, just after Vatican II. Its remit is to advise the magisterium of the church, especially the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on issues current in the church. The report unmistakably makes church governance an open question because it advocates a change in the way church governance has generally functioned since Vatican I. It advocates the reintroduction of diocesan, regional, national and international synods as a regular feature of church life.

The scholarship that undergirds the document is first-rate on every aspect of the subject. The document is, however, more than an academic review of the issue, which is what we normally expect from the International Theological Commission. This document looks to action. It advocates synodality and suggests how it is to be made operative.

It opens with a prologue in which it makes some remarkable assertions about the immediacy of synodality for the church today. It quotes, for instance, the allocution Pope Francis gave in 2015 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Pope Paul's creation of the Synod of Bishops. "It is precisely this path of Synodality that Christ expects of the church of the third millennium." Francis stressed that synodality is "an essential dimension of the church." It is impossible to speak of the tradition of the church without speaking of synods. The above review of the history of councils/synods altogether supports that assertion.

With this document, the commission wants "to offer useful guidelines for deepening the theological basis of Synodality and practical orientations for what it means for the church's mission." I would add: and for what it means as a mode of church governance—as a mode of being church.

After establishing the scriptural and historical basis for synodality, the document moves on to the theology of synodality. Next it presents a program for making synodality work in the church. It also reveals the ambitious scope of the proposal. It envisages synodality as operative on every level of church structure—diocesan, regional or national, and international. It explicitly states, moreover, that "the

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participation of the faithful is essential" at every level.

The final chapter, "Conversion to Renew Synodality," tackles the problem that neither bishops nor people are accustomed to acting in a synodal fashion. Without quite saying so, the chapter acknowledges that a change of mentality will not be easy. Implementing synodality, we must conclude, is a long-term project. Will it happen at all? Is it just "pie in the sky, bye and bye"? Perhaps. But if it should be implemented even in a partial and imperfect way, it will by definition have an impact on church governance because synodality is about church governance.

The document itself specifies that one of the positive effects would be to eliminate procedures that do not work or that work only in a one-sided way. In that regard, I think of the possibility of the process of nominating bishops being modified by lay voices gathered officially in synod. At least that is a possibility. Time will tell.

Is church governance an open question? On the one hand, the governance of the Catholic Church has been remarkable for its stability, due in large part to the decision-making authority bishops have enjoyed from the very beginning. With all its warts, the stability of the governance of the church has allowed the church to survive every crisis in its history. On the other hand, the governance of the church has been dynamic. Persons other than the bishops have played official or semi-official roles in that governance also from the beginning of the church. Nor have the roles they played remained static, as is clear even in how differently theologians functioned in Trent than in Vatican II.

Today, two factors have thrown the dynamic element into new prominence. The sexual-abuse crisis has forced us to ask hard questions about church leadership—that is, church governance. The promotion by the Holy See of a renewal of the synodal tradition now similarly compels us to ask hard questions about the status quo of church governance. For all its stability, church governance has been and remains an open question. Stay tuned.

John W. O'Malley, S.J., *is University Professor emeritus in the theology department at Georgetown University.*

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A Diversity of Authority

A response to John W. O'Malley

By Russell Hittinger

I should begin by first thanking John W. O'Malley, S.J., for his trilogy of books on the modern ecumenical councils (Trent, Vatican I and Vatican II), and second for his remarkable addition to that trilogy, *When Bishops Meet*. His work helps us to see that the conciliar tradition enabled the church to face three crises, each of which had to do with the question of reform.

The first, of course, was the 16th-century Reformation, which fragmented the unity of the pre-modern church. Speaking in general terms, the Protestant Reformation in France and Germany was instigated by the corruption of the church, especially on issues of morals and the long-standing arrogance and sloth of ecclesiastical leadership. The Protestant solution was to radically simplify church polity with the aim of preserving the essential core of the Gospel. The reform of Trent, however, resisted the idea that the evangelical core could be preserved by radical simplification of the ecclesial structure. In some ways, Trent made the ecclesial structure more complex.

Three centuries later, the church faced another crisis. Once again, the issue was reform by radical simplification—much more radical than the Protestant reformation. Let us call it the laicist program. The French Revolution quickly overflowed into almost every Catholic country in Europe and the New World. The revolutionary proposition was this: The multitude of offices and orders of the church must be regarded (at least for public purposes) simply as *civil* offices and orders. Because the guiding principles of society were liberty, equality and fraternity, the church was to be seen as a civil fraternity. Pius VII, when he was Cardinal Archbishop of Imola, was prompted to put on his stationery: "Liberty, Equality, and Peace in Our Lord Jesus Christ." The First Vatican Council thus made it clear that the relationship between the pope and the bishops is not a civil fraternity.

A century later at the Second Vatican Council, the bishops acknowledged that the reform of the previous council was incomplete. While it rather successfully preserved one important aspect of church polity—the hierarchical and collegial relationship of apostolic authority—it did not address reform of the even more complex offices and orders and charisms of the church as a social body. One lesson that needs to be learned over and over again is that church reform cannot consist solely in clarifying and enhancing the efficiency of the chain of command. This was a signal and enduring insight of the council—albeit one that is often ignored when passion for reform is at full tilt.

For a social entity organized around hierarchical complementarity, the social parts are not homogeneous. They are qualitatively different and in need of one another. Think of matrimony and family. The distinct social parts are not substitutable or replaceable, or out-sourceable. Collaboration for the purpose of external results that are mutually agreeable suffices for the organization and maintenance of a social utility, but it does not suffice for a social order in which the mutuality and reciprocity of the members is an intrinsically valuable common good.

When considering a social order oriented chiefly to social utility, subsidiarity invariably means devolution, transparency and efficiency—to reach the lowest effective level that makes possible the agreed-upon results. The original meaning of subsidiarity, however, depended on hierarchical complementarity. What do the social parts owe to one another? *Subsidium*—that is, aid and assistance. But not aid that cancels out or replaces what is proper to their *munus*, or social role. Pius XII noted that "every social activity is [of] its nature subsidiary; it must serve as a support to members of the social body and never destroy or absorb them."

Every social body requires collective action. Social order is not spontaneously achieved, but instead requires the members (at least most of them) to be able to imagine the social "whole." I think here of Charles Taylor's term, a "social imaginary" (a repertoire of experiences, actions, symbols, laws, customs) that allows the social parts to know the social whole. If that should recede or become defunct, the chain of command would be ineffective. The legislative and authority structure of the church is not just commonality under commands. It is socially multiformed.

In this regard, modern social institutions have two

Editor's note: This essay is adapted from a symposium at the Lumen Christi Institute in Chicago, Ill., on November 4, 2019.

advantages. First, they are "constructed." Corporations, states, armies and even Facebook friends are designed. We know how they are arrayed and arranged because we made it so. Second, the order is homogeneous: quantitatively complex, but not qualitatively. In a democratic republic such as ours, the parts (citizens) are equal in dignity and rights.

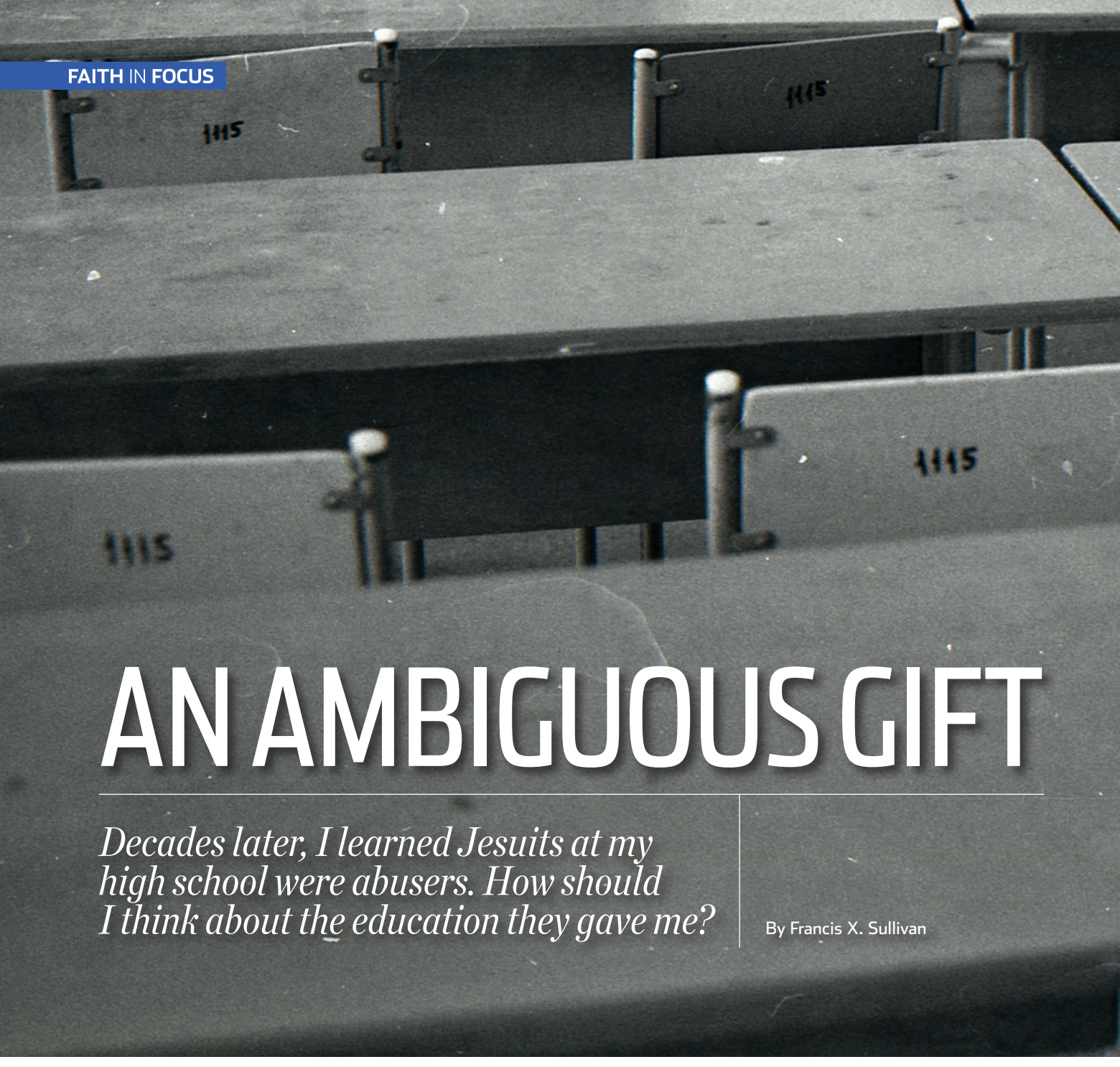
A constructed and relatively homogenous social entity makes it easy, or at least easier, to know the "whole." Think, for example, of the Westphalian system of state sovereignty: command over persons inhabiting a geographically unified territory. (Compare that to its predecessor, the Holy Roman Empire.) Or think of quantitatively huge and complex enterprises like Amazon. It is amenable to managerial direction and, just as importantly, to almost continuous reform based on institutional principles of efficiency and transparency and motivational slogans provided by the human resources department.

