

America

APRIL 2023

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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**BISHOP JOHN STOWE,
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Tuesday, April 11, 2023
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Commonweal

A New Way of Being Church

What is the way out of polarization?

This is the question our editor in chief, Sam Sawyer, S.J., poses at the opening of his essay on Page 18 of this issue. If you haven't already read it, I urge you to do so, for it is a question we all have to face as Catholics. As Pope Francis reminded us in his interview with **America** in November, "Polarization is not Catholic."

As it happens, this is also a question that a group of theologians, bishops and other church leaders wrestled with at a recent colloquium at Boston College called "The Way Forward: Pope Francis, Vatican II and Synodality." The gathering, which was sponsored by the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College, the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage at Loyola University Chicago, and the Center for Religion and Culture at Fordham University, was the second meeting of this distinguished group, and I was invited to join as a representative of America Media. Michael J. O'Loughlin, our national correspondent, attended the first meeting in Chicago last year.

The Chicago meeting drew some criticism at the time. The fact that most of the representatives were seen as sympathetic to Pope Francis, and that it operated according to the Chatham House rule (which limits reporting in order to foster open discussion) led some to wonder what the group was up to.

And I admit, I did wonder what I would discover when I arrived at the hotel where we all stayed for the gathering. Who would be there, and what would they talk about?

Over the next two days, we listened to a series of keynote reflections from Rafael Luciani, Robin Darling

Young, Hosffman Ospino and Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Tex. (These talks will be made available to the public. Other conversations at the conference, according to the Chatham House rule, may be reported, but without attribution.) The lectures were edifying, to be sure, but perhaps not as rewarding as the informal interactions that took place between meetings and during meals. There is no substitute for meeting your fellow Catholics face to face.

You will not be surprised to learn that the word *synodality* was mentioned many times and was held up as a possibly groundbreaking way to combat the polarization that plagues the church. I confess that I was not as enthusiastic about the synod process as some of the participants when I first arrived. Don't get me wrong: I think it's a very good thing that the church is asking to hear more from Catholics about the issues that matter most to them. But the concept of synodality is a bit confusing, even to seasoned Catholics, and the global synod process has struck me as unwieldy and ultimately not as representative of Catholic opinion as it is sometimes argued. One fact: Only 1 percent of Catholics in the United States took part in the process.

But here are some equally important observations and takeaways from our gathering. "Our communion is unsure of itself." We must "recover a sense of what holds us together." We have to find a way to "walk and work together." "In listening, I make myself accountable to real communities." In short, the stakes are very high for our church, and listening to one another is the first step on a much longer journey.

Once I began to see the synod as less of a discrete event, but rather a

new way of being church, the more I felt open to it. I also realized that I am the product of a church that has not placed a high value on listening and conversation, so it's a muscle I need to exercise. One criticism made about Catholics today is that they don't see themselves as part of the church they criticize. But as one participant noted, can you really blame them? Have we done the hard work necessary to make everyone feel co-responsible for this church we love?

The only way to be a listening church is to learn by doing—and by doing again and again. This, several participants argued, is part of Pope Francis' "long game." He is trying to teach us a new way of relating to one another, one that is embraced in much of Latin America but is foreign to the church in most of the world.

Does the global synod process represent the best way out of polarization? That very much remains to be seen. The synod process itself has become another thing to argue over. It will take many more gatherings, at all levels of the church, for the process to start to work. And that will mean including people with whom we disagree and who may have serious questions about the course set by Pope Francis.

But at a time when polarization runs deep in all levels of society, the church is one of the few places where people of all backgrounds gather under one roof. That represents a rich opportunity. And in the end, we don't all have to agree with one another. As one panelist noted, Jesus prayed that "that they all may be one"—not that they all may be the same.

—
Maurice Timothy Reidy
Twitter: @mtreidy



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Reckoning with the church's record on slavery

In the March issue of **America**, Christopher J. Kellerman, S.J., explored the Catholic Church's history with slavery. For much of its history, he wrote, the church "embraced slavery in theory and practice, repeatedly authorized the trade in enslaved Africans, and allowed its priests, religious and laity to keep people as enslaved chattel." Pope Leo XIII changed the church's teaching on slavery with his encyclicals "In Plurimis" in 1888 and "Catholicae Ecclesiae" in 1890. The article elicited numerous responses.

Our Catholic history worldwide is replete with the sins of slavery and racism. The first steps in uncovering institutionalized sin are solid research and exposition like this article. Then education. Then public confession and repudiation by each of us as church members because we are the church. First such article on the subject in a Catholic publication that I have ever seen. Thank you.

Vincent Gaglione

This is the simple truth about the evils of slavery. It must be acknowledged in order for the sin of racism to be eradicated. A few years ago, I participated in the Ignatian solidarity retreat on racism. We were given different articles to read. One article described the conditions the kidnapped endured on the slave ships. They were crowded into the ship's hull and forced to sit between the legs of the person behind him or her for weeks. They sat in their own waste. Those who died were thrown overboard. Where was the recognition of their dignity and right to life?

Ethel Sutherland

No doubt the poor example set by rank-and-file Catholics such as myself is the greatest stumbling block to folks who might otherwise enter Christ's church. But the intellectual dishonesty manifested in claiming that Catholic teaching has never changed is certainly another obstacle. Intellectual dishonesty is still dishonesty.

Kevin Doyle

There just is no one "thing" called "slavery" that is capable of being out-and-out condemned before the emergence of labor markets following the onset of the Industrial Revolution. As to the church, the record is crystal clear: Slaves are fully Christian and should be treated in accordance with the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. Any other conduct is sinful and has always been so. Picking out the African slave trade as "typical" of slavery as an institution through history is problematic.

James Miller

It seems unlikely, to me, that the average American Catholic will be emotionally prepared to confront the authentic record. It's as if they believe the "culture of death" more or less suddenly appeared as a result of some kind of industrially facilitated cheapening of life. And the next thing anyone knew, we were producing [millions of abortions]. As if the millions of lives that have been lost to a lust for treasure and territory, sugar cane and cotton, didn't count.

Christopher Kelley

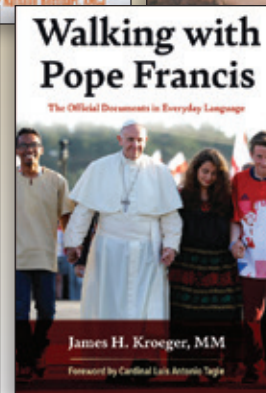
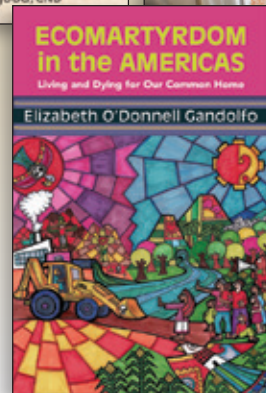
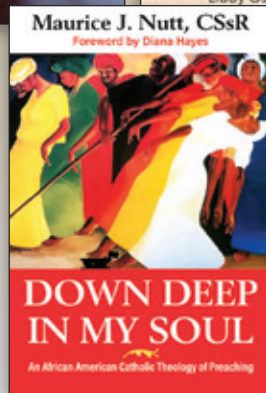
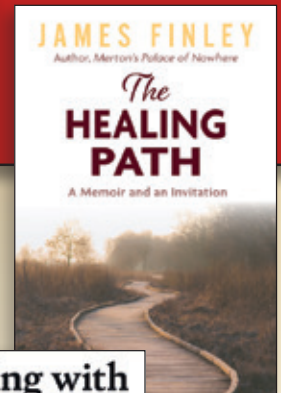
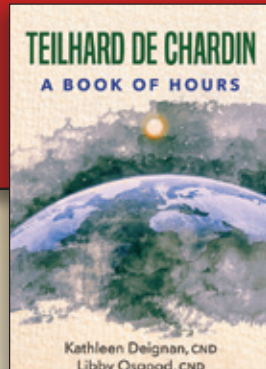
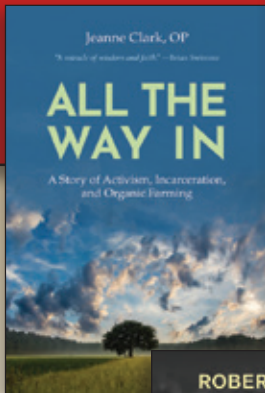
I laud the author for addressing this issue, but trained historians have been researching this topic for a while now. The fact that the "average Catholic" isn't aware of the history isn't particularly surprising; most Catholics don't know very much about the church's history.

Vince Killoran

I'm neither a theologian nor historian. This article and the comments lead me to conclude that until 1888, the hierarchy of the church condemned the slave trade. But except in a few instances such as the situation of Canary Island slaves, the church did not condemn slavery per se. Chalk it up, I guess, to the fact that for too long a bunch of old white men, who were in the thrall of the European colonialist monarchies and guided by the knowledge gleaned from old writings attempting to explain things, decided to keep the status quo rather than rocking the boat. Thanks and kudos to Pope Leo XIII. Now if we could just get to the point that individuals may enter the priesthood regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or marital status, and come clean about church history, perhaps we won't need to be so defensive about things. (Disclosure: I am an old white man.)

Floyd Grabel

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Follow us

Repentance and Holiness: The True Meaning of Lent

“Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” This verse from the Book of Joel (Jl 2:12) is part of the Mass readings on Ash Wednesday, followed by further prophetic exhortations to repentance: “Rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.” It is an age-old reminder that Lent is a time of penance, that we are sinners in need of repentance and God’s mercy. We are called to mourn, to fast, to turn with sincere sorrow from our failures to follow God’s call, with both outward signs and inward conviction.

That the Lord seeks not to punish us for our sins but to call us all back to holiness is a conviction so strong among theologians in the church in the modern age that it risks becoming a truism. Any look through some of the Lenten homilies of the church Fathers reminds us that fire and brimstone most certainly play less of a role in our spirituality and theology now than in ages past. Rather, we gravitate more toward a sense that the Lord wants for us the integrity and wholeness that comes with being made in the image of God—and surely the words of Jesus in the Gospels amplify that call to “return to me with all your heart.”

The danger of situating our understanding of sin and repentance in this framework, however, is that it can become pablum, half-hearted nods toward the existence of evil by a people fully convinced of their own goodness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Protestant theologian put to death by the Nazis in 1945, had no such illusions about human nature when it is unmoored

from fear of God, and identified in his own time the danger of “cheap grace.” What did he mean? “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession,” he wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship*. “Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

Bonhoeffer recognized the opposite as well: grace that comes at a cost. “Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods,” he wrote. “Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.”

These are valuable words for us all to reckon with both in and out of the Lenten season. Discipleship has a cost and discipleship has a reward. Throughout the history of Christianity, various proponents of an emphasis on one vision of human nature or the other have come and gone, and for every Pelagius comes along a Jonathan Edwards, for every John Calvin an Origen.

In our Easter celebration we recognize that depravity, sin and death do not have the last word. We hear as the antithesis of the Lenten call to mourn the words of Jesus to Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John: “Woman, why are you crying?” And we see in Mary’s response—she goes to tell the others the good news of the Resurrection—the beginning of the church itself. The time for sorrow and repentance

is followed by a time of rejoicing and sharing the good news of God’s love.

In the past few months, **America** has featured several articles contributing to the perennial conversation in the church about where our emphases should lie in our theological and pastoral approach to sinfulness and holiness. In December 2022, the theologian James F. Keenan, S.J., delved into the history of the church’s approach to reconciliation and the sacrament of confession, arguing that “the moral tradition developed *from its inception* pathways to holiness, embodied pathways that were collective, merciful, hospitable, inclusive, exemplary and grace-filled.”

In January and March of this year, Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of San Diego contributed essays (available on **America’s** website) on the church’s need to be more inclusive toward those who find theological and pastoral barriers thrown up against their full participation in the life of the church, particularly divorced and remarried and L.G.B.T. Catholics. It is important to recognize, he wrote, that “the pastoral cannot be eclipsed by doctrine. For the pastoral ministry of Jesus Christ stands at the heart of any balanced understanding of the church that we are called to be. And pastoral authenticity is as important as philosophical authenticity or authenticity in law in contouring the life of the church to the charter our Lord himself has given to us.”