But there are other kinds of social communions, including those based on the principle of hierarchical complementarity. This includes various orders and a diversity of offices, gifts and charisms. Our unity requires a mutuality of orders and persons who contribute unique parts to the church's whole. Those parts have to retain their mutuality and distinct roles for the church to succeed in reform.

For a constructed and relatively homogeneous body, the practices of decentralization, transparency and efficiency are usually reliable. But such a model is of limited efficacy in a social order that is multiform and enjoys a common life, a communion. After all, the role of baptized parents to educate their children in the faith is not necessarily the most efficient—but who would deny parents that solemn obligation?

As Father O'Malley has noted, the path of synodality has emerged slowly, in inverse proportion to the urgency with which it is needed. Perhaps that pace is good news, so we can be slowly reformed rather than deformed by the piecemeal application of corporate best-practices to every problem. We must wait to see whether regional synods are a good venue for addressing reform issues that affect the whole ecclesial body. Some of the issues—clerical corruption, irresponsible leadership, the corporate identity of the laity—now have a life of their own across the global church. They might be the harbinger of another ecumenical council. Father O'Malley's trilogy teaches us that this would not be our worst fate.

Russell Hittinger *is a senior fellow at the Lumen Christi Institute and a visiting professor at the University of Chicago School of Law.*



AN AMBIGUOUS GIFT

Decades later, I learned Jesuits at my high school were abusers. How should I think about the education they gave me?

By Francis X. Sullivan

When I graduated in 1983 from Jesuit College Prep, an all-boys high school in Dallas, Tom Hidding, S.J., a scholastic at the time, gave me a simple clay cup and a bowl that he had made himself. The bowl shattered during a move when I was in college. The same accident broke the handle off the cup, but I still drank beer from it, then wine and, on one odd but happy occasion, warm champagne.

In 2001, my family and I bought a house with a glass-fronted kitchen cabinet and the concurrent obligation to find dishes that were worthy of display. We had no fine china or fancy stemware, but we had Tom's cup. Sometimes I would take it down and use it, enjoying the sense of solidity, of holding a piece of my own history in my hands.

I lost touch with Tom after graduation, as I lost touch with almost everyone else from school. But although I lived far away, Dallas Jesuit had not lost touch with me. I got the alumni magazine. I got the fundraising calls from classmates and the letters seeking money for everything

David Shoykhet/ Unsplash

from the art museum to a grooved practice wall for the tennis team. Every year, I got a birthday letter from the Jesuit alumni director, Pat Koch, S.J.

Tom Hidding was good to me. My childhood home was unpredictable and violent, but I felt safe at school because of him and the school's Jesuit priests: Pat Koch; the austere Vince Malatesta, who argued theology with me when I was working the switchboard; gruff Pete Callery, who coached wrestling and taught me freshman theology; and the wry Ben Smylie, who referred to the prosperous neighborhood around our school as the "North Dallas ghetto" because of the concentration of emotional and spiritual poverty he saw in his students and their families.

On a boring day at work in 2002, I searched on the internet for the names of classmates and former teachers. Tom's name came up on bishopaccountability.org; he had been accused of sexually abusing a student at Jesuit High School, in Tampa, Fla., where he was assigned before coming to my school.

I had felt safe at my school. In 2003 I asked myself for the first time: "Was I safe?"

Certainly nothing happened to me. I knew the Jesuits at my school were human beings with human desires. They liked to eat. They got angry. A gay classmate told me that he had gone to a Dallas bathhouse when he was home from college and recognized one of the priests (nobody I have named here). The priest recognized him and ran away. It made sense to me that lonely men condemned, if that is the right word, to celibacy would seek comfort in sexual relationships that did not align with the values they taught us.

But it had never occurred to me that they would seek sexual relationships with students.

Tom had organized a folk music trio with two of my friends during our senior year. He played guitar. I went to the practices in the band building, separate from the rest of the school, and Tom invited me to join, but I declined. (I can't sing.) Looking back with the eyes of a lawyer, I question the wisdom of allowing a teacher to have unsupervised access to students in an isolated building. But that was a long time ago, and things were different.

I also wonder about the other gift Tom brought me. He and I were both runners. He gave me a T-shirt from Taos, N.M. I can still see it. It was grey, with colored lines going across it and "Taos" in red. It was a cut-off T-shirt—what we called a "belly shirt," nice for running in the Dallas heat—but I was too self-conscious to ever wear it.

What a strange gift for a teacher to give a student. It seemed odd then; it seems odder now. A belly shirt? Do teachers give students gifts? Did he give other people gifts or just me? Why was Tom even in New Mexico? Had he gone for a vacation? (Did Jesuit scholastics even get vacations?) Had he gone to study or work? Or had he gone for treatment at a New Mexico monastery that treated deviant priests? I didn't know. I still don't. I doubt I ever will.

Tom died in 2005. I do not know how he died or where

> I loved my school while I was there. I trusted its people to keep me safe, and they did. But was I just lucky?

he was buried or who mourned him. I wish I did. I left his cup on display in the cabinet. Pat Koch died in 2006; the birthday letters continued but without the "Father Pat" signature with the smiling face in the loop of the "P." The fundraising appeals also continued.

In 2017, I found myself at a conference with an Irish-Catholic woman from South Boston. Over dinner and drinks, we and others talked about growing up Catholic. Then somebody asked her about "Spotlight," the movie about the Boston Globe reporters who broke a story on pedophile priests. She told us the story of the devastation of a community at the hands of the people responsible for protecting it. We got drunk, and we all cried.

I left that table shaken. And I thought, "At least that did not happen to us."

In 2018, the U.S. Central and Southern Province finally issued a list of Jesuits credibly accused of the sexual abuse of minors. Thomas J. Hidding was on the list, of course. Another priest at Dallas Jesuit I had barely known was listed. And so was Vincent Malatesta.

Shortly afterward, the Diocese of Dallas issued its own list. It included Hidding, Malatesta and the diocese's most notorious abuser, Rudy Kos. It included two other names: Benjamin Smylie and Patrick Koch. The school's current president, who had been the assistant principal in charge of discipline when I was a student and an occasional lunch partner at the legendary Shakey's Pizza buffet in Dallas, wrote a letter expressing pain for the victims who suffered "and may still suffer."

One of those still-suffering victims is my classmate Mike. We were Boy Scouts together, but I did not know him well. Last year, he sued Dallas Jesuit, alleging that he had recently recovered memories of Father Koch hypnotizing him and sexually abusing him during a one-on-one counseling session. I have not seen or spoken to Mike since graduation, but I believe him. Liars fabricate detail; Mike's allegations are so bizarrely vague that they ring true.

When Mike revealed his abuse, he explained, "I am going to be a man for others, again, for the voices that can't stand up for themselves, but also for the voices yet to even walk through the doors of Jesuit." Another anonymous alum from our time period has alleged that Peter Callery sexually assaulted him after a wrestling tournament in El Paso. The allegation is part of an ongoing lawsuit. (Editor's note: The U.S. Central and Southern Province of the Society of Jesus has said it has not received any other allegations against Father Callery.)