An essay in this issue by Sister Nathalie Becquart points out another reality uncovered in the listening phase of the ongoing synodal process: Many Catholics find the church to be an unwelcoming home, a place not where wounds are healed but from which the

wounded feel excluded.

We have wounds that only God can heal, and the church's role is not to set up barriers, but to bring to God those in need of healing. Yet we are not healed simply to go back to our old lives. The healing found in Christ gives birth to a new life marked by holiness and discipleship.

In the work of these scholars—and many who have responded to them in various forums—we see that as a church we continue to struggle with a question that is as much an anthropological as a theological one: Are we sinners who must make amends in order to receive God's grace and mercy? Or are we made in the image of God, and in need of the church's guidance and care on our lifelong path to holiness?

Everyone involved in such conversations, even when these become rancorous and impassioned, surely confesses that the answer is both. When answered with careful discernment and a recognition of past wisdom, when received in the spirit of charity, these questions are always worth asking and answering. St. Paul reminds us of exactly this in one of the Easter Sunday Mass readings: "Let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5:8).

In our engagement with Lent and our celebration of Easter this year, we are all profoundly aware of the suffering and despair that human sin has wrought upon the world and ourselves. So too, however, are we reminded of what the Lord has done for us on Easter morning—and so we rejoice and resolve once again to care for the wounded, to welcome the stranger, to cooperate in God's bringing life out of death.

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An apology to my economics students: Pope Francis, not Adam Smith, is right

At a Christmas Eve Mass last year, Pope Francis explained “the problem of our humanity—the indifference produced by the greedy rush to possess and consume.” He spoke of how “a world ravenous for money, power and pleasure does not make room for the little ones, for the so many unborn, poor and forgotten children.”

This is a common theme for Pope Francis. At a Mass in June 2015, he characterized greed as a kind of gateway vice, saying that it “keeps going, keeps moving forward.” It “opens the door,” Francis said, “then in comes vanity—to think you’re important, to believe you’re powerful—and, in the end, pride, and from there all the vices, all of them.” His solution? “A continual stripping down of one’s own interests and not thinking that these riches will offer us salvation.”

Francis is well-meaning, no doubt about that, but he is not an economist. I, on the other hand, have a doctorate in economics and decades of experience both as a college professor and as a business consultant. I taught the principles of the free-market system, a.k.a. Economics 101, to hundreds of college students. In doing so, I introduced them to a worldview completely at odds with the one expressed by Pope Francis.

Over 200 years ago, economic godfather Adam Smith penned the sound bites that underlie capitalist thinking. In *The Wealth of Nations*, he wrote: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love.” A corollary of that rule is that we should be skeptical of actions taken out of concern for the

common good. As Smith wrote, the individual concerned only with his or her well-being “frequently promotes that of society more than when he really intends to promote it.”

The staggering hubris of claiming to know more than the pope, much less God, about how to promote our common welfare comes easily in teaching an economics class. For example, if a student wondered about starvation running rampant in a world ruled by capitalism’s invisible hand, all I had to do was refer them to our textbook (*Microeconomics*, by Paul Samuelson and William Nordhaus): “A rich man’s cat may drink the milk that a poor boy needs to remain healthy. Does this happen because the market is failing? Not at all, for the market mechanism is doing its job—putting goods in the hands of those who have the dollar votes.”

The underlying goal of an ECON 101 class is often expressed as helping students learn how to “think like an economist.” Such thinking can lead to the belief that both greed and self-interest are good; they power an economic engine that propels us toward efficiency. Little wonder that studies have shown that the more someone studies economics, the more likely he or she is to become selfish (as measured by donations to charities) and less concerned with the well-being of others (again, as measured by donations to organizations working for the common good).

I left academia years ago to start a life in consulting, public speaking and publishing, and my misgivings from teaching ECON 101 only grew. Then came Pope Francis. As I read his writings on the moral failures of capitalism, I came to see how the debate

among his most vocal critics completely missed the point.

“I do not condemn capitalism in the way some attribute to me,” Francis told the Argentine journalists Francesca Ambrogetti and Sergio Rubin in their new book *El Pastor*. “Nor am I against the market [economy].”

Every advanced society needs some sort of economic system. No matter what the system, however, we must always avoid the “ends justify the means” logic by which economic systems are so often judged. It is not capitalism itself but actions motivated by the sin of greed, like the scandal of rationalizing those actions, that must be condemned.

The pope is not a socialist. The pope is not a communist. The pope is a Catholic. Far more than any economist I have studied, the writings of Pope Francis give meaning to the phrase “In God We Trust.”

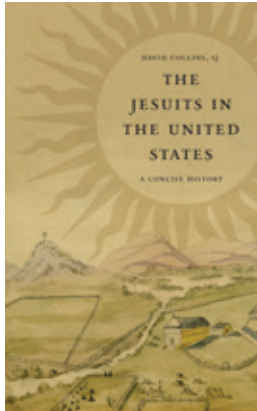
We must look first to what our faith has taught us: Love your neighbor. “Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.” Sell everything you have and give it to the poor. Each of these directives, like so many other teachings of Catholicism, might set a budding economist on a fresh and wonderful intellectual journey.

To my former students, I am sorry that I did not send you down those paths. Please don’t forget that you, like me, still have time to explore them.

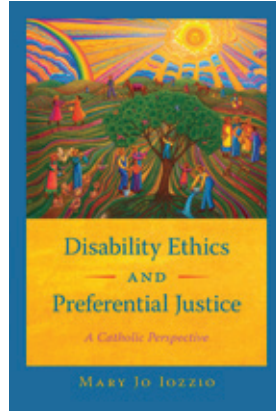
Richard A. Levins is a professor emeritus of applied economics at the University of Minnesota, in St. Paul. His most recent book is *God or Greed: The Market as Culture* (ItascaBooks.com).



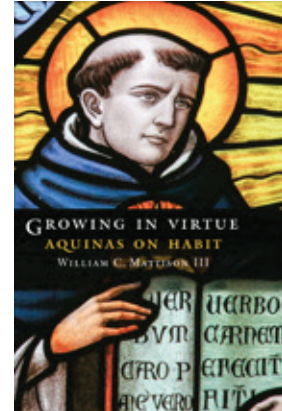
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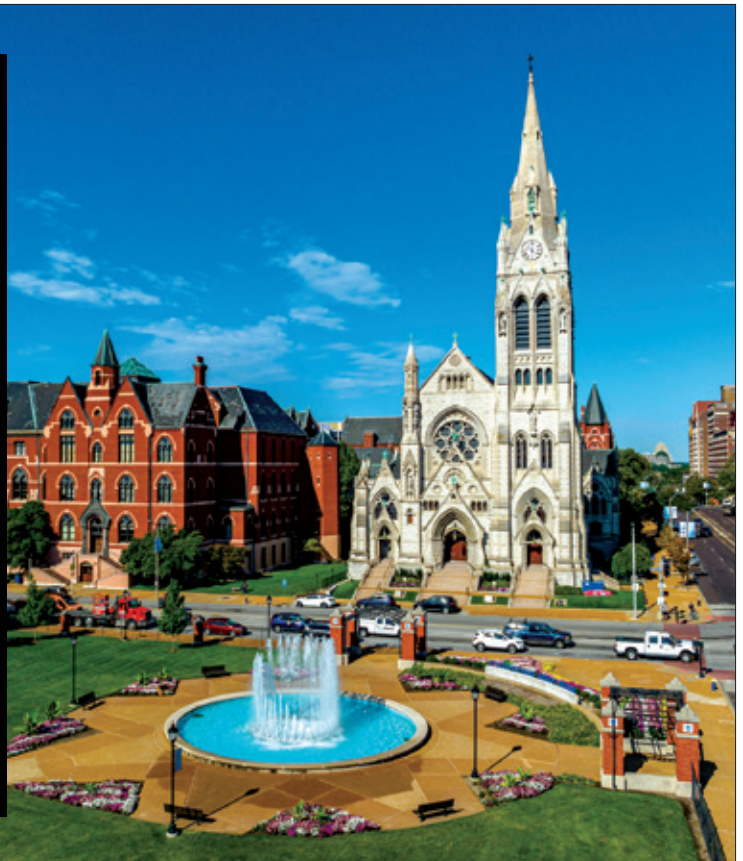
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Contemplating a church of inclusion

Listening to Latino Catholics on L.G.B.T. issues, including young people, and welcoming women's leadership

By J.D. Long-García

In an essay for **America** posted online in January, Cardinal Robert McElroy, the bishop of San Diego, called for a more inclusive church, one that recognizes the leadership of women and welcomes L.G.B.T. people. That inclusive church, he wrote, should “embrace a eucharistic theology that effectively invites all [baptized Catholics] to the table of the Lord.”

Cardinal McElroy's essay—which was inspired by the ongoing Synod on Synodality—sparked a wide range of reactions. The changing demographics of the Catholic Church in the United States raises another question: How well do Cardinal McElroy's views reflect the various perspectives present in the growing Latino community?

It is not an easy question to answer.

Cardinal McElroy certainly echoes many of the sentiments expressed in the national synthesis document produced during the diocesan phase of the 2021-23 synod process, which the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops released in September. But the document's emerging themes—reported by dioceses across the country—are not broken down by ethnic community.

And what Latino communities emphasized in synodal consultations likely also varied considerably from one parish to the next. It has become a cliché to say it, but Latinos are not monolithic. Nevertheless, to try to get a better sense of how Latino Catholics are engaging with the synod, **America** interviewed several participants from across the country.

Young Catholics and a Welcoming Church

As Cardinal McElroy noted, the synthesis document reports that the marginalization of certain groups “has become a source of scandal for some youth who perceive the Church as hypocritical and failing to act consistently with justice toward these diverse communities.” It also reports “a deep



CNS photo/James Ramos, Texas Catholic Herald

ache” because of the departure of young people.

Communities in South Florida are expressing similar concerns, according to Carmen Villafañe, a spiritual director and theology teacher in the Archdiocese of Miami. The synodal listening sessions she helped organize included one with young men who were high school seniors.

“Their families felt that the Catholic Church wasn't addressing their needs—for transparency, for reconciliation,” she said. “That came out of the mouths of 17-year-olds. They want less ritual and more listening.”

The desire to become a more welcoming church, which Cardinal McElroy and the synthesis document both stressed, is also important to Latinos, Ms. Villafañe said.

“The concept of communion is important to people—feeling part of something,” she said. Yet even some of her family members who attended Catholic schools are not inclined to regularly attend Mass—in part because of the sexual abuse crisis (another major theme underscored by the synthesis document).

“It does not mean that they're agnostic or atheist, but it's very painful,” she said.

“Sometimes the church can feel very rigid. Sometimes the Latino culture can be very conservative. But all of this is also full of contradictions,” she said, noting that acceptance of the L.G.B.T. community by Latinos is becoming common.

Jaime Whitford, a deacon at Queen of Peace Church in Mesa, Ariz., also stressed the need to be welcoming. He and his wife, Martha, both immigrants from Nicaragua, have been running a Spanish-language couples' group at their parish for the last 16 years.

The ministry welcomes couples whether they are married sacramentally or civilly or are cohabitating. In fact, the majority of the people who get married at Queen of Peace, the Whitfords said, have been together more than 10 years, have children and

have now decided to seek a sacramental marriage.

During Sunday Spanish-language Masses at Queen of Peace, it is common to see a substantial number of Catholics forgo Communion. Yet Deacon Whitford has found that couples are willing to participate in church activities even if they cannot receive the Eucharist.

“One has to be very careful to not judge,” he said, reacting to one of Cardinal McElroy’s points. “Couples do get angry when they’re judged.... In the end, no one can know the intentions of any other human being.”

In his experience, most of the couples who seek a sacramental marriage do so to receive the Eucharist. “But it isn’t that they feel marginalized because they don’t receive the Eucharist,” Deacon Whitford said. “The church must have an openness to anyone who comes, but that does not require a change in church teaching.”

The deacon believes theological debates often happen in small, elite circles that are disconnected from the day-to-day lives of his community. He says parishioners at his church are primarily concerned with other problems, like immigration, economic issues and passing along the faith to their children.

L.G.B.T. Catholics

The synthesis document also noted “the desire to accompany with authenticity LGBTQ+ persons and their families.” That focus resonated with Yunuen Trujillo, who is a lay minister at St. Louis of France Church in La Puente, Calif. The church’s lay eucharistic ministers sometimes ask her if they are supposed to give Communion to L.G.B.T. people.

“When there’s such a focus on who can and cannot take Communion, then people feel that it’s their role to make those decisions,” she said. “We could eliminate that if we just said, you know, ‘Communion is for everyone.’”

Ms. Trujillo participated in synodal listening sessions led by an L.G.B.T. ministry. “Obviously, the most pressing concern from everyone was inclusivity and welcoming L.G.B.T.Q. people and families,” she said. She also attended sessions at her parish, where participants expressed concern for individuals who are divorced and for pastoral issues related to abortion.

Participants expressed similar concerns at Dolores Mission in Los Angeles, according to Rosa Bonilla, who is a pastoral assistant there. One thing that surprised her is how well the community embraced the synodal process.

“The presence of young people really stood out,” Ms. Bonilla said.

“Some of the young people were a little timid, but those who did share in small groups expressed a concern that

L.G.B.T. people do not feel accepted by the church,” she said.

That lack of welcoming was not just of L.G.B.T. people themselves, but also those who support the L.G.B.T. community. “They want to have youth groups where everyone is welcome,” Ms. Bonilla said.

Recognizing Women’s Leadership

Cardinal McElroy argued in **America** that “the church should move toward admitting women to the diaconate.” Similarly, U.S. synodal consultations expressed “a desire for stronger leadership, discernment, and decision-making roles for women—both lay and religious—in their parish communities.” Neither surprised Ms. Bonilla.

“Many women in the parish are talking about the lack of participation of women in the highest places in the church,” she said. “They would like to hear more women’s voices in the church, in liturgical celebrations and making decisions. They want women’s opinions to be considered and their work recognized.”

Lily De Leon said the church does not always recognize the vital role women played in the development of the church. She was involved in the first phase of the synodal listening process in Miami and helped organize consultative sessions.

Women were at Christ’s side, she said. “The Virgin Mary was at the center of the [early] church,” Ms. De Leon pointed out. And in remote regions throughout the world, women have served as catechists, have helped priests and have prepared families for baptisms.

“They have been like deacons in that sense,” Ms. De Leon said. “It’s important to recognize that, not as a competition, but to recognize women have worked in this way, which is complementary.”

Ms. De Leon called the synodal process itself a step forward and has been disappointed to encounter Catholics who are against the synod and have not participated in it. Beyond dialogue, however, she does hope the process will lead to change.

Ms. Trujillo likewise hopes the synodal process will lead to concrete action. To truly become more inclusive, the church must make “a public and unequivocal statement of welcome,” she said.

“We all at some point are in violation of some principle, and we’re still looking for God in one way or another,” she said. “So we have to learn to journey together, regardless of our differences. We’re not here to police each other. We’re here to accompany each other.”

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

Do Catholics care about climate change?

Not for nothing was the late Pope Benedict XVI called “the green pope.” He approved the installation of solar panels on Vatican rooftops and the planting of a forest to push Vatican City to net zero on greenhouse gas emission. His successor, of course, took things even further. In 2015 Pope Francis devoted an entire encyclical, “Laudato Si’,” to care of creation and the existential threat posed by climate change.

Have U.S. Catholics gotten the message?

A recent Pew survey found that while overall Catholics show a higher degree of worry about the impact of climate change than other Christian denominations, the issue appears to divide U.S. Catholics along the same political and racial lines as within the wider public. Fifty-seven percent of Catholics overall say climate change is a serious concern, a percentage that matches all U.S. adults.

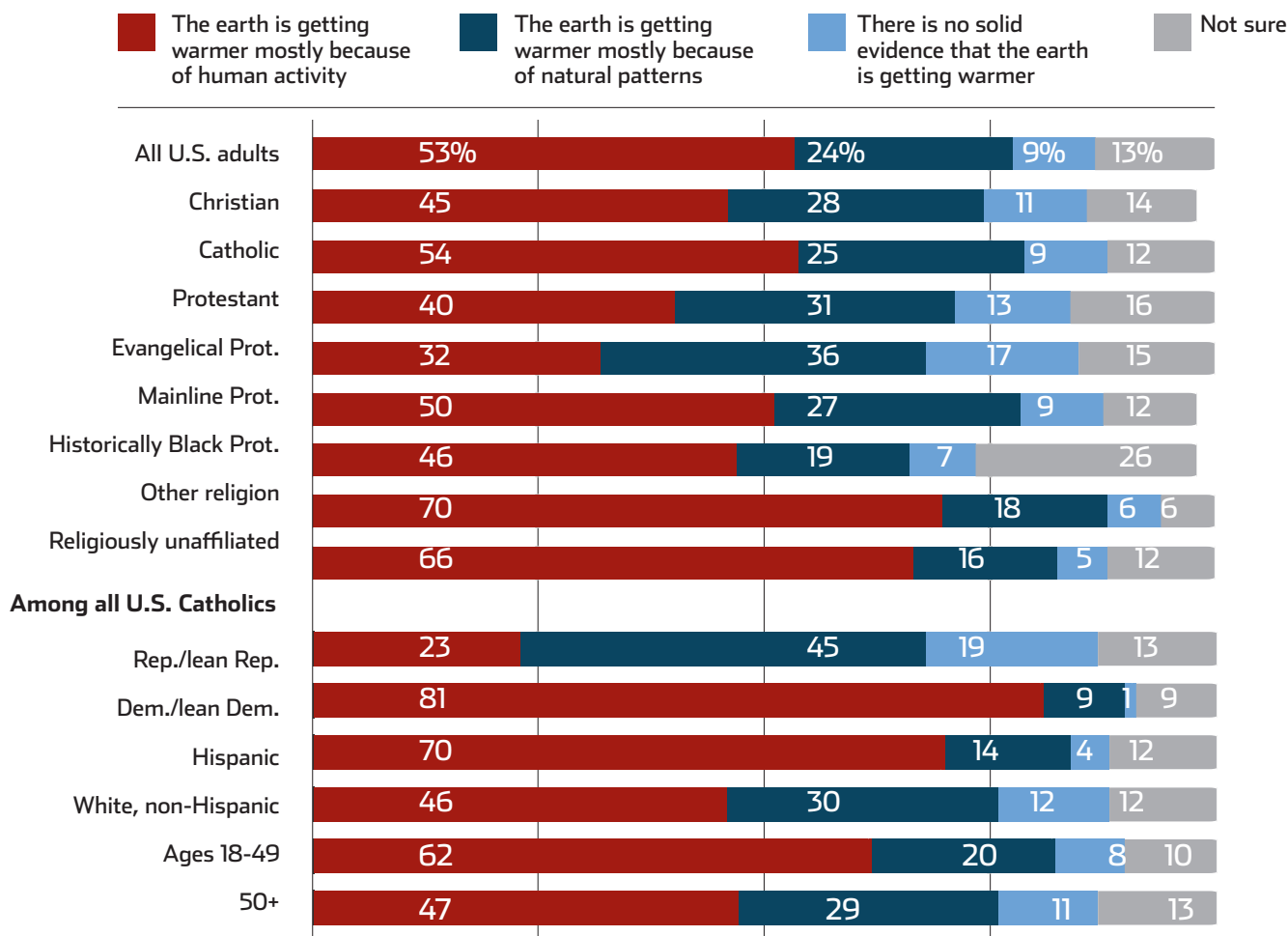
But only 49 percent of white Catholics deemed it so. Raising the overall percentage among Catholics were Hispanic Catholics, 71 percent of whom believe climate change is a serious concern. Only 25 percent of Catholics who are Republican or who lean Republican believe climate change is a serious concern, but 82 percent who are Democrats or who lean Democratic do. Sixty-one percent of Catholics between 18 and 49 call it a serious concern. That figure drops to just 53 percent for Catholics older than 50.

Hearing about it at Mass?

Only about one in 10 Catholics—8 percent—said there is a great deal or quite a bit of discussion on climate change during homilies; 50 percent said there is either some or a little discussion of it, and 41 percent report never hearing about climate change at Mass.

A slim majority of U.S. Catholics say the earth is warming mostly due to human activity

% who say each of the following



Source: Pew Research Center, “The pope is concerned about climate change. How do U.S. Catholics feel about it?”, Feb. 9, 2023

'DO NOT FORGET US' An appeal after a year of war in Ukraine

Mila Leonova is a partnership coordinator for Caritas Ukraine, representing the nation's embattled southeast region. At the beginning of the war in February 2022, as Caritas evacuated staff from communities overrun by Russian forces, she remained in Dnipro in eastern Ukraine. The city at the time was a primary target of the advancing Russians.

"So many people told me, 'Mila, you have a son, 5 years old; you have family; you have to go to safe territory.... But I had a strong thought in my soul that I have to be in Dnipro and I have to help these people that evacuated to us.'"

Soon hundreds of displaced families were coming to Caritas, knowing they would find help.

A year later her hometown has become "the biggest humanitarian hub in Ukraine," the first destination "between the war area and a safe area," Ms. Leonova says. Officially the region is hosting 400,000 displaced people, but she thinks the actual number is closer to twice that figure.

The war has produced the world's largest refugee crisis—eight million people. Perhaps seven million more are "internally displaced people," driven out of their home communities but remaining within Ukraine's borders.

The staff and volunteers of Caritas Ukraine accept a double duty as a second year of war began on Feb. 24—as agents of humanitarian aid but also, with their families, as victims and targets of conflict themselves. The Rev. Vyacheslav Grynevych, the secretary general of Caritas-Spes, tries to remain mindful of the spiritual and psychological burden carried by Caritas team members and volunteers, offering them opportunities for recuperation when he can and sufficient time off for grieving when a family member is lost on the battlefield.

Caritas Ukraine reports that 40 percent of its volunteers are themselves people dislocated by the conflict. Many find the humanitarian work a blessed distraction, Father Grynevych says. Some have children fighting at the front. "They tell me, 'Father, this is our battlefield,'" their chance to contribute to the war effort.

Caritas teams performed some small-scale restoration work on salvageable homes as winter closed in during this first year of the war, Father Grynevych reports. He hopes to do more significant restoration work in cities around the country as soon as it becomes safe and practical to do so. But at this time, new attacks threaten to obliterate any reconstruction.

For now humanitarian aid remains of primary impor-



The aftermath of a Russian missile strike on Kramatorsk, Ukraine, on Feb. 2, 2023.

tance—delivering food kits, hot meals and shelter. Father Grynevych calls the future the "most difficult question."

He has buried three friends lost on the battlefield, and he wonders: "If I saw the terrible things that [Russian soldiers] did in Bucha, in Irpin, what would I have to do as a man, as a priest?... I know that I have to pray, but I also have to protect the people that are close to my heart."

He does not have an easy way out of this dilemma, balancing love of country with the Christian demands of mercy and forgiveness

"It is very painful to think about forgiveness," Father Grynevych says. "I know that is a moment that will be in the future, that we have to. But I have to meet some family from Russia, for example, and I cannot imagine how it will be."

The silence of the Russian people is a great mystery and misery to him. How could his friends in Russia and Belarus have been so completely taken by Mr. Putin's justifications for the war? How can they remain passive and mute, "like vegetables," before this injustice, he wonders.

He knows "the war will not end in the moment when there will be agreement of peace. The war will be done when we can forgive Russia." That is something he struggles to imagine now.

As the second year of the war begins, during a conversation in February he can offer no easy answers about how peace may come, only an appeal to the American people and others who have stood by Ukraine over the past year.