My brother is a fellow J.C.P. alum, more cynical about the institution and the people in it than I am. We exchanged texts about the allegations. He had never liked Father Koch and thought him "creepy." We discussed the allegations for a while. Suddenly he asked, "Was it weird that Koch showed us 'Midnight Cowboy' in sophomore theology?"

We decided it was. "Midnight Cowboy" was the only X-rated movie ever to win an Oscar for Best Picture. It is not a movie for 15-year-olds.

I do not know how to think about my time at Dallas Jesuit. Unlike Mike, I did not stay connected to the school or most of my classmates. We graduated before the internet and email. I live far away. I don't donate during the fundraising drives, and I have never gone to a reunion. I do not really understand people who do. Dallas Jesuit and its people, staff and students were an intimate, essential part of my life once—for four years, ending 37 years ago.

And yet.

My framed Academic Excellence Award for Latin (1981-82) hangs on the wall of my home office. I was a terrible Latin student. I framed the award because of Owen LeBlanc, the Jesuit scholastic who gave it to me and refused to tell me why.

I went to a Jesuit university. I regularly use the analytical and rhetorical tools I learned in high school. I was 30 years old before I realized that being called "Jesuitical" is not necessarily a compliment.

What was Jesuit College Prep in the early 1980s? The

priests lived in community, in a residence attached to the school building. It strains credibility to think they did not know that their colleagues had sexually abused students. If they knew, what does that mean for the other values that they taught?

What does it mean to teach Catholic adolescents how to be a man for others when you live among men who view the students as potential sexual conquests? What does it mean for those of us who tried to internalize those values? What value does community have when leaders exploit vulnerable members and the others do nothing?

I loved my school while I was there. I trusted its people to keep me safe, and they did. But was I just lucky?

What was Tom Hidding? A friend, a predator or both?

I still have his cup. I wish I knew what to do with it.

Francis X. Sullivan *graduated from a Jesuit high school and a Jesuit university. He and his family live in Wisconsin, where he is a lawyer in the state government.*

Prayer in a Laundromat

By Atar Hadari

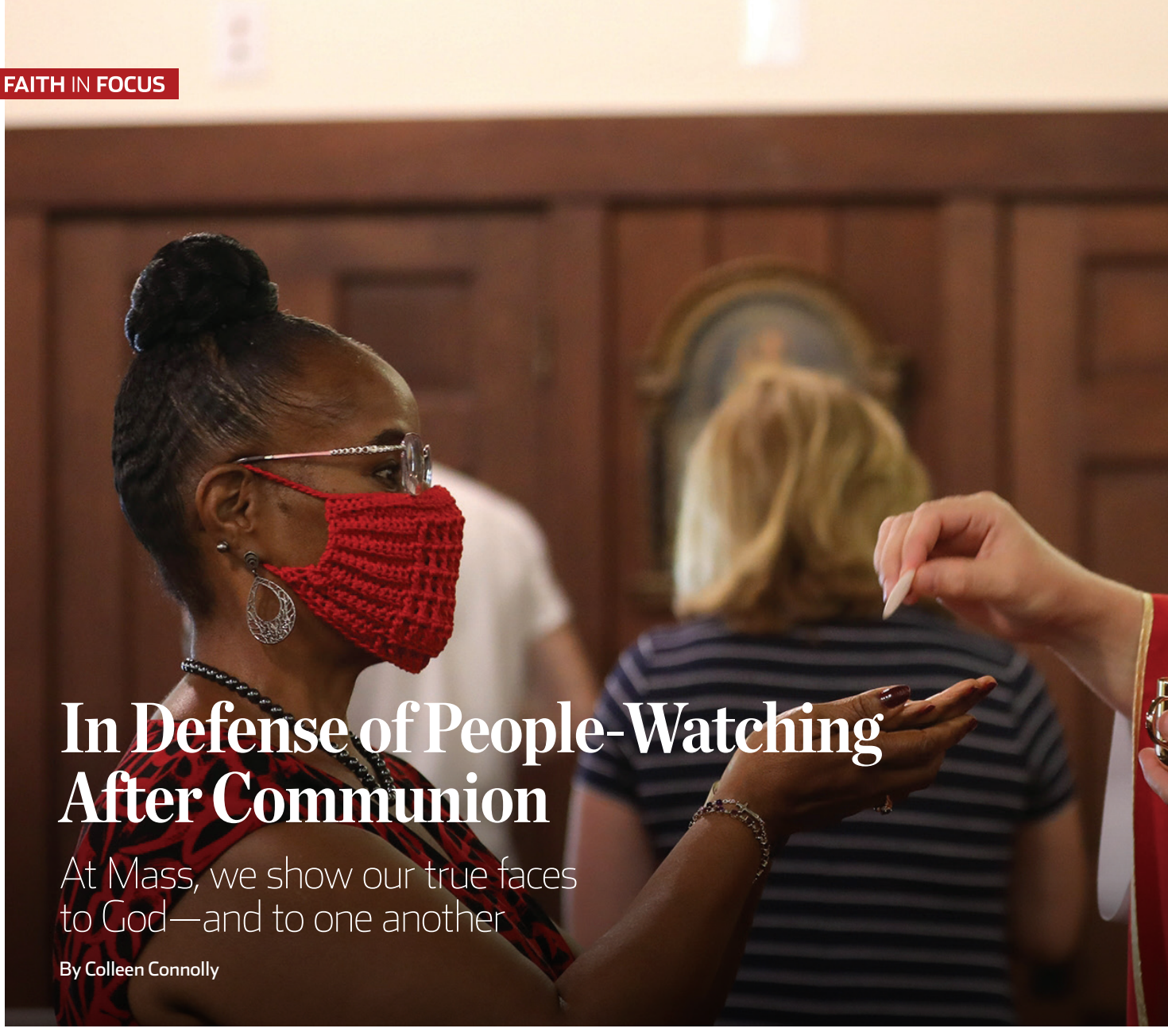
We are the brief shadows
that fall across your face Lord
in your light
look at us pray not too harshly
let us stay with you a moment
before night—

and when we come for your mercy
when our shadows turn a moment into clay
and we are weighed—our deeds of clemency
our offences against that which made us stir in day—
do not assay us too harshly
that were ever more tin than gold—
let Lord your memory of that hour
we stayed with you in your shadow
cancel out our fall

and when our flesh is levied
let that sin not be espied
that makes nine parts of our weight
let your light—which is as nothing
but the whole—weigh more than our poor dust.

Yours in the remainder of your memory—faint
impressions of your hopes and strivings of the clay
you left half turned on earth
a memory of what could have been flesh, but turned to air.

Atar Hadari's Songs From Bialik: Selected Poems of H. N. Bialik *was a finalist for the American Literary Translators' Association Award. His debut collection,* Rembrandt's Bible*, was published in 2013.*



In Defense of People-Watching After Communion

At Mass, we show our true faces to God—and to one another

By Colleen Connolly

I have a very Catholic confession to make. After receiving Communion, which ought to be the peak moment of my week, when I should be praying on my knees for Christ's mercy, I prefer to lightly zone out while watching everyone else receive Communion. When I catch myself, I will sometimes send a flowery prayer of thanksgiving upward for the diversity and unity inside my parish (as if God didn't hear me judging that woman's shoe choice when she came down the aisle a second ago: Four-inch heels at the 9 a.m.? Bold...). Thankfully, God uses even the sloppy Mass habits of us cradle-Catholics to teach us about his glory. After months of Zoom liturgies, I am beginning to think people-watching at Mass can itself be an opportunity for deeper communion.

On a recent Sunday, at my new parish in Washington, D.C., which strictly enforces mask-wearing and sanitizing, I noticed something new and beautiful during the celebration of the Eucharist. The Communion procession was slower, of course, because everyone was maintaining more space between themselves and the person ahead of them in line. It looked markedly different from the usual 10-car pile-up on the I-95 that could crowd bigger churches pre-Covid. What really moved me, though, was that communicants received the body of Christ with much more intention and deliberation than I was used to seeing pre-pandemic. Turning away from the priest after saying amen, communicants stepped to the side and took off their masks to consume the consecrated host. Nearly everyone automatically faced the tabernacle to do so, out of reverence or maybe concern about breathing on the people in the front row.

During this pandemic, we have shrunk our social groups to only our closest friends and family members. Even when we meet friends at parks or on sidewalks, it is

CNS/Wikimedia composite

an act of great intimacy and trust to take off your mask. In our houses of worship, songs are muted behind cloths, and I cannot see anyone else's face. Only when we receive the Eucharist do we dare to take our mask off, to greet Christ intimately. The clear analogy of approaching the presence of Christ in the tabernacle, showing your true face and offering him your trust brought me to tears in Mass.

I am new to my current parish. Other than the priests, who know me as the young person who bothers them for a quick confession after weekday Mass, I do not know any of my fellow parishioners, and I sit alone in a socially distanced pew. Watching people remove their masks one by one to receive our daily bread reminded me that I am deeply connected with these strangers. I will also never be able to know or care for them the same way that Christ cares for each of us. Even if the church was filled to the brim with my closest friends and family members, people whose faces I have memorized, my knowledge of them would pale in comparison to the complete knowledge that Christ has when they approach his presence.