"Please pray for us," he says, softly. "Do not forget us."

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

In Brazil, a contemporary genocide threatens the Yanomami people

Communities of the Yanomami people in the Brazilian Amazon region have for decades been threatened by illegal mining, narco-trafficking and other criminal activities, and their health and social conditions have long been precarious. But in January, Brazilian Health Ministry agents surveying the region reported that conditions in the Indigenous communities had substantially deteriorated. The national government declared a health emergency on Jan. 20.

Devastated by malnutrition and preventable diseases like flu, pneumonia, anemia, malaria and diarrhea, the Yanomami people were described as victims of a contemporary genocide by government authorities. In a message to Congress on Feb. 2, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said, "The genocide committed against the Yanomami people demands more drastic measures from us, in addition to emergency medical treatment, to combat malnutrition."

Mr. Lula said that it is urgent "that we remove the 20,000 miners," known in Brazil as *garimpeiros*, "who work illegally in Indigenous territory, murdering children, destroying forests and poisoning rivers and fish with mercury."

The Yanomami communities of Brazil are located in the Amazon Basin portion of the northern state of Roraima, near the border with Venezuela. Illegal mining contaminates the legally protected territory's water with mercury and drives away animals that could be hunted and eaten by the Yanomami, diminishing their diet to a few vegetables grown or found in the forest.

In Roraima and other territories many Indigenous communities still live in relative isolation from modern society, inhabiting villages in mountains and rainforests. The Yanomami preserve much of their cultural and religious traditions and have a system of self-governance. In total, the Yanomami population is estimated at about 40,000 people.

Mr. Lula said the degradation of conditions among Yanomami communities had accelerated because of the policies and inaction of his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro. The Bolsonaro administration encouraged the return of mining settlements, and the estimated number of gold miners in Yanomami territory surged, according to environmental and Indigenous rights groups.

The Yanomami leader and human rights defender Davi Kopenawa Yanomami told Brazilian media that more than 570 Indigenous children had died over the past four years



because of illness caused by mercury contamination and malnutrition. "*Garimpeiros* are many and we are few. Half of my people have died [over the decades]," he said. "We are only a few Indians protecting lands for the entire world. Indians do not die alone. They will die with water, forest, culture. You will suffer, too."

Many of the incursions on Yanomami territory are begun by poor people themselves, who hope to find a living in illicit mining or harvesting of Amazonian natural resources. But organized criminal gangs also violate protected territories, often provoking violent confrontations and engaging in human trafficking and the sexual abuse of Indigenous minors and women. Such incursions can also lead to the rapid spread of infectious disease.

Kenyan-born Sister Mary Agnes Njeri Mwangi has been a Consolata Missionary in Brazil since 1996. "In this land, reciprocal generosity reigns, the land takes care of them and they heal the land," she said. "Everything is shared with the land, nothing is accumulated. When someone dies, everything they owned is burned.

"The only inheritance the Yanomami dream of leaving to their children is the habitable forest."

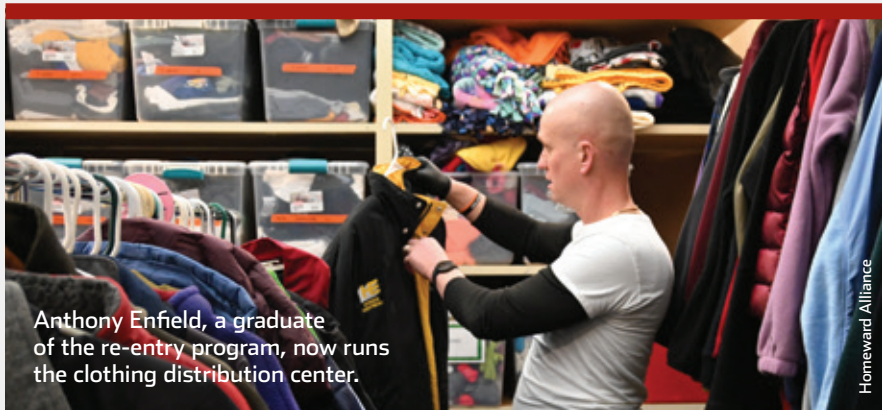
Sister Mwangi said that "the church cannot be complicit with the death project" being perpetrated by miners. She believes the solution to the crisis, beyond the immedi-



A Yanomami man stands near an illegal gold mine on Indigenous land in 2019.

CNS photo/Bruno Kelly, Reuters

GOODNEWS: Murphy Center stops the revolving door for parolees in Colorado



Anthony Enfield, a graduate of the re-entry program, now runs the clothing distribution center.

Homeward Alliance

Russell Turner spent nearly 25 years in and out of jail or prison, beginning in juvenile detention as a minor. He described being repeatedly abused while incarcerated, targeted by police after his release and denied support like housing assistance and addiction counseling. The cycle of recidivism that he experienced is common in the United States.

But upon his second release from state prison last May, Mr. Turner found help at a low-rise brown building in Fort Collins, Colo., called the Murphy Center for Hope. A project of the Homeward Alliance, the center offered all the support that Mr. Turner had not received after previous prison releases: job training, guidance into transitional housing and personal attention from a dedicated case manager.

The logistical genius of the Murphy Center is to house at one site many of the local private and public social service entities that people who are vulnerable to homelessness—a group that includes people recently released from incarceration—might need. The center’s re-entry effort is funded through a Colorado state program called Work and Gain Education & Employment Skills.

A national Department of Justice report in 2021 found that 62 percent of incarcerated people return to prison within three years of their release. In Colorado, 50 percent of parolees end up back behind bars within that time.

The rate of recidivism among clients of the Murphy Center, however, is just 9 percent, according to Kayla King, the director of Homeward Alliance’s re-entry program. She attributes much of that success to the sense of community and mutual accountability created by the re-entry program at Murphy.

Mr. Turner has battled addiction, depression and health issues most of his life, but now he is living up to promises he made to himself, and he gives a lot of the credit for that to the support he received through the Homeward Alliance. The support cleared a path to freedom and self-sufficiency.

Now, he said, it is “up to me to walk it.”

Christopher Parker is a Joseph A. O’Hare, S.J., fellow at America. Twitter: @cparkernews.

ate delivery of emergency aid, will be grounded in the protection and empowerment of younger Yanomami. Now many Indigenous young people are succumbing to the vices of modernity, becoming involved with drugs, guns and liquor, she said. As a result, some even end up collaborating with the criminals who are threatening their communities.

What might help restore balance is food sovereignty and security among the Indigenous communities, she said. That autonomy could be hastened by relearning ancestral farming techniques and the recovery and restoration of now-degraded land.

Filipe Domingues contributes from Rome. Twitter: @filipedomingues.

THE POISON OF POLARIZATION

And the Catholic call to communion

By Sam Sawyer

What is the way out of polarization? And why does that question—along with the now-commonplace observation that society suffers from deepening divisions about everything from gun control to abortion to public funding for religious schools—seem so exhausting?

Polarization is exhausting largely because it seems hopeless, and also because it gets progressively worse. Americans' negative attitudes toward political parties other than their own, as measured in surveys, have increased dramatically in recent decades and at a much faster pace than in other countries.

These entrenched divisions simultaneously increase the vehemence of our arguments and decrease our willingness to listen to one another. We exhaust ourselves declaring our opinions, but we are not really in conversation. We produce monologues that are intended more to reassure us than to convince those with different views—or worse, that are received by them as taunts and provocations which must be answered in turn. Constant exposure to arguments that we are not willing or able to engage with in dialogue is draining as well. It is like listening to a radio tuned to a station that is half static, half shouting—but that we dare not turn off lest we miss the point



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our own monologue will aim to refute later.


When we think about polarization in terms of its derangement of public discourse, we often think first of political partisanship. But it is clear that this dynamic also plays out in many realms of common life, including religion. In the Catholic Church, it is easy to recognize polarization operating both within the life of the church itself and in the church's relation to the secular world. For example, conflicts over the Traditional Latin Mass and over how the church should engage with a wider culture whose sexual norms have changed radically both reflect different factions arguing fervently but often talking past each other.

In fact, a closer look at the relationship between religion and secularity provides powerful insights about how polarization arises and how it becomes so intractable—and it also helps us imagine how to find a way toward greater unity. The reality of the church as a communion, not just an association of individuals, offers a powerful antidote to polarization. Finding resources within the church's tradition for a healthier engagement across internal divisions can provide a model for responding to secular forms of polarization as well. As I begin my service as **America's** 15th editor in chief, I want to put the ministry of America Media at the service of these hopes.

Where Polarization and Secularity Intersect

Polarization is not simply an intense form of extremism; it is not just the worst case of division or disagreement. The kind of polarization that is exhausting us is, instead, a pathology endemic to pluralism. It is a name for how attempts to live together with others who hold different accounts of meaning, goodness and human nature—accounts that overlap and intersect but do not fully agree—break down and turn into fear and scapegoating instead. Our arguments about how to live together run in circles. As we despair of ever convincing each other, the “other side” in a polarized discourse becomes less a partner in conversation and more a threat to be neutralized.

Indeed, what most characterizes polariza-



What most characterizes polarization is the constant sense of threat.

tion is the constant sense of threat: Everything is at stake all the time, always in need of defense. Because we lack shared ground on which to agree or disagree, we also feel the lack of safe ground for our own beliefs. This is the ugly and dangerous truth of why the outrage machines of social media and the 24-hour news cycle work so well on us. We are already afraid—and they are ready at hand to tell us why.

In thinking through how polarization operates, I have found that the philosopher Charles Taylor’s analysis in *A Secular Age* offers crucial insights into how the stakes of disagreement have risen so high in our contemporary situation. (While I would encourage everyone interested in these issues to read *A Secular Age* themselves, a 900-page tome is a very good reason to make a recommendation of a shorter précis as well. James K. A. Smith’s *How (Not) to Be Secular* is an excellent exploration of the key points of Taylor’s work.)

There are two main points from Taylor that have bearing on the question of polarization: his distinction between three different meanings of *secular* and his concept of being “cross-pressured” by having to constantly choose among many sources of ultimate meaning.

Taylor argues that the meaning of the word *secular* has at least three different senses. First, *secular* can mark out a sphere differentiated from the sacred, as when the church is separated from the state. Second, it can describe the results of the historical process of secularization, such as a decline in belief in God or religious practice. But Taylor is not satisfied with the assumption that modernity or rationality necessarily leads to secularization and decline in belief. So the third sense of *secular* describes a cultural context in which religious belief has come to be understood as one contested option among others.

This means that Taylor’s third sense of *secular* applies even to those who are fervently religious and deeply converted. It names the condition in which answers to ultimate questions can no longer be taken for granted, even



by those who take religion most seriously. Believers or not, we all live in a secular age, in which we become responsible for opting to believe.

Taylor’s third sense helps us see that the secular is not an automatic antagonist for religion. There is indeed a “secularism,” an ideological opposition to religion that assumes belief is destined to decline and is only too willing to hasten the process. But there is also a “secularity”—not an antagonist opposing religious belief, but a new context within which both religious belief and unbelief operate.

It is in this context of secularity, in which we have become self-consciously responsible for the choice either to believe or not to believe, that the stakes are raised. Taylor describes this situation as being “cross-pressured.” We are all conscious of being pulled toward both belief and unbelief. When we feel the attraction of the transcendent, we always have a rival explanation ready at hand that would not disrupt the disenchanted, immanent world we occupy: “Yes, that could be the voice of God. But it might also just be me talking to myself.”

We cannot escape the responsibility for choosing



Supporters of legal abortion and pro-life demonstrators hold signs outside the U.S. Supreme Court during the annual March for Life in Washington on Jan. 20, 2023.

OSV News photo/Jonathan Ernst, Reuters

how and whether to pay attention to such longings and for choosing the framework within which to understand them. Nothing comes to us with its meaning built-in and uncontested, because even the recognition that such robust meaning is possible is an option that has to be consciously embraced.

Taylor notes that what makes cross-pressure even more challenging is that it cannot be definitively relieved. Even after we choose belief or unbelief, we still feel the pressure of other options as possibilities for us. This pressure is not skepticism or even active doubt with regard to religious belief, but simply the fact that in secularity, belief cannot be settled once and for all. We have to opt in continuously to the project and practice of belief.


Taylor's concept of cross-pressure helps to explain how polarization (and exhaustion with it) arises within pluralism. Secularism, as an ideological opponent of religion, tries to settle the question of belief by relegating experience of the transcendent to the private sphere, but this has the inevitable consequence of making responsibility for opting in to (or even out of) belief almost

unbearably heavy to carry alone. Fundamental commitments cry out for shared responsibility; we need help with these burdens.

The responsibility for choosing frameworks of understanding applies not only to questions of belief in God, but also to how we understand meaning itself and how we envision human nature and goodness. Unless we learn to share the burden of continuously choosing these commitments—even and especially in situations where the answers are not universally agreed upon—cross-pressure becomes nearly overwhelming. And so instead of looking for ways to sustain and channel that pressure, we start to look for ways to vent and discharge it, all too often at the expense of an enemy on the “other side” of a contested choice for meaning.

Polarization Within the Life of the Church

Taylor's analysis of cross-pressure and secularity provides a background for understanding how polarization is also a threat and challenge for the church, because Catholics believe and worship within the context of secularity and



We all live in a secular age, in which we become responsible for opting to believe.

a plurality of frameworks for ultimate meaning. The Catholic Church is not pluralistic in the sense that it holds all religious viewpoints as equally true, nor should anyone expect or want it to be. The communion of the church binds Catholics together in one faith—not simply as an organizational principle of the church, but because no one can be a member of the body of Christ alone. Catholic faith is always an ecclesial faith, and the one church of Christ proposes a universal account of meaning, goodness, human nature and the relation of human beings to God.

While the church's communion is universal, in order for it to be healthy under the conditions of secularity, it cannot imagine itself as a refuge from pluralism. The temptation is to treat the church as a space where believers should be safe from any confusion, secure on the ground of the church's unchanging teaching. But this impulse misreads *secularity* as *secularism*, as the ideological opponent of religion rather than the context for both belief and unbelief. So it treats the unavoidable challenges of cross-pressure as antireligious assaults on faith, framing any difficulty in assenting to church teaching as a fundamental danger.

There is a reciprocal temptation to imagine the church as perfectly at home with pluralism, making no truly universal claims at all. In this temptation, the primacy of conscience can become a license to make one's own decisions about belief in a solipsistic, one-way dialogue in which the tradition and church teaching might inform conscience but cannot easily make demands on it. But this falls prey to its own version of secularism's error of relegating religious questions to the private sphere and reduces the church's communion to a kind of consensus, consisting of nothing more than the sum of individual religious options.

Avoiding both these temptations, the church must form believers from, and for discipleship within, a world in which religious belief cannot be taken for granted and is

always contested. But such formation is unsustainable unless it can be shared at a level deeper than merely personal choice and commitment. Both of these realities are operative in the church's struggle with polarization.

Even though the conditions that produce polarization involve the struggle between belief and unbelief, they contribute to conflict in the internal life of the church as well. A brief look at Catholic conversation, especially online, will quickly demonstrate that many in the church are reflexively suspicious of other Catholics' orthodoxy, reacting to any disagreement or even any different theological emphasis by subjecting others to an *ad hoc* inquisition for heresy.

An underlying good motive—to defend and explain the tradition of the church—is at least partially at work in many of these responses. However, in polarized conditions, this practice becomes distorted into hypervigilance against any hint of confusion. The goal is no longer explanation of teaching, but the preservation of the church as a safe space against the threat of secularism, which obscures the deeper challenges of discipleship within the context of secularity.

Once the stakes have been raised in this way, the conversation in which an explanation could be heard and understood never really begins. Rather than a dialogue that aims to help fellow Christians to change their minds, such interventions become a show of force explaining to those who already agree exactly how wrong the suspect position is. And it is equally easy for defensive responses to these *ad hoc* inquisitions to fall into the same pattern.

When **America** interviewed Pope Francis last November, I asked him about polarization, both in politics and the church, and he responded forcefully: "Polarization is not Catholic." In the wake of polarization, Pope Francis said, "a divisive mentality arises, which privileges some and leaves others behind." In contrast to polarization, he described the action of the Holy Spirit as "harmoniz[ing] opposing differences."

The pope's trust in this action of the Spirit is also at work in his commitment to synodal dialogue, even when it is messy and complex. And yet we have seen that the Synod on Synodality is itself a flashpoint for polarization in the life of the church and even in discussions among bishops. Some Catholics are suspicious that openness to dialogue and a call to listen to voices on the margins is a Trojan horse for plans to change doctrine. Other Catholics seem to presume that dialogue puts every kind of structural and theological reform on the table for discussion, regardless of whether or not it is compatible with tradition or if the church is ready for it, a tendency Francis has criticized strongly as "elitism" in his appraisal of the German Synodal Way.



A group of men protest gun control in Asheville, N.C., on Feb. 23, 2013.



Students call for stricter gun laws at a rally outside the U.S. Capitol on March 14, 2018.

All of this means that Catholics engaged in public discourse about faith and the church—and I am certainly including both myself and readers of *America* in this category—need to examine their consciences to ask how deeply they hope in the work of the Holy Spirit harmonizing differences. As Sister Nathalie Becquart, X.M.C.J., said in a lecture on synodality (a version of which begins on Page 38 of this issue), “Harmony is preferable to monotony, but harmony can only be achieved via sharply different notes in combination.” When we go into conversation with other Catholics in areas where we disagree, are we seeking to add a note in combination or to make sure our note is the only one heard?

Can we recognize each other within the bonds of communion, or have we already decided in advance that a sister or brother is a threat to the truth and the common good rather than a fellow pilgrim searching for it? Are we ready to let our own ideas and desires be shaped and disciplined, both by the tradition of the church and by the needs of our sisters and brothers whose experience of faith is different from our own? Or are we so convinced we are right that we enter into conversation principally to demonstrate how others are wrong?

The remedy for polarization in the life of the church cannot simply be better arguments, better apologetics or better catechesis. Such remedies only have a chance to work if they can be applied within a framework of dialogue

based on mutual trust. In an atmosphere of suspicion and divisiveness, these approaches can be twisted, even when they come with the best intentions, into strident reassurances for those who are already convinced of one position or another rather than charitable and generous engagement with those who think differently. And in those conditions, argument and explanation only deepen polarization and the exhaustion it causes.

Communion as a Way Out of Polarization

In response to polarization, many have noted the importance of civil discourse. While necessary, however, civility alone is not sufficient. The fuller remedy for polarization is the practice of communion. We need to learn and relearn that we are bound together in the life of the church at a level deeper than our own agreement. This unity, which arises from our common baptism, makes it possible to sustain the experience of being cross-pressured without succumbing to polarization and making enemies of one another.

Ironically, both the tendency for hypervigilance against heterodoxy and the tendency to treat doctrine as easily revisable suffer from reducing communion to a kind of social contract. For the latter, doctrine has only as much binding force as we are willing to grant it and can be revised again if our willingness to consent to it changes. For the former, any specter of change in teaching is tantamount to a crisis, the social contract demands full and unquestioning assent, and



People pray during a traditional Latin Mass on Aug. 11, 2020, at Our Holy Redeemer Church in Freeport, N.Y. The restrictions on the Latin Mass by Pope Francis have been met with strong, and mixed, reactions by many Catholics.

those who do not offer it must be aggressively quarantined lest the contagion spread.

But ecclesial communion is neither malleable according to our opinions nor so fragile as to collapse when the tradition is examined critically and the possibility of doctrinal development is recognized as a part of God’s ongoing preservation and guidance of the church in history. More importantly, communion is not a product of our consensus, but a cooperation in God’s grace as members of the body of Christ.

The reality of being in communion, in other words, does not cease when Catholics disagree with one another, nor do our obligations to one another as members of that communion. We are still members of the same body of Christ, called to the one table of the Mass—even when, as is often tragically the case, our approaches to the Mass itself are points of division and rancor.

When the dynamics of polarization take over, we start to treat other Catholics as enemies or even as traitors who are dangerous to the life of the church. Disagreement leads to suspicion that our interlocutor does not *really* believe in the same faith as we do. This is poisonous to charity, and because it destroys trust, it also works against any hope of helping brothers and sisters in Christ to grow in faith. Worse yet, these internal divisions in the church are ripe for exploitation by other forms of polarization, especially by partisan political divisions.

What is necessary for us to begin to find our way out of polarization is a deliberate practice of cultivat-

ing and valuing communion, *especially in the midst of disagreement*. Rather than demonstrating how another Catholic has betrayed or undermined the faith, we ought first to look for evidence, even in what we disagree with, of the faith we hold in common, and celebrate that evidence when we find it.

This idea is not my invention. It is simply an application of the “Presupposition” from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola to the situation of polarization. In order that a retreatant and retreat director may be “of greater help and benefit to each other,” Ignatius counseled:

It should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor’s statement than to condemn it. Further, if one cannot interpret it favorably, one should ask how the other means it. If that meaning is wrong, one should correct the person with love; and if this is not enough, one should search out every appropriate means through which, by understanding the statement in a good way, it may be saved.

It is striking how much effort and desire Ignatius calls for. We are to be “more eager” to find a good interpretation than a bad one and to ask how to interpret what we cannot readily accept. If that does not succeed, we should correct “with love” and “if this is not enough”—having already made the previous *three* attempts to



CNS photo Gregory A. Shernitz

Communion reveals that polarization is not an automatic consequence of difference.

reach agreement—we are to “search out every appropriate means” to save the statement we are tempted to condemn. Disagreement and condemnation among Christians are envisioned more as a failure of love than as a principled defense of the truth against a subversive enemy.

Ignatius’ advice might be rejected as idealistic, or perhaps criticized for having as much potential to be exhausting as does the very polarization that it might help us avoid. But this is precisely the effort that is necessary to sustain communion in a cross-pressured and polarized world. And it is also the kind of effort necessary for a new evangelization in the context of pluralism and secularity where all claims to ultimate meaning are contestable and even devout believers need help and community to keep opting in to the possibility of faith.

At its best, the way of seeing recommended by the “Presupposition” involves an enlargement of our own imagination of another’s motives. We are asked to see how they might be *trying* to say something we can agree with, even when we cannot agree with what they have actually said. To put it somewhat more theologically, we are asked to see—and to *want to see*—how something we are inclined to reject might proceed from a desire for the good, and a desire for God, in which we already share.

This is a deeply hopeful vision, and it is one **America** will try to put into practice.

We commit ourselves—and we will exhort our contributors—to both imagine and acknowledge the best motives of those with whom we may disagree, especially within the life of the church. This does not mean we

will manufacture agreement where it does not exist; nor does it mean forgoing any possibility of correction as sometimes necessary to maintain the bonds of communion. But it does mean that we believe that such critique is more likely to succeed in its goals and to help fellow believers if it is animated by a vibrant charity, more eager to recognize and celebrate a shared faith than to find something in need of correction.

Catholics will still disagree with one another, and they will disagree in the pages of **America**. But even in disagreement, we will acknowledge one another as seeking the communion we already share whenever possible; we will not hasten to predict or threaten its failure.

In 1909, our founding editorial announcement promised that **America** would “be cosmopolitan not only in contents but also in spirit. It will aim at becoming a representative exponent of Catholic thought and activity without bias or plea for special persons or parties.” That promise, in today’s context of secularity and the all-too-easy collapse of disagreement into polarization, is what motivates this commitment to the practice and cultivation of communion.

The gift of communion—of being bound together in a common life by something deeper than our own agreement—is a gift not only for the church, but also for a divided and polarized world. Communion reveals that polarization is not an automatic consequence of difference and exposes it as a lie that deceives us into fearing each other instead of recognizing what we hold in common. Catholics ought to aspire to show our neighbors who are exhausted by polarization and division that there is a way out of this trap, and that it starts by choosing to love those we are tempted to view as enemies.