At the height of the lockdown in March and April, I felt starved for the consecrated bread and wine. I would sit glumly on a Zoom call with my college friends, everyone feeling claustrophobic in their respective childhood bedrooms and talking about how joyful and exciting it would be to go back to Mass. It would feel like Christmas or New Year's, we said. But as the weeks of pandemic dragged on, Mass came back the same way that shopping malls and happy hours did, quietly and with hints of guilt. Even when churches reopened, they didn't look or feel the same. No congregating in crowded narthexes. No coffee and doughnuts in the parish hall. I now feel starved for that humdrum of community and support.

Which is why I am throwing away my Catholic guilt about people-watching at Mass. I am thrilled to be at the Eucharist, seeing my brothers and sisters in Christ, and I was sick of watching the holy transubstantiation from a laptop in my living room. I encourage you to joyfully receive your piece of the eternal banquet and then respectfully watch while the other celebrants receive their share, no more and no less than yours. Mentally cheer them on and lift them up in petitionary prayer. Reflect on this intimacy and commonality you share with complete strangers. Consider what this moment of relief in showing our true faces to God, no masks and nowhere left to hide, means to all of us in this turbulent time. Please know that until the day when I can meet you all at a parish picnic, I will be praying for you all from my socially distanced pew.

Colleen Connolly *is a recent graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University. She is a freelance designer based in Washington, D.C., and is preparing for her Fulbright Arts Research Grant in Taiwan to start in 2021.*

C. S. Lewis, holding hat, at R.A.F. Chaplaincy School, 1944

Reading C. S. Lewis in the Time of Covid

By Thomas P. Harmon


R.A.F. Museum, London

Everything is strange. Our routines have been disrupted. Many of us are not going to work, the playground, the ballpark. We have lost jobs or have been forced to take pay cuts. Many of us have not been to Mass or confession for months; some poor souls have been left to die alone in hospitals because of fear of the disease, and their families have been forbidden to be with them for comfort and to grieve together.

In such peculiar times, it is natural to take a hard look at our priorities. Do we prioritize differently now because of the change in circumstances? Has the change in circumstances revealed to us that our priorities were previously askew? It seems that the virus has made concern with our health much more urgent than it was before the outbreak. The effects of our new priorities are visible everywhere, codified in the new labels "essential" and "nonessential." Maybe the starkest example for Catholics is the disorienting classification of in-person worship as "nonessential."

C. S. Lewis gave a sermon called "Learning in War-Time" in the fall of 1939 to the congregation at the Oxford University church of St. Mary the Virgin, which addressed an analogous, and analogously disorienting, shift in priorities. The date is important because he gave the sermon at the outset of World War II. The question he proposed to take up is analogous to the one we have to deal with now: What use is it to study, that is, to carry on with an activity that seems at best not a matter of urgency and at worst a costly and distracting luxury, during wartime? After all, academic study, especially the sorts of studies that Lewis was most familiar with, the study of the liberal arts and humanities, is one of those higher goods of the soul that is almost never a matter of urgency and is always vulnerable to getting bumped down the list of priorities when life and limb are at stake.

Lewis's talk provides much-needed perspective in light of circumstances that then, as now, seemed to turn normal priorities on their heads. He observed that it seemed strange, in the face of such urgent threats, to embark on academic study without interruption—just as it seems strange to us to continue some of the activities we were busy with before the outbreak of the pandemic, even if they seem to be very important—academic study included. Here is how Lewis addresses the strangeness of the situation:

> I think it is important to try to see the present calamity in a true perspective. The war creates absolutely no permanent human situation; it simply exaggerates the permanent human situation so that we can no longer ignore it. Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice. Human culture has always had to live under the shadow of something infinitely more important than itself. If men had postponed the search for knowledge and beauty until they were secure, the search would never have begun.

He goes on to say:

> We are mistaken when we compare war with "normal life." Life has never been normal. Even those periods which we think most tranquil, like the nineteenth century, turn out, on closer inspection, to be full of crises, alarms, difficulties, emergencies.

> If a thing is worth doing outside of Covid-time, it is still worth doing in Covid-time.

> Plausible reasons have never been lacking for putting off all merely cultural activities until some imminent danger has been averted or some crying injustice put right. But humanity long ago chose to neglect those plausible reasons. They wanted knowledge and beauty now, and would not wait for the suitable moment that never comes.

What is exaggerated? Our perception of the importance of death. War changes our perspective by bringing what is potentially very far from us potentially very close to us; so does a pandemic. But the relative proximity of a thing does not radically change its nature. War and disease do not change *whether* we are going to die; they only change *when* we might die.

Without the threat of imminent death, we can delude ourselves into thinking that death is not going to happen, or we can simply neglect to think about death at all. If death is decades away, it is not urgent. If it is potentially only two weeks away, then all of a sudden death becomes an urgent concern for us. The question is: Does that make sense? After all, viewed from the standpoint of the lifespan of nations, or civilizations, or species, or Earth itself, the difference between two weeks and a few decades vanishes into nothing.

I say this not to frighten, but rather to embolden. If a thing is worth doing outside of Covid-time, it is still worth doing in Covid-time. As Lewis said, "The war will fail to absorb our whole attention because it is a finite object and, therefore, intrinsically unfitted to support the whole attention of a human soul." The same can be said of disease. Learning and study, to be sure, have at their highest point the fixing of our attention on the infinite: God and the things of God. Those are things most worthy to absorb our whole attention, whether we are under imminent threat of death or not.

There are many factors that lead to our ordinary situation of death-forgetfulness, which allows us to misapprehend and misjudge the value and the urgency of things. Some are common to human beings everywhere, and some are specific to us in our time and place. One of Blaise Pascal's most famous essays, which can be found in his *Pensées*, focuses on the subject of "diversion." There he tells us how so much of our lives is caught up in pursuits that, at bottom, have no other purpose than to keep us from thinking about our own mortality. He talks about the bizarre spectacle of men hunting a fox. Why do they hunt the fox? Are they made happy once they capture it? No; it is a diversion, an activity that allows them to avoid the contemplation of death, to stave off anxiety about their mortality for a time. These are features of human beings that will not change.

Death stands as the ultimate rebuke to our thinking of ourselves as radically free. How can we be free when we live under the unchosen necessity of death? As the Catholic political scientist Peter Augustine Lawler observed, "The world won't really be governed by choice unless we can become pro-choice on death itself."

As a result, we have become a culture of death-deniers. You can see this everywhere. Whereas we used to put our churches in the middle of our towns, and our graveyards right next to our churches, we now bury our dead at enormous graveyards far from the center of our lives. We color our hair, trying to eliminate signs of aging from our bodies, and if we are wealthier, we turn to more sophisticated methods, from Botox to plastic surgery.

War—or disease—really just exaggerates what is already the human condition, a condition that we normally succeed in not thinking too much about. As Lewis himself says, "Do not let your nerves and emotions lead you into thinking your predicament more abnormal than it really is." As to equipping ourselves to face the moment, Lewis mentions "three mental exercises which may serve as defences against the three enemies which war

raises up." It should be profitable to go through those exercises ourselves, with appropriate adaptations to our own time of pandemic from Lewis's time of war.

The first enemy Lewis mentions is excitement: "the tendency to think and feel about the war when we had intended to think about our work.... There are always plenty of rivals to our work.... If we let ourselves, we shall always be waiting for some distraction or other before we can get down to our work." Nowadays, we might say, "Professor Lewis, if only you had known about Facebook, Twitter and 24-hour cable news!" How many more enticing objects we have within such easy reach!

There is no doubt that living in the midst of a pandemic is frightening. But we also have omnipresent media blaring dread signals into our brains constantly. We may pay attention because of what, at least at the beginning, is a responsible desire to be well-informed about the virus, how to keep ourselves and others safe and how to gauge risks. But the feelings those stories provoke can soon become an end in themselves. We can soon begin to relish them: horror at the looming threat, outrage at people being irresponsible, sadness at the deaths and sufferings of so many, anxiety about the future. It may be useful to examine whether what seem like urgent distractions are really urgent. Lewis admonishes, "The only people who achieve much are those who want knowledge so badly that they seek it while the conditions are still unfavourable. Favourable conditions never come."

The second enemy Lewis talks about is frustration, "the feeling that we shall not have time to finish." Covid-19 brings with it the threat of death. In addition to fear of death for ourselves and our loved ones, many of us are worried about what tomorrow will bring: How will the pandemic change our lives? Our country? The church? The world? Here too we can benefit from Lewis's advice. The internet encourages us to take global views on things. But the problem is that while we can have, or can at least deceive ourselves into having, a global view, we certainly cannot act in any way proportionate to that global view. The internet has monstrously increased our vision while giving us only a tiny increase in the power to act and affect things.

That lack of connection leads to a feeling of horrified powerlessness to change the evil things we can now see. Lewis advises us to leave "futurity in God's hands. We may as well, for God will certainly retain it whether we leave it to him or not. Never, in peace or war, commit your virtue or happiness to the future. Happy work is best done by the man who takes his long-term plans somewhat lightly and works from moment to moment 'as to the Lord.' It is only our daily bread that we are encouraged to ask for." In other words, do not worry so much about the future, or global problems. Do the best with what is at hand now and is in our power to do.

The third enemy Lewis mentions is fear: "War threatens us with death and pain." According to Lewis, "What does war do to death? It certainly does not make it more frequent; 100 percent of us die, and the percentage cannot be increased. It puts several deaths earlier, but I hardly suppose that is what we fear." So what do we fear from Covid-19? After all, most deaths involve suffering, even suffering as acute as that experienced by those who contract Covid-19. Our lives may be shortened by the virus; but it is unlikely that at the point of death, many of us would have found death to be more peaceful simply because we had lived longer.

Will Covid-19 leave us significantly less prepared to meet our maker? Surely the pandemic ought already to be encouraging us to make our peace with God. If we have taken seriously the proximity of Sister Death, as St. Francis of Assisi named it, we may be in a better state, because more clearly prepared, to meet God's judgment now than in non-Covid times.

So what does Lewis say that war—or disease, in our case—changes? "Yet war does do something to death. It forces us to remember it. The only reason why the cancer at sixty or the paralysis at seventy-five do not bother us is that we forget them. War makes death real to us, and that would have been regarded as one of its blessings by most of the great Christians of the past. They thought it good to be always aware of our mortality."

We should, therefore, at least try to take one positive thing from the pandemic: We are forced in a salutary way to see our mortality close at hand. That ought not only be a helpful thing personally but also something that those involved in religious studies and theology ought to take advantage of—not in a crass way, manipulating people through their fear, but instead offering consolation, hope and the good news of the savior who defeated sin and death. Now more than ever, a strong interior life of friendship with God through

prayer will help us to counteract the baleful effects of the pandemic.

Let us conclude with Lewis's own words at the close of his sermon:

> We see unmistakably the sort of universe in which we have all along been living, and must come to terms with it. If we had foolish un-Christian hopes about human culture, they are now shattered. If we thought we were building up a heaven on earth, if we looked for something that would turn the present world from a place of pilgrimage into a permanent city satisfying the soul of man, we are disillusioned, and not a moment too soon. But if we thought that for some souls, and at some times, the life of learning, humbly offered to God, was, in its own small way, one of the appointed approaches to the Divine reality and the Divine beauty which we hope to enjoy hereafter, we can think so still.

Sometimes suffering has the power to show us the truth that is hard to see in times of prosperity.

Thomas P. Harmon *is an associate professor and holder of the Scanlan Foundation Chair in Theology at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Tex.*

Not Silence

By Lance Le Grys

One thinks of deafness as complete stillness. But oh no, that is wrong.
— Fini Straubinger

deafness is not silence
says the deafblind
a voice as if its own echo
blindness is not darkness

an inconstant noise never ceasing
crackles pops
static
sound fury
a dim promiscuous chaos
indistinct color incomplete shapes
abortions of form

to reach out
what even is out
in a world without depth
what beneath above
or within
to touch what
touches back
somewhere
what is where
near
whatever near be

what touches back
is you
whatever you be
and so
instanter
from chaos
am I
beneath above
or within
sound fury
the articulation of fingers
there
I am you are
become we

a smile plays on her lips
of a conqueror

Lance Le Grys *is the author of the poetry collection* Views From an Outbuilding. *His work has appeared in many publications, including Caveat Lector, The Naugatuck River Review and The Southern Humanities Review.*

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The fight for survival in a white world

By Eve Tushnet

The Only Good Indians is a scary and well-told tale of four men being stalked by the spirit of an elk.

They thought they were lucky.

The antiheroes of Stephen Graham Jones's revenge-horror novel, *The Only Good Indians*, are four Blackfeet men, childhood friends, who on the Saturday before Thanksgiving go poaching in the part of the forest set aside for tribal elders. They dub the trip the "Thanksgiving Classic," and they are in the woods for fun, for friendship—but also out of economic need and shame. Winter is coming, and they haven't managed to fill their freezers with big game. So they roll through the woods in the kind of broken-down truck Keith Secola would sing about. At the bottom of a cliff they spot the elk, spread out like a carpet of easy prey—and so begins a hunt that spans a decade and threatens not only their own lives, but the next generation.

Jones is the winner of multiple horror and fantasy awards, and his most recent novel has earned praise from Stephen King. He's a King-like writer: punchy, down-to-earth, fond of closing out his chapters with sinister one-liners:

> The ceiling of the living room.
> That spotlight.
> It's flickering yellow.

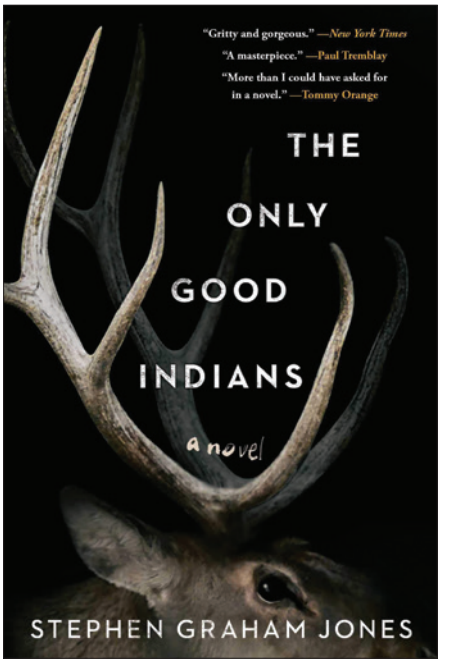
He finds horror in everyday objects and moments, the spinning blades of a ceiling fan or the marginalia scribbled in a paperback novel.

The Only Good Indians is a scary and well-told tale of four men being stalked by the spirit of an elk they had killed, returned from the dead as the shapeshifting Elk Head Woman. But it is also an exploration of guilt—how we respond to the slow, suppressed knowledge that we have done something truly wrong. And it is a portrayal of everyday Indian life. The characters are mostly married men who long for their bachelor days of good times and bad decisions. There is a sweat lodge and the cadences of traditional storytelling; there is the small town entanglement in which everybody is somebody's son. And there is ever-present and deadly racism.

Jones writes terrific descriptions of basketball games on the reservation—even the sports-ignorant will be enthralled by the scenes of the basketball prodigy Denorah, daughter of one of the hunters, as Jones makes you feel the "spinning-away leather" under Denorah's fingertips, the hula swivel of her hips, the discipline and the twisting muscles and the fury. These scenes show Denorah's hope, her youthful certainty that talent and hard work will triumph, her ferocity and her willingness to listen when somebody has something worth saying. But they also show the world that does not respect her. At her games rival fans chant, "Indians, go home!"

In many horror tales, the threatened protagonists call the police. They cannot help, because if they could help, it wouldn't be horror, but they try. In

The Only Good Indians
Stephen Graham Jones
Saga Press
320p $26.99



The Only Good Indians, the scene in which the cops show up may be the book's tensest moment. Investigating a dog bite, the cops come to see Lewis, one of the participants in the "Thanksgiving Classic." We know Lewis as a nerdy married guy who has been having some disturbing visions lately. They see him as a brown criminal. They treat him with casual disdain: "Shouldn't you be at work?" They know they can kill him. With one wrong gesture he can fill them with fear—and they can fill him with bullets. Lewis knows they are as much a threat to him as Elk Head Woman herself.

The title alone should make it clear that *The Only Good Indians* is about whether—or how—American Indians can survive in a white world. When one hunter describes a sweat lodge as "the safest place in the Indian world," a younger man scoffs, "That means we're only eighty percent probably going to die here, not ninety percent?" These are people who, when somebody mentions "your friend who...got shot," have to ask, "Which one?" This is a world where a jagged, clumsy scar might be the sign of supernatural resurrection—or it might just mean that Indian women don't always get the best doctors.

The book is divided into four sections, one per friend, three titled with Native riffs on horror—for example, "It Came From the Rez." The Indians are hunters in this novel, but also prey; so far, so obvious. But "Blackfeet are to elk as white people are to Blackfeet" is an equation for the SAT. Jones is doing something subtler.

Lewis's wife is white, which suggests one layer of complexity. The novel hints at a better way of coexistence: a way to live in the natural world without being its enemy, for example. Even the narration suggests the hope of mutual understanding, as one section is told from the elk's-eye view, the creatures who "move like blown smoke across the rolling prairie." *The Only Good Indians* knows that this better way was lost long before the four friends decided to poach from the elders. Whether the better way was lost long before the white men came (say, on the day the man and woman left the Garden dressed in the skins of the dead creatures they had named), this novel doesn't say. What it does concern is the nature of repentance necessary to restore the better way.

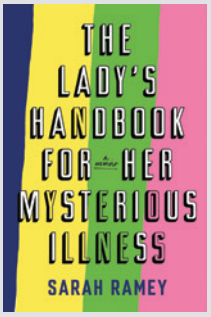
The four men's guilt may seem disproportionate to the offense. There are more elk in the woods, right? Is it so bad to kill too many? But Jones shows us two nonhuman lives as microcosms: the created universe in the form of a pregnant elk. This is a classic horror trope, the seemingly small wrongdoing that spirals out into terrible consequences because it reflects a deeper disorder in the soul. (Is it so bad to eat an apple?) When the universe itself has been violated, what can put it right?