Sam Sawyer, S.J., is the editor in chief of **America**.

COULD A SMARTPHONE DESTROY YOUR SOUL?

And other (less dramatic) questions parents face when navigating the world of children and technology

By Elizabeth Grace Matthew

In the 18 years since I graduated from high school, nearly every aspect of childhood and adolescence in the United States has been altered by smartphones and social media. No matter how my husband and I decide to mediate our children's relationship to these technologies, their lives and the lives of everyone they know will be shaped to a large extent by the ways in which the world they inhabit and inherit has morphed to revolve around these pocket-sized super-computers on which we now conduct so much of our personal, professional and civic lives.

My sons are 7, 6 and 2. When should I get them smartphones? How about iPads? At what age are social media accounts appropriate? If I walked up to any group of my fellow Catholic (or, for that matter, non-Catholic) parents and asked the aforementioned questions, I would get many different answers. But it is likely that these answers would be delivered with just a few overarching emotions: uncertainty, concern and a sense of being overwhelmed.





One of the reasons for this is that behind these basic questions are much larger philosophical ones: What aspects of yesteryear's childhoods have been replaced by screens? What have we gained and lost in this trade-off? How do we protect our children from mature and disturbing content (sexual, violent and otherwise) that is more readily accessible than ever before? How are children and teens affected by the constant curation of self that is incentivized by social media? Are boys and girls generally affected in the same ways, or in different ones? And what can be done about any of it?

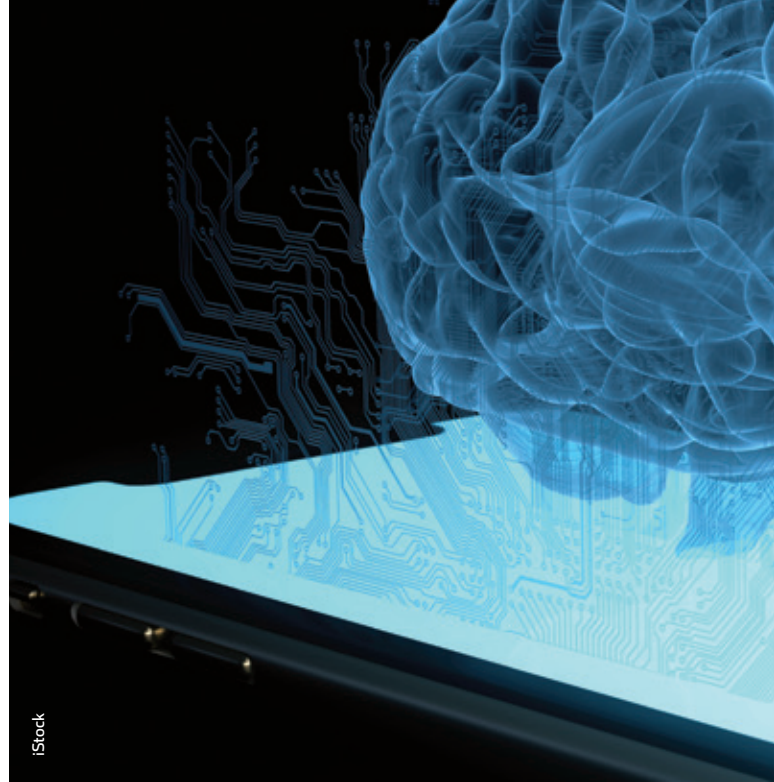
In her book *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood (and What That Means for the Rest of Us)*, published in 2017, the psychology professor Jean Twenge offers detailed insight into the technological and social landscape faced by those she terms “iGen,” referring to people born in 1995 and later.

According to Dr. Twenge, who drew her research from surveys of 11 million Americans since the 1960s as well as from personal interactions with today's kids, iGen spends so much time online that they rarely read and, even more concerning, spend less time in-person with peers than any generation on record. As a result, in some ways they are “physically safer than ever” (teens can't get pregnant or impregnate someone else alone, and they are less likely to drink or use illicit drugs absent peer pressure) but “more mentally vulnerable” (Dr. Twenge's chart showing how increased time on electronic devices correlates with unhappiness and suicide is jarring).

Any attempt to create a cohesive plan for helping children to navigate cellphones and the technology and media that come with them must begin with a closer look at some very real challenges.

The Seductive Power of Fake Reality

Online and on social media, today's children—especially girls—are constantly measuring their own lives against curated and what Dr. Twenge describes as “relentlessly positive” images of their peers' lives, and feeling unworthy when their reality cannot match up to this new juggernaut designed to stoke adolescent insecurity: fantasy that is being marketed as reality and that turns smartphone users into helpless masochists as algorithms designed to addict fully functioning adults render our children unable to look away.



If, 20 years ago, some girls created “burn books” with mean comments about their less popular peers or pointedly excluded one girl from a party (per Tina Fey’s “Mean Girls,” the 2004 hit movie about my own millennial era’s iteration of high school cliquishness), feelings might be hurt by that cruelty, and understandably so. But that kind of jockeying for popularity and position among adolescent girls is as old as the hills; my mother and even my grandmother could tell stories like these from their high school days in the 1970s and 1940s—and those stories are not so different from my own. In all three cases, these mostly one-off occurrences were separated by literally thousands of other in-person interactions.

But this new reality of constant online exposure of oneself and of others is a form of spiritual poison. Today popularity and seeming worthiness can be actively *quantified* through likes and clicks, and identity becomes something that one must constantly proclaim through premeditated words and pictures (rather than something one organically reveals face-to-face). Or, as one of the nation’s leading addiction experts, Nicholas Kardaras, author of the 2016 book *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction Is Hijacking Kids—and How to Break the Trance*, has called it: “digital morphine.”

As in-person interaction continues to be replaced by online engagement, it is no wonder that rates of mental health problems, depression and suicide among adolescents continue to climb. That there was a sharp uptick during the pandemic—when schools were closed and socialization went fully online—makes sense.

The Cultivation of Psychological Fragility

The challenges of the online world become even more troubling in light of some offline developmental trends among young people. According to Lenore Skenazy and Jonathan Haidt, co-founders of The Let Grow Project, today’s children and teens are vulnerable to unhealthy levels of anxiety in part because they have never been given the opportunity to cultivate physical or mental resilience. Some of this comes down to parenting philosophies. Helicopter moms predate nonstop smartphone use among children, but allowing excessive screen time in place of more “dangerous” activities can rise from a desire to insulate children from harm.


We have all heard the stories of teenagers who are afraid to sit alone in restaurants or talk to waiters. We have seen the trends of college students believing that certain words actually constitute (not just invite, but are) violence, and witnessed twenty-somethings stage walk-outs at companies that do things like offer a platform to comedians who have utterly mainstream ideas.

These developments are, according to Ms. Skenazy and Mr. Haidt, the result of the fact that childhoods without any opportunity for real-life risk-taking have become the norm: “Having been told that the world is so scary that they always need someone supervising them, the kids have internalized it.” Moreover, having been told that unkind words from random people can permanently wound them and others, they dutifully internalize every kind of prejudice that they can find online (hint: every kind); mistake disagreement for intolerance; and, given what they believe to be the stakes, devolve into puddles of anxiety when they can’t convince faceless online accounts to agree.

People currently in their early to mid-20s were the “life as internet-enabled smartphone” guinea pigs. It is not any particular person’s fault that we failed them, but fail them we did. Now the results are in, and we need to heed the call to do better.

Coping Thoughtfully With the Problem

In an effort to find a way forward, I spoke with five people who have unique insights into how smartphones and other technology interact with American childhood—particularly in Catholic families and institutions—today. Each of these individuals helped me to consider questions about my kids’—and my own—present and future relationships to technology in deeper and more productive ways: How to pursue the good, the true and the beautiful amid the constant din of a world suffused in smartphone-induced distraction? How to minimize exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying and online social drama? How to inoculate the brain against the craving for online attention and vali-



THIS NEW REALITY OF CONSTANT ONLINE EXPOSURE IS A FORM OF SPIRITUAL POISON.

dation? They offered a few guiding principles to consider.

Seek the good. For Deacon Chris Roberts, the president of Martin Saints Classical High School, a Chesterton Academy just outside Philadelphia, concerns about problematic content online are real but secondary to the smartphone's promise of constant distraction. Deacon Roberts—who with his wife mostly homeschooled their four daughters until high school—co-founded Martin Saints, where he seeks to instill in students the ability to “be intentional in the real world.”

Deacon Roberts's teenage daughters are going through their high school years with access to flip phones but not to smartphones. He expects they will own and use smartphones once they depart for college. But it is his hope that the principled resolve he demonstrates—not to allow his family to be swept into uncritical adoption of technological distraction and to teach by example the habit of making “ordered choices” by restricting his own smartphone use to specific times and places—will cultivate, in both his own daughters and in their classmates at Martin Saints, the capacity for true joy as Catholic adults.

The ability to cultivate “interior silence” by spending time in nature and in conversation is crucial to our spirituality and to our joy as Catholics, Deacon Roberts explained to me. We lose that most important ability to “seek the good” if we do not give ourselves the space to be in touch with nature and creation. That is why allowing the thoughtless use of technology—with its incessant presence—to blunt our spiritual faculties is a grave mistake.

Cason and Dan Cheely, Philadelphia-area Catholic parents of seven children who range in age from 17 to 2,

echo Deacon Roberts's concerns about the ways that an incessant pull toward technological distraction can diminish young people's relationship with God. As Cason Cheely explained to me, the biggest worry that she and her husband have about technology—all its problematic content aside—is its ability to “crowd out” that “still, small voice” of God that speaks to us “in the quiet, in the solitude, in that empty space.”

The elementary-age Cheely children attend Regina Angelorum Academy, a classical Catholic pre-K-through-grade-8 school that requires parents to sign a pledge that they will not get their child an internet-enabled smartphone until after eighth grade. The Cheely teenagers attend various Catholic high schools where technology is integrated into the school day. They do have access to smartphones—albeit with the web browser disabled and very few applications. Extending restrictions on technology into their children's high school years is challenging and countercultural. But Ms. Cheely told me that the restrictions have not prevented—and indeed, have fostered—her teens' development of meaningful friendships (and ones mostly free from social media-induced drama).

Avoid exposure to the bad. Durrell Harris, the principal of St. Raymond's, a Catholic elementary school in Philadelphia, said that most young children there have access to cellphones—but not during school hours. At St. Raymond's, which is an Independence Mission School serving predominantly socioeconomically disadvantaged children, almost all students get smartphones by fourth grade. Most get them for safety reasons, as parents want to be able to track where their children are.

THE THOUGHTLESS USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO BLUNT OUR SPIRITUAL FACULTIES IS A GRAVE MISTAKE.



Mr. Harris, however, said that ensuring the school is also a “safe space” means “keeping the building smartphone-free.” As the assistant principal of a public high school before taking the helm at St. Raymond’s, Mr. Harris spent more than half of his time addressing issues related to children and technology. Sometimes disputes that began online erupted into face-to-face violence; other times, cyberbullying itself was the problem.

Mr. Harris explained to me that parents, both at his prior institution and at St. Raymond’s, are concerned about students’ exposure to inappropriate content and to bullies online. In likely the most succinct distillation possible of how most families feel about smartphones, Harris said, “Everyone knows it’s a problem, but no one wants to be without one.”

Still, rendering phones inaccessible during the school day is an important and appreciated part of the culture at St. Raymond’s. Parents and students in Mr. Harris’s school know what high school students in Springfield, Mass., learned after they started using magnetically locking cell-phone pouches to eliminate phone use during the school day: Despite initial resistance to the policy, they say it’s “nice talking with people face to face.”

Technology is, for Mr. Harris, both a “gift and a curse.” It is a gift because students in schools without as many resources can nonetheless access differentiated instruction through online learning programs. The curse is that we are saddling children with the adult obligation to understand—as Mr. Harris explains to his elementary schoolers in a fall assembly—that they are responsible and accountable, *forever*, every time they click “send.”