And here the novel's emotional honesty meets its moral and even mystical tendencies. Horror is a good genre for exploring the hunger for justice, because justice requires a supernatural intervention—no mere human can fully repair the harm we do. All the Blackfeet characters here are people you will love, and although for a long time they remain "unprepared to face what [they'd] done," it won't surprise you that eventually they try to make things right.

They try generosity; it isn't enough. They try violence. It fails—but not before several gut-wrenching scenes of gore and the destruction of love. They try returning to the old ways, pushing the guilt out through their pores in a sweat lodge. "All you ever want this deep into a sweat, it's a bit of reprieve," Jones writes. "But you've got to push *through* that." But even the old ways do not restore the balance.

One person caught in the elk's revenge tries to fix things by suffering, that razor edge where martyrdom becomes suicide. But neither guilt nor determination nor tradition are enough. At last an innocent willingly enters the unforgiving mathematics of justice. In this final sequence, Jones moves easily between legend and everyday life. He creates, from characters you might meet on any ordinary day, an extraordinary portrait of sacrifice and costly reconciliation.

Eve Tushnet *is the author of* Punishment: A Love Story.



The Lady's Handbook for Her Mysterious Illness
By Sarah Ramey
Doubleday
432p $27.95

To the underworld and back

The journey Sarah Ramey relates in *The Lady's Handbook for Her Mysterious Illness* has much in common with resurrection narratives: It is only by accepting the darkness she goes through that Ramey can come out on the other side. After having explored and exhausted countless paths to wellness, most of them unsuccessfully, she has a plethora of advice for fellow WOMIs, as she calls them: "Women With Mysterious Illnesses." Her own research into the chronic illnesses that plague millions of women is astonishing, thorough and revelatory, a valuable resource for WOMIs and those who seek to understand and treat them.

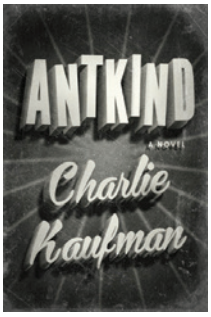
Ramey's physical illnesses haunt her for more than a decade as they are ignored, misdiagnosed and minimized by the medical establishment until she discovers something called functional medicine and experiences an epiphany about her body. Her journey is not without its low points: "Reader, it was horrible to still be alive at all."

Ramey struggles with inept and uncaring doctors, some of whom do more harm than good, including one who causes lasting devastation to her vagina. Eventually Ramey comes to see that the "process of death and renewal is the story of life itself. It's the story of nature, earth." Ramey spends most of her time in the Holy Saturday world—before resurrection and after a death of sorts, struggling to find the light—but she finally finds it in embracing the darkness: "No cure, no juggler, no miracle pill, no positive thought will ever be worth more to me than the story of my story, the story of our story, the story of the ancient, holy, and important dark." She asserts that "a near supernatural ability to rise up from the dead—that is, and has always been, my real superpower. And my dear reader, it's probably yours too."

Ramey is a crusader for everyone who has been ignored, offering a powerful argument that "my case went unsolved for fourteen years because no one would listen to me and the reason they would not listen to me is because I am a woman."

This book is a rallying cry to all other women whose illnesses go untreated but also to the general public on the need to make our medical system more responsive to chronic illness. Ramey's memoir will lift you up by taking you down into the depths of despair that she experienced; you will be as inspired as you are educated about topics such as autoimmune disease, the endocrine system and the ways that society and gender affect them.

Cynthia-Marie Marmo O'Brien *is a writer and educator in New York.*



Antkind
By Charlie Kaufman
Random House
720p $30

Bugs on the brain

From its opening pages, *Antkind* struck me as one of the most surreal and yet enchanting novels I have ever read. Of course, the book is 720 pages long, so reading it is also an exhausting experience—Thomas Pynchon meets David Foster Wallace. Its greatest quality is Charlie Kaufman's sheer authority over language as the prose meanders through its protagonist's endless internal conversations.

Kaufman has had a long and idiosyncratic career as a screenwriter, playwright, director and producer and is best known for writing the movies "Adaptation," "Being John Malkovich" and "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind." The unorthodox plots of those films have their parallels in this debut novel.

The protagonist, B. Rosenberger Rosenberg, is a hilariously vain and sociopathic middle-aged author and former film critic. There is more than a bit of *A Confederacy of Dunces*' Ignatius J. Reilly in him, in that he is alternately loathsome and endearing. He does yoga but hates the other people who do it. He can't stop talking about his African-American girlfriend ("very famous, you'd recognize her"). He derides fast-food restaurants but becomes obsessed with one. He is proud of his billowing

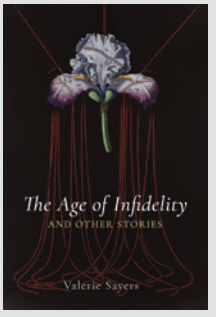
beard, even though he wears it only to cover up an enormous birthmark. He is fixated on gender pronouns, and even has his own: "Thon."

Rosenberg discovers a film made by his ancient Floridian neighbor. The movie is three months long (like Borges's imaginary map that covered the whole world?) and involves thousands of puppets. Rosenberg becomes determined to bring it to a wider audience. Unfortunately, he accidentally destroys it, leaving him with only a single frame to attempt to reconstruct the original. Doing so seems to drive him insane (or more so). Living increasingly in his head, he experiences incredible events, though whether or not they are actually happening is up to the reader to decide. All of this is exacerbated by his own narcissism. He is forced to have plastic surgery—or does he simply hate his nose? He is examined by psychiatrists—but is it just his own ruminations on his unique persona? He hates Donald Trump—but his mocking imitations of Trump sound just like Rosenberg himself.

In the end, Rosenberg remembers the end of the movie: It is a million years in the future, and humans are extinct. One hyperintelligent, Kafkaesque ant is the dominant creature on the planet. Of course, it exists only in his mind, burrowing around like all the other phantasms present there.

Antkind is not for the faint of heart. But it rewards the effort to read through a story about self-perception and the internal monologues that rattle through all of our heads.

James T. Keane, *senior editor.*
Twitter: @jamestkeane.



The Age of Infidelity and Other Stories
By Valerie Sayers
Slant
146p $16

Can hope survive a fallen world?

One of the most striking features of the stories in Valerie Sayers's new work, *The Age of Infidelity*, is the use of arresting opening lines. The economy-of-words constraint facing short-story writers often demands a compelling and pithy opener. And on this score Sayers really hits the mark.

Consider "Suicide Dogs," the opening entry in this 11-story collection. "Once upon a time we haven't yet lived through—but I know we will, and you know it too—I moved to the outskirts of Greenglass with my young son and daughter." The story describes an ominous future in which spies, snitches and Big Brothers abound. It is a future where language, familial relationships, even the air we breathe, become subject to control and conformity. The landscape itself betrays a sense of societies gone very, very wrong.

Sayers, also the author of six novels, covers a wide range of territory in this latest collection. Three of the stories are set in Due East, S.C., a fictional community modeled on Sayers's hometown of Beaufort, S.C. The Southern setting for the stories "Tidal Wave," "A Freak of Nature" and "The Age of Infidelity" echo some of Sayers's earlier Due East fiction, in which a Catholic family interacts with the majority-Protestant population—who are amused but wary of this offbeat group of believers.

Other stories are set in New York City during the tumultuous 1960s, while the remainder are situated in unnamed "gated burbs of the once-great plains."

There is an unsettling tone to most of the stories in *The Age of Infidelity*. Many reflect the inherent danger as communities succumb to groupthink, along with the loss of both individuality and the freedom simply to be human. Take this passage from "Children of Night," another post-apocalyptic glimpse of a society gone to ruin: "As the years passed and the earth heated, belief itself seemed more and more childish, false innocence in a dangerous age.... How could I believe in God after the God-particle, the Trinity after the triad-beams? What sort of God would create a lush earth only to fry it?"

Despite recurrent themes of aging, fading, lost idealism and world weariness, the stories are also populated with characters who strive to hang on to something good. While not every story delivers a clear, coherent message, the overall collection reads as an apology for a kind of "fidelity" that acts as a bulwark against a great unraveling.

Michael Mastromatteo *is a Toronto-based columnist and book reviewer for Catholic News Service.*

Be Saints

ALL SAINTS (A), NOVEMBER 1, 2020
READINGS: RV 7:2-14; PS 24; 1 JN 3:1-3; MT 5:1-12

Today is the feast of All Saints. Since the solemnity falls on a Sunday this year, we hear the Lectionary readings assigned for the feast rather than for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time.

In Matthew, Jesus frequently interprets, reframes and expands upon Jewish laws and traditions. Today we hear the Beatitudes, which are at the beginning of a series of discourses.

Like Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai to receive the law, Jesus ascends a mountain to teach the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus highlights multiple groups who are blessed—people who are: 1) poor in spirit, 2) mourning, 3) meek, 4) hungry and thirsty for righteousness, 5) merciful, 6) pure in heart, 7) peacemakers and 8) persecuted for righteousness' sake and insulted.

Matthew emphasizes aspects of spiritual growth, divine comfort, suffering and future rewards. The first group, those who are poor in spirit, are blessed for their openness to receiving God in their lives. In his important work, *A Theology of Liberation,* Gustavo Gutiérrez notes that being poor in spirit is an essential state for receiving the Word of God. The spiritual poverty called for in Matthew's Beatitudes recognizes the need to seek fullness through prayer and living out the Gospel message of love. Those actions enable the poor in spirit to connect with God and others, leading to the kingdom of heaven.

Similarly, several of the other blessed groups show openness and attentiveness to the world around them. People who mourn express sadness, dismay and grief in order to receive comfort. People who are meek live humbly, and people who are merciful, seek righteousness, live purely and make peace emulate God through their actions.

The last two beatitudes focus on those who suffer during persecution, especially apt for All Saints' Day. Matthew compares these people to the prophets of the past who were also rejected and persecuted. Matthew's dual blessing and comfort responds to challenges of his community and acknowledges the expectation of future pain and blessings.

Most of the rewards in the Beatitudes are future-oriented, which is both comforting and frustrating. While many of the readings from Matthew over the past few months have had an eschatological slant to them, they can sometimes leave people feeling dejected, as future rewards do not resolve present-day suffering.

But the Beatitudes can be read with an eye to the present, not only the future. The groups that are highlighted show characteristics that we should aspire to have today. These statements are about how people live, even in the face of adversity; and they remind us that actions, not only words, reveal faith in Christ. On All Saints' Day, in addition to reflecting on the lives of saints, we are called to be saints. Today's Gospel reveals how to live as Christ did.

During this grueling election season, politicians have invoked religion to appeal to certain segments of the electorate. As you cast your ballot, let the Gospel message of love and the Beatitudes inspire you to elect leaders who strive to be saints and to live out their faith righteously.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. (Mt 5:6).

Praying With Scripture

How do the Beatitudes help you to reflect on the present and future?

How does Scripture influence your vote?

What can you do to live out the Gospel?

Empowering Women

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), NOVEMBER 8, 2020
READINGS: WIS 6:12-16; PS 63; 1 THES 4:13-18; MT 25:1-13

In the first reading and the Gospel, women are central figures. This is a rarity. Frequently, women are marginalized, silent or absent from biblical texts, often reflecting the imaginations of men situated within patriarchal contexts.

In the Wisdom of Solomon, we hear of Woman Wisdom, a figurative woman used to personify intelligence, insight and thoughtfulness. Traditions about Woman Wisdom often emphasize her close connection to God, depicting her as a divine gift and also a participant in divine power and

actions. Today's reading highlights Woman Wisdom for being radiant and easily perceived. The reading reminds ancient and modern audiences to be observant of the world and look for examples and attitudes that are wise. The repeated notion that Woman Wisdom makes herself known should empower people to seek wisdom and to avoid and critique ignorance.

The beauty of Woman Wisdom is also highlighted, which can be interpreted positively or negatively—for instance, "She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of their desire." This could suggest that people seek wisdom because it is appealing. However, it could also reveal an objectification of Woman Wisdom that is likely rooted in sexual desire for women. This sentiment is further emphasized as a voyeur watches Woman Wisdom and will not be disappointed by her. Despite the sexual innuendo and imagery, the important point still remains that wisdom should be desired.

In the Gospel, we hear another Matthean parable about the kingdom of heaven, the parable of the ten virgins. The title alone pushes women's sexuality and lack of sexual experience to the forefront. Some translators and commentators refer to this as the parable of the ten bridesmaids, which highlights their assumed role in the story instead of their sexuality. As the women prepare for the groom and presumably his bride, who is absent from the story, five wise women bring oil for their lamps, and five foolish women do not bring oil. The women are judged as wise or foolish according to their ability to prepare. All 10 women fall asleep, and at the end of the story Jesus' hearers are warned to stay awake. Jesus also criticizes the apostles, in the following chapter of Matthew, for falling asleep.

When the women without oil request assistance, they are told to go buy their own. On the one hand, this seems contrary to the Gospel message of love and care for one another. Shouldn't the prepared women offer help? On the other hand, within the context of this parable about preparation, the five women with oil withhold it so that they can be fully prepared in the end. When the groom arrives, he and the five women with oil enter the banquet, and when the other women return, the groom says that he does not know them, which seems odd but reflects the harsh realities that follow their lack of foresight.

Although this is not the model story for assistance and solidarity, it is an important parable about personal accountability and responsibility. It reminds ancient and modern audiences of the uncertainty of the world generally and of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven more specifically, and it calls for all to be vigilant. Moreover, it empowers everyone, especially women, to be conscious of personal survival and self-reliance.

Resplendent and unfading is wisdom (Wis 6:12).

Praying With Scripture

What do you do to empower women?

How do you seek wisdom in your life?

What do you do to be self-reliant?

Seeing the 'Woman of Power'

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), NOVEMBER 15, 2020
READINGS: PRV 31:10-31; PS 128; 1 THES 5:1-6; MT 25:14-30

Last Sunday, we heard two readings with women as central characters. Today, we reflect on another, the woman of power (Hb. *'eshet hayil*) in the first reading from Proverbs. Read it in its entirety in the Bible, as the Lectionary omits vs. 14-18 and 21-29, which highlight the woman's business management abilities and intellect. That we hear about her after Woman Wisdom is not an accident. This arrangement encourages us to see parallels between these figures.

Depending on the translation, the woman of power is also called a woman of valor/substance and a capable/worthy wife. Using "woman of power" is an intentional affirmation that the woman and her work should be understood as examples of strength.

Some interpretations downplay her power, understanding support of her husband as a sign of subordination. A misogynistic reading interprets the "woman's work" as relegating women to only home affairs or to a lesser status. This is incorrect. In fact, the woman of power supports herself, her family and her community. She is trusted for her good judgment and is

a gifted teacher, a helper to people in need and successful in business, as she "enjoys the profits from her dealings" (Prv 31:18). She works tirelessly, and her family praises her for it. She fears the Lord, a sign of devotion and recognition of God's power.

For ancient and modern women, this woman can be a great example. While some ancient and modern men might be encouraged to "find" this woman to be a wife, men ought to find her within themselves. All people are called to be like the woman of power.

In the Gospel, we encounter a parable about three men who are given money to empower them to action. Two of the three take their money, their talents and double them. The third hides the money and adds no value to it. When the overlord returns, he condemns and banishes the one who did not increase the wealth, giving his one talent to the person who made the most money.

There are elements in the parable that leave much to be desired, such as the slave/master imagery, the master who might be stealing peoples' crops, the harsh punishment meted out to the slave who returns the money, the praise for accumulation of wealth. Situating the passage within the larger Gospel context aids in interpretation.

The parable is preceded by two parables about final judgment and Jesus' second coming. Matthew is concerned about his community's preparation for the end of days. Like the previous parables, this parable reminds people to use and build on what is given to them, as time is fleeting. Resources (money, talents, faith) should be strengthened and increased, as the woman of power's example makes clear, even without instruction. Right after this parable in Matthew is the judgment of nations, which affirms the importance of caring for those most in need. It is unlikely that the parable of the talents teaches people to exploit the poor and help the rich get richer. Instead, it is about maximizing potential, not simply hiding it away.

Give her a reward for her labors, and let her works praise her at the city gates (Prv 31:31).

Praying With Scripture

How can the woman of power be an example in your life?

Are you using your talents well?

What can you do to empower people in your community?

The Lectionary offers a shorter reading that in this case might help people understand the point more directly. The overlord praises the servants who added to what was given to them, saying, "Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come share your master's joy." Matthew reveals that by acting on what is given, people show their intentions and abilities, and they are able to reap more benefits for their actions.

Living Faithfully

CHRIST THE KING (A), NOVEMBER 22, 2020
READINGS: EZ 34:11-17; PS 23; 1 COR 15:20-26, 28; MT 25:31-46

Today is the last Sunday of the liturgical year, the feast of Christ the King. This is an opportunity to reflect on the past and plan for the year ahead.

Today's Gospel is a culmination of themes that we have read in Matthew over the past few months: ethical actions, final judgment, rewards and punishments. Jesus shares a vision of the final judgment, describing himself as a king sitting on a throne, which is why this Gospel is chosen for this feast. Like a shepherd separating sheep and goats, Jesus groups people based on how they lived their lives.

"Sheep" show love and concern for others. They feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit the imprisoned. "Goats" do the opposite, ignoring people who are on the margins of society and most in need. Each group is judged for their actions or inactions, with the sheep inheriting the kingdom and eternal life and goats receiving eternal punishment.

This parable of judgment is often invoked to remind people to serve, advocate for marginalized groups and seek justice. It sets priorities for the faithful by affirming that faith is not solely a person's adherence to a set of beliefs but is an active care for people in the world.

The actions listed here are included in the Corporal Works of Mercy, as they stress physical needs to promote and sustain life. Jesus re-

minds us that by serving others and supplying their needs, we serve God. Moreover, by ignoring and blaming people and downplaying their needs, we disregard others and God: "When you did not do it for one of these least ones, you did not do it for me."

Although this is an eschatological passage about future times, its purpose is to effect change in the present. The primary point is not to affirm Christ the King as the final judge but rather to affirm that Christ the King is present now among the poor, the immigrants, the sick and the imprisoned. The theological implications are massive and should not be minimized. Jesus proclaims that being a righteous person of faith means acting on behalf of those most in need, as Christ the King is with them. Living faithfully requires a commitment to serving and advocating for the most vulnerable in society, not dehumanizing, denigrating or disregarding them.