Beat addiction to the clicks. For Howie Brown, the director of admissions at St. Joseph’s Preparatory School, a Jesuit boys’ high school in Philadelphia, and a Catholic father of two young children, today’s smartphone technology is a “fine tool, but a bad master.” So it should be kept mostly away from children (who cannot help but be

mastered by it) and offered to teens (who are learning to be adults) only with thoughtful directives about how, why and in what spirit it is to be used.

Mr. Brown, who graduated from “The Prep” himself in 1999, explained to me how technology has altered almost every aspect of high school life since he was a student. For example, students’ class schedules are now stored in an app on their phones. So, while the devices must remain away during classes, they are out in hallways, as students check those schedules.

This new ubiquity of smartphones has prompted critical engagement among certain teens. Mr. Brown told me that some students seem increasingly self-aware about the time that social media can waste, and intentional about avoiding it—whether mostly or altogether—because they would rather be engaging in face-to-face pursuits. This sentiment echoes (albeit in a far less extreme way) the worldview of some Brooklyn, N.Y., teens who call themselves the “Luddite Club.” Eschewing smartphones entirely, these high schoolers meet regularly to hang out in person, and are not in communication with one another between meetings. Some of them hope to grow their numbers on the college campuses where they alight in a few years.

While Mr. Brown worries that constant access to smartphones and adaptation to social media’s communicative norms can adversely affect students’ academics and particularly their writing, his biggest concern about social media is the way that it feeds and inculcates a need for online validation and attention such that “the appetite grows with the eating.” This is why he is careful to keep his young children away from social media, and to model for them intentional habits around technology. Mr. Brown wants his young son and daughter to develop the capacity for “focus and attention” that grows as they do—through intentional engagement with family and friends, not through “clicks.”

Thinking Ahead, Apart and Together

Jonathan Haidt contends that social media like Instagram and Twitter that utilize “posting” models, where “people on there are the product which is sold to advertisers,” are “unsafe at any speed” for children—especially girls—younger than 16. He believes that we should find a way to ban these apps for people under that age. “Wait Until Eighth”—the pledge that groups of families can take to resist purchasing their children an internet-enabled smartphone before eighth grade—is good. Extending the wait until about the 10th grade is even better.

I agree with Mr. Haidt—who is no hysterical fearmonger, but rather a sober researcher and also a father—both about the crux of the problem (these posting-centric iterations of social media) and about how to ameliorate it (pass laws regulating the age at which these social media companies can turn children into fodder for profit).

Of course, laws banning people younger than 16 from these types of social media—like the one recently proposed by Senator Josh Hawley, a Republican from Missouri, that is likely to receive support from some of his Democratic colleagues—would be nearly impossible to enforce, and they will not fix the full scope of the problem. But they do not need to be perfectly enforced, nor do they need to fix everything. They just need to give parents like my husband and me, who intend to wait until high school to offer our kids limited access to any internet or social media on smartphones (though I expect we’ll give them talk and text capacity several years before that, to facilitate those independent experiences!), the legal high ground that will encourage more people to feel like “waiting until eighth” is the moderate position: splitting the difference between parents who recklessly flout the law and parents who follow it to the letter.

It may help to consider social media legislation the way we consider legislation around another addictive substance: alcohol. Like many people, I tend to think that the legal drinking age should be 18, not 21. That there is a group of people who can die in the defense of their country but cannot buy beer in it strikes me as absurd. Moreover, the fact that alcohol is a forbidden fruit well into adulthood is infantilizing and, many contend, creates a broader atmosphere for the kind of binge drinking that Americans engage in at far higher rates than our counterparts in Europe (where moderate alcohol consumption is a part of life from childhood onward).

All that said, however, the National Minimum Drinking Age Act that was passed in 1984 and made the national drinking age 21 has demonstrably lowered alcohol con-

sumption among teens, and especially among younger teens. This makes sense: Shoot for 21, and even if you miss, you still land at 17. But shoot for 18, and when you miss, you land at 14.

We all knew kids when we were in high school whose parents let them have friends over for alcohol-soaked parties. Many of these parents recalled their own teenage debauchery with fondness, which is part of why they permitted what those of us with law-abiding parents deemed reckless behavior. But there were also parents who expected their kids not to drink at all. And there were those—perhaps the plurality—who shrugged off social drinking in a 16-year-old but would have been alarmed and incensed to discover any drinking at all, let alone binge drinking, in a 13-year-old.

With better legislation, I suspect a similar attitude would apply to children and social media (although few people would look upon adolescence spent staring at a screen with nostalgia). So if we as a society aim for 16 as the approved age for access to social media, many of us may land at 14. This is not perfect, but it still would be enormously better than what we have right now, when many fifth and sixth graders nationwide become addicted to internet-enabled smartphones before they are anywhere close to mature enough to navigate the perils of these devices.

We cannot roll back the clock. But we also do not have to accept eternal devolution of our kids, their childhoods—and ultimately our republic—at the hands of a few digital economy oligarchs. This epidemic of technology-related teen mental health concerns is a spiritual crisis that transcends religion and politics. Surely we as Catholics can agree on that. Perhaps we can even experience a rare moment of unity as we help to persuade our friends of other faiths and no faith to come together in an attempt to craft necessary but imperfect solutions to a problem that affects us all.

Elizabeth Grace Matthew is a freelance writer, an America’s Future Foundation Writing Fellowship alumna, and a Young Voices Contributor. Her work has appeared in *The Hill*, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *FemCatholic*, *Patheos* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.



Ten Years of Good Shepherding

MARIO J. PAREDES

March 13 marks the tenth anniversary of the Pontificate of Francis, the first Latin American pope in the Church's bimillennial history. The election of the Argentine Mario Bergoglio as the leader of the Catholic Church reaffirmed the non-Eurocentricity of the papacy in the Church that began to manifest, in recent centuries, with the election of Polish Pope St. John Paul II in 1978 and then, at his death, with the election of German Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

All of this shows that the work of the Pontificate in the Church has been opened to the Catholic Church's universality and to the possibility that we may see – in its fundamental mission of presiding over the faith of the entire ecclesial community – different styles, ways of being, thinking, and acting in the most recent popes of the Church, who have come from such diverse corners of this world.

Precisely, Pope Francis, in these ten years of his Pontificate, has shown us a human and pastoral style typical of his being a Jesuit, Latin American, and a good shepherd who is always aligned with the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is this style of Pope Francis that impacts the world and the Church as the world increasingly strays from the ways of God, and the ecclesial community increasingly needs to return to the sources of Christianity.

His pontificate has inspired admiration, and no one has been left unmoved, either because of the novel profile of his genuine personality as a human being and as pope, or because of the themes, focuses and emphases of his Petrine ministry. Francis embraces the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and makes them his own life and teachings. And his wanting to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ authentically, simply, transparently, and naturally, is not foreign and has not escaped the amazement and admiration of all, within the Catholic Church and beyond.

His temperament and his life as a Christian also make him a good man and shepherd, companionable, simple, humble, one like us. Jorge Mario Bergoglio is, as a man and pope, an everyday and authentic being in his words

and gestures, in the topics he takes on, in his attitudes and in his very own and personal way of communicating and approaching everyone.

His presence in the Church and world shows him as a conservative man in his doctrine, but progressive in his attitudes and approaches; as welcoming, compassionate and inclusive – and not exclusive – and as a Pope who has, wants and proposes a new way of understanding the forms of government within the Church to the point of appearing and presenting himself as “anti-clerical.”

From the first moment he appeared on the balcony of St. Peter's Square to offer his first Papal blessing “Urbi et Orbi,” the pontificate of Francis has been accompanied by new and prophetic signs and gestures with which he has refreshed the Church's image before the world but, above all, has permanently summoned us believers to align with the person of Christ, return to the primary sources of our faith so we can live with evangelical authenticity as true disciples and missionaries of the Good News in the world.

In the complexity of this historical, political, social, and cultural juncture in which the whole of humanity lives today and amidst the enormous challenges that the world and the Catholic Church within it endure today, the figure of Pope Francis, his life, gestures and teachings, have been for all a fresh breeze and a beacon of light amidst the vicissitudes and uncertainties that we all face.

His desire to move forward, to set the Church in motion to keep pace with the changes and “signs of the times” that humanity experiences today, his eagerness for the whole Church to be “a light in the midst of darkness,” for us to shine in the peripheries of the world and share the love of God, especially with the “throw-aways” of our world, has encountered criticism and obstacles, above all, within the Church itself, from those who – laity and clerics – see in Francis a threat to their comforts and interests, from those who feel that Francis confronts them with the Gospel and dusts off and disturbs the appeasement of their consciences, and from all those who – like the Pharisees in the time of Jesus of

Nazareth – set aside God's commandment to instead cling to the legalisms and traditions of men (cf. Mk 7:1-13).

All this because Francis is, above all, a “Christian” in its complete sense, a man convinced that the Gospel of Christ is the answer to our yearning for happiness and to our pursuit of a better, more livable, sustainable, human and fraternal world.

On this tenth anniversary of his pontificate, we rejoice in everything that Francis, as man and Pope, is and has meant for the Church and the world. We celebrate his eagerness to draw us – anew – to the gospel of Christ and to God's love experienced and shared by all. We rejoice in his commitment to renewing us as Christians and delivering the Church from the sacristies so that it may “enlighten all who are in the house” (cf. Mt 5:14-16). We thank God for all his love and devotion to the poor, sick, imprisoned, the migrants, and those who suffer the most.

Pope Francis has not had an easy task. He has had to swim against the current in a world that wants to build realities, relationships, institutions and societies against or behind God's back and, above all, he has had to confront that which pains him the most – experiencing and suffering the resistances, oppositions, denials and betrayals to the Gospel of Christ, from laypeople and ordained ministers alike, within the very Church over which he presides.

Let us pray for Francis, as he himself asked of us from the first moments of his pontificate, that the Spirit of God may continue to strengthen him, console him, encourage him, so that he may be with us and preside over us in our faith for many years to come.

Ad multos annos!

Mario J. Paredes is CEO of SOMOS Community Care, a network of 2,600 independent physicians—most of them primary care providers—serving close to a million of New York City's most vulnerable Medicaid patients



America RETREAT DIRECTORY

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

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

What sort of retreat should I look for? There are many types of retreats, so you can choose a style that fits your spirituality. On a directed retreat, a person meets daily with a spiritual director to discuss what is coming up in one's prayer life. A guided retreat may focus more on one topic (say, women's spirituality) and can offer presentations and opportunities to meet with a director. Preached retreats consist of listening to spiritual talks and praying on your own or sometimes in faith sharing groups.

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



Bellarmino Jesuit Retreat House

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'A Spiritual Event'

Like Vatican II, the synod is a dynamic example of the church in history

By Nathalie Becquart

CNS photo/Paul Haring

The Dominican theologian and ecclesologist Yves Congar said in his book *True and False Reform of the Church* that the reform of the church is always a collective act. My research and work at the Vatican during the last few years, particularly during the ongoing synodal process as an undersecretary for the Vatican's Synod of Bishops, has convinced me he was correct: Reform is never done alone. We should all be very aware that the best way the church can continue this journey toward a synodal conversion is all together—synodally.

I would like to begin by sharing a little bit about synodal methodologies. The scriptural story of the journey to Emmaus (Lk 24:13–32), used at the Synod on Young People in 2018 in Rome, was one that resonated with me and many participants in this current process for the Synod on Synodality. We had the experience that Jesus Christ was walking with us like he was walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

This image of the road to Emmaus is a good expression of synodal methodology based on the “see-judge-act” approach created by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn because it begins with the reality: We start from our situatedness, from the very concrete reality where we are. Then we try to interpret that reality in the light of the Gospel, to discern a

course of action. Then we are called to act.