As we conclude this difficult year and prepare for a new liturgical cycle, we should reflect on what we have done and will do to live out the Gospel injunction to love and serve others.

Whatever you did for the least, you did for me (Mt 25:40).

Praying With Scripture

Do you look for God in all people?

Do you treat people who look differently than you as you would Christ?

What can you do to live out your faith through service?

Stay Woke

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (B), NOVEMBER 29, 2020
READINGS: IS 63:16-64:7; PS 80; 1 COR 1:3-9; MK 13:33-37

Today is the beginning of Advent and the start of a new cycle of liturgical readings. In Year B, we will hear many texts from Mark. Today's Gospel reminds us that during Advent and always we must *stay woke*.

At the end of Year A, we heard several passages from Matthew that called for vigilance and preparation for the coming of the kingdom. That concern is prominent in Mark and likely influenced Matthew's writings. Mark puts his audience on high alert, depicting Jesus preaching on the importance of watchfulness.

In Mark 13, Jesus makes predictions about the destruction of the temple and the suffering and persecution of his followers to come, revealing Mark's context as an evangelist writing during the First Jewish-Roman War. Living during a tumultuous period of revolt, Mark and his community thought that the end-times were near, a concern palpable in the Gospel.

In today's reading, Mark reminds his community to "Be watchful! Be alert!" To illustrate this, he describes Jesus telling a story of servants and a gatekeeper entrusted with care for a house. They are to maintain the house and continually watch for the owner's return: "May he not come and find you sleeping." Jesus insists that his followers remain vigilant, as they must be ready for events that are beyond their knowledge and understanding.

Like Mark's first-century audience, many people today have been living in a state of uncertainty and anxiety. Covid-19, the presidential election and the ongoing struggles for equality and racial justice have dominated our minds and hearts. To use a 21st-century expression, Mark reminds us all to *stay woke*! We must be mindful of what is happening to us and around us. Like those given responsibility for the owner's house, we must be responsible for ourselves, our actions and our community, constantly increasing our awareness, recognizing and criticizing evil and pursuing the common good.

"What I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mk 13:37)

Praying With Scripture

What can you do to increase your knowledge and understanding?

How can you advocate for justice for all people?

How can the season of Advent help you to be more mindful in your actions?

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

R.B.G. in Context

The limits of Justice Ginsburg's belief in caregiving

By Erika Bachiochi

Ruth Bader Ginsburg passed away from metastatic pancreatic cancer on Sept. 18. I join the nation's celebration of a heroic American attorney who employed her top-flight legal education and disciplined mind to convince an all-male Supreme Court in the early 1970s that the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment ought to protect women, too.

I deeply admire the way in which Ms. Ginsburg gave herself fully not only to her work but also to her marriage. I had my first child while in law school, and I will never tire of hearing how the late justice cared for her husband, Marty, a fellow law student, when he was ill with cancer. She kept him up to speed with his classes while taking classes of her own, editing the law review and caring for their very young daughter. Her unflappable resilience, reputation for equanimity and composure, and work on behalf of others are admirable human qualities. Indeed, they are virtues my husband and I work to inculcate in our children, and I am grateful we can point to Ms. Ginsburg's life as exemplary in this regard.

Yet I find it more difficult to praise Ruth Bader Ginsburg as a U.S. Supreme Court justice. For even as she upheld important rights for vulnerable populations as a judge, she also argued that the right to abortion was at the very heart of the legal equality between men and women.

What if Justice Ginsburg's defense of a constitutional right to abortion cuts against her most praiseworthy normative goal: to encourage and support the shared human task of caregiving? As she wrote so beautifully in 1984, quoting a friend, "Human caring and concern, for home, children, and the welfare of others, ought not to be regarded as dominantly 'women's work,' it should become the work of all."

Easy access to abortion has not rendered women freer or more equal; rather, in tearing at the first bond of human solidarity between a mother and her unborn child, it has distorted the shared responsibilities that adhere in male-female sexual relationships, promoted a view of childbearing as one consumer choice among many and greatly contributed to the dim view of caregiving ever since.

Well-intentioned interlocutors on both sides of the abortion debate often argue that women would not need to access abortion so frequently were our society more hospitable to children. This is true, but it neglects an essential reality about the pedagogical nature of law. The law shapes a culture, explicitly teaching it not only goods to be pursued and evils to avoid but even more subtly creating incentives and disincentives to action, channeling individuals to behave in certain ways.

When abortion is easily accessible, that reality shapes individual and institutional behavior. For example, employers think less about how to accommodate caregiving and discriminate against pregnant women instead. Abortion also relieves men of the mutual responsibilities that accompany sex and so has tended to upend the duties of care for dependent children that fathers ought to share equally. Single mothers, who are disproportionately more likely to live with their children in poverty, are hardly experiencing "gender equality." Without the investment and engagement of her husband in their children's lives, it is hard to imagine Ms. Ginsburg achieving all that she did. I think she would have been the first to acknowledge that.

Justice Ginsburg lived a heroic life, and I am grateful for her tenacity, equanimity and concern for others. But to truly realize her noble vision for caregiving, we will have to point our children to those who recognize unborn children not as potential hindrances but as reasons for greater solidarity with one another. This kind of love is among the greatest contributions any of us will make to the world.

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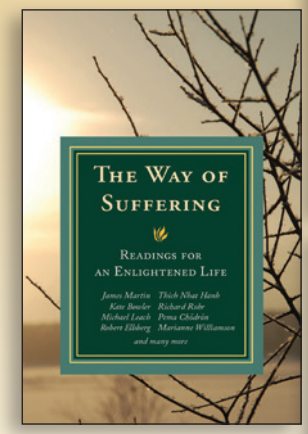

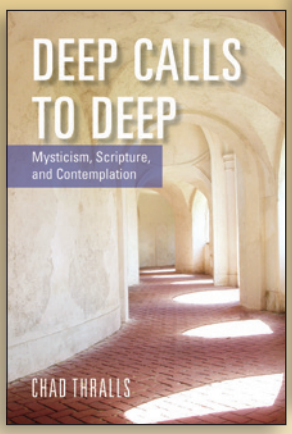

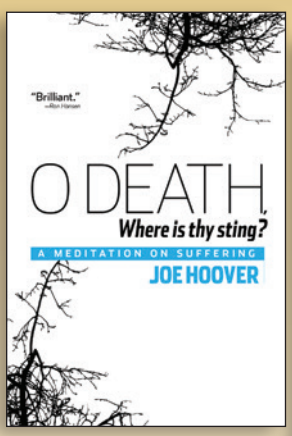

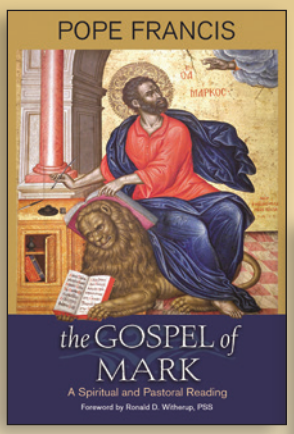

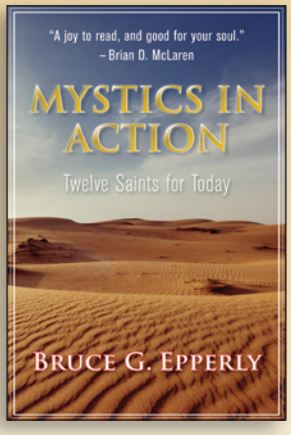

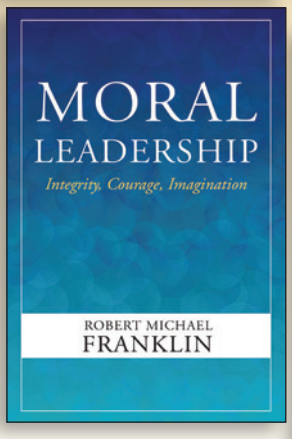

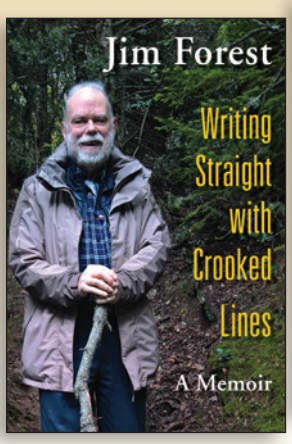

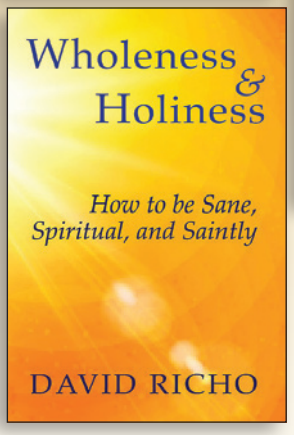

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The Catholic Medical Mission Board is leveraging over 100 years of experience to limit the spread of COVID-19 in some of the poorest communities around the world.

With our primary focus on serving women and children, CMMB combines our Medical Donations Program, volunteer healthcare workers, and strengthened healthcare facilities in order to expedite the delivery of life-saving medicines, care and training.

Please join us in these efforts.

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