At the beginning of the journey of Emmaus, Jesus is just listening to the disciples as they walk along, hearing where they are on their road, their disillusionment, their questions. We do something similar when we listen to the “signs of the times,” to use that famous phrase from Pope John XXIII's document summoning the Second Vatican Council. And we are doing that today in our synodal process, and recognizing there is a strong link between synodality and the processes of Vatican II.

The Synod of Bishops, where I am working now, reflects the spirit and method of an ecumenical council. As the Australian theologian Ormond Rush has stated, synodality is the council in a nutshell. We understand the synodal process to be not just documents but a spiritual event, in the same way that it is important to read the texts of Vatican II but also to remember that the experience and impact of Vatican II is not represented only by its documents.

We cannot understand and live synodality today without referring to the council, and our experience of this synod helps us with the ongoing reception of Vatican II. In a way, maybe we are living all together as baptized Christians in this process in the same way that the council fathers experienced collegiality in their role as bishops. But there

is one major difference: This synod is not only a synod of bishops. This process was opened in October 2021 in Rome, and every diocese in the world called all the baptized to participate. We are already in synod, walking together as the people of God.

Synodality and a Pilgrim Church

Another way to describe synodality is as a dynamic vision of the church in history. One of the major shifts that occurred at Vatican II was the move to integrate the historical dimension of the church into our conception of God's revelation. Synodality invites us to understand our personal identity as Christians and our identity as a church as dynamic. Our synodal process is also an example of the church in history, as communion and mission. For this reason, we cannot speak of or live synodality without incorporating practical experience: We are not imagining the church in theory and trying to implement an idealistic, abstract vision of the church. Synodality is a way to be church that incorporates the diverse experiences of its members as we find processes that build us up as the people of God. That is why synodality unfolds step by step.

We are talking about the church of today, in this world, in this context, in these cultures. In this sense, our conversations in the synodal process should include a concrete vision of the church in history, but at the same time be truly rooted in the vision of the Trinitarian God. Those conversations should appreciate the *sensus fidei* of all God's holy and faithful people, the apostolic collegiality of all the bishops and our shared unity with the successor of Peter.

Already in Scripture, we can see that synodality was the style of Jesus and the style of the early church. In Acts of the Apostles 15, we see the church's first synod at the Council of Jerusalem over the question of circumcision for Gentile converts to Christianity. The gathered Christians find much conflict in the community. They do not agree. So what do they do? They gather together, they pray together, they listen to each other, and they try to find a consensus. And ultimately they say that through the Holy Spirit, they can agree that those who were not already Jews do not have to be circumcised to follow Christ.

We see in such examples that synodality is a constitutive dimension of the church: Just as there is a hierarchical principle by which the church is governed, so too is there a synodal principle. There is no primacy without synodality and no synodality without primacy.

The recently released "Document for the Continental Stage" is a kind of synthesis of all the feedback coming

to the Vatican from all over the world. The title of this text—"Enlarge the Space of Your Tent"—says a lot. A reference to Isaiah 54, it indicates that through listening to all these voices of the people of God, we have come to understand that the Holy Spirit is asking us to enlarge our tent to become a more welcoming and inclusive church.

The document was formed from contributions from 112 out of 114 episcopal conferences. Not only is it the first time that we have received feedback from consultations done by almost 100 percent of the bishops' conferences, but we also have input from all the Eastern Catholic churches, from dicasteries in the Roman Curia and from religious communities around the world. We also received many contributions from lay associations and movements of the faithful, many from the United States.

This level of participation made it clear that people want to have a living experience of faith, a living experience of church, not just an abstract concept. All kinds of members of the people of God are calling the church to practice synodality as a way of being and acting, promoting the participation of all.

Learning From Each Other

A member of our commission on theology, the Rev. Carlos María Galli, one of the main theologians in Latin America, offered the following theological reflection:

Today synodality designates the pilgrim style of the Church of Christ as [it] journeys through history towards the Father's house, and discerns her evangelizing mission in the communion of the Holy Spirit. It points out the path that the people of God travels with the plural unity of its local churches, members, and communities—through the convergent exercise of the charisms and ministries at the service of the common good.

Everyone is called to take part in this journey; no one should be excluded if we are to credibly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to all people. We know this is not easy. We all must accept the need both for *metanoia*, or change, and for *kenosis*, an emptying out of ourselves to follow Christ in his paschal journey, if we are truly to allow space for the other, to journey with people from different backgrounds and positions and experiences. This process requires us to be open to new spiritual experiences, to have faith in God, to be humble, to be prayerful.

For this reason, it was moving to read contributions

to the synod from people in countries wracked by war or experiencing difficult crises, like Lebanon, Myanmar, Haiti and Congo. Even in the midst of so much conflict and violence, they say, “We want to participate in the synodal process”—and when they experience synodality, it brings joy and hope. We see how the synod is a transformative process already bearing fruit at the grass roots. A bishop from the United States recently told me the following:

This synod is changing my vision of evangelization. As a bishop, as a priest, I have been trained to teach, to preach, to tell the truth. Through all this experience of listening, I realize that the Spirit is already at work in all these people. This synod is really changing my vision of evangelization.

Recognizing Difference

One sentiment that came very strongly in many reports is that many Catholics don’t experience the church as being welcoming. Many people feel they are not listened to, feel they are left on the margins. They want a more welcoming church, a more inclusive church, a more open and relational church. But it is important to recognize that when you open the floor to everybody and listen to everybody, you won’t always get the answers you think you already know. Rather, you will have diverse and at times actually opposing views.

That too is part of the synod—a call to embrace the tensions present in our midst. We can’t do synodality without facing and dealing with those tensions and receiving them as generative. At times it may not be as necessary to forge agreement as it is to recognize, honor and reconcile differences. We might use the image of musical notes here: Harmony is preferable to monotony, but harmony can only be achieved via sharply different notes in combination.

This is important to remember if we are to truly listen to the marginalized and to the poor in the church. If we truly listen, we may find that maybe they do not speak in very theological or sophisticated ways. But we know that the Holy Spirit is speaking through them too. In many cases, listening to their experiences of church brings us back to the essentials of church life and mission.

These actions need to be in the context of the church community that sees each other as equals, as all participating in the same mission. But we can find the roadmap for synodality in “Laudato Si” and “Fratelli Tutti”—both of which stress that everything is interrelated and connected.

Embracing Co-responsibility

Another important outcome of our listening, and an important goal for the church moving forward, is the embrace

and implementation of a greater degree of co-responsibility in the church. In the same sense that we all wish to be listened to and welcomed, we also all have a responsibility to shoulder part of the work of mission, even if it is just on the local level of our parishes, dioceses or universities. This will require work in formation, because to be a synodal church, we need to train people to pray, to listen, to discern, to dialogue, to work collaboratively. If we truly want new styles of leadership—where authority is exercised not in a personal authoritarian way as power, but in a listening, consultative, collaborative style as servant leadership—we also need to expand our sense of who holds responsibility for the church’s mission.

One thing that came through strongly from the syntheses from all over the world, in so many different contexts, was a series of questions about the role of women and the need to value co-responsibility between men and women based on equality and reciprocity. This was already a strong call coming from the Synod on Young People and the Synod on the Amazon, but with this synod, it is becoming one of the main issues—not just questions about women in the church, but questions about how men and women respect each other and share responsibility at every level.

One important task for us all if we are to embrace co-responsibility is to change our mindset away from a model of a top-down teaching church. At the risk of oversimplifying, if we look back to the First Vatican Council, we see that it reinforced the role of the pope, seen at the top of a pyramidal church with supreme power. With Vatican II, the church embraced the notion that the pope is not alone but part of a college of bishops, and emphasized the notion of collegiality. Perhaps now with synodality, based on the recognition that the Holy Spirit is working in all the baptized, we are being called through the synod to embrace a further vision where everyone in the church—regardless of status, regardless of vocation—has much to offer the rest of us.

We saw some of this in the Synod on Young People: a vision of circularity and reciprocity in our communion, and the idea that the Holy Spirit is working in everybody. We certainly hope the Holy Spirit is working through the hierarchy, but we also hope that through our relationships, dialogue and mature listening, the Holy Spirit can be heard in many other venues and voices. So the primacy of the pope and the collegiality of the bishops have to be brought together with the synodality of all the people of God.

Six Elements at the Heart of Synodality

What are the key elements that form the basis of the synodal vision? I think there are six to keep in mind moving forward. The first is a stress on the church as “the people of

God on the way.” We need to retrieve and preserve that dynamic vision of ecclesial communion as a journey together as missionary pilgrims.

The second is a deeper theology of baptism that stresses the equality of all the baptized. As Pope Francis has said, all of us—bishops, priests, brothers, sisters, laypeople—entered the church in the same way: through our baptism. If we think of this in terms of the documents of Vatican II, it means reading Chapter 3 of “Lumen Gentium”—on the hierarchy of the church—through the lens of Chapter 2, on the people of God, describing the church as all united by baptism and highlighting the common priesthood of all the baptized.

A third key element for the synodal vision is to retrieve and to integrate into the process the notion expressed by “Lumen Gentium” (No. 12) of the *sensus fidei fidelium*, the sense of faith possessed by all the faithful. As a church we do not have simply the authority of the magisterium, though that is important; we also do not have only the authority given to what we sometimes call “the magisterium of the theologians,” though that too is important. We also have the authority given to all the people of God together. This is what truly constitutes the *sensus fidei fidelium*. A synodal church is a church that acknowledges a kind of plurality of authority.

It is of course normal that in this parsing of authority, tensions arise. But we need to receive those tensions as generative and creative, not always as negative.

A fourth key element is paying closer attention to what might be the action of the Holy Spirit. We cannot talk about synodality without looking at the agency of the Spirit in the dynamic of the church. We remember what Pope Francis said when he inaugurated the synod in October 2021: It is not just a gathering of opinions but an ecclesial moment whose protagonist is always the Holy Spirit.

Along those lines, we have the fifth key element of synodality: recognizing and appreciating the diversity of charisms in the life of the church. That requires finding new ways to value, to recognize, to empower all our charisms that are gifts of God for the service of the community.

And the last key element? To embrace a vision of church based on a relational anthropology. This is a call to put human relationship at the center of our discernment and processes, and to develop new communicative dynamics to become this synodal church. That is the only way forward in this process: through relationship. A synodal church is a relational church of brothers and sisters in Christ, a church of fraternity building human fraternity.

Nathalie Becquart, a French Xaviere Sister, is undersecretary for the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. This essay is adapted from a lecture delivered at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry on Oct. 27, 2022.

EVEN THE CRACKS

By Sandra Kolankiewicz

I don't miss his wit, nor his slightly chipped front tooth, his 1965 Volvo 122, which he called his Vulva, nor his 1969 Triumph Bonneville. I'll be fine without the upturned horseshoe over his front door, saltwater fish tank's glow-in-the-dark coral, the Venus in a Half Shell mosaic floor he started in his front hall, then gave up on after setting the face, the blue eyes and pouting lips he avoided stepping on out of respect and made me do the same. He moved me into and out of two marriages, once in the middle of the night, and liked me not as some extension of himself, but wanted to see me grow into who I might become in spite of those mistakes he called moments of enlightenment, going backward not an option, moving forward impossible, scooting sideways better than staying where I was, what he called my crab consciousness, merely his description for my either avoiding or digging a hole, coming out when all was safe like a ghost would. I hear him even louder than this ringing in my ears, a sound he labeled an attempt by enlightened beings to communicate with me truths I do not want to hear, spirits invisible to me in the shower but who know my every move and forgive me when I stray, who don't judge me because the kind of judging we do in three dimensions is impossible without a body, and this is all the body I'll ever get, he said, so make sure I visit every inch, even the cracks.

Sandra Kolankiewicz is the author of the poetry collections *Turning Inside Out* and *Lost in Transition*, and also the novel *When I Fell*, with illustrations by Kathy Skerritt.



WHAT SACRISTANS CAN TEACH THE CHURCH

Our task is to attend to small acts of care in a world that is too often inattentive and careless

By Terence Sweeney

In the back of my parish church, you can find small plaques with the names and dates of the past pastors of St. Francis de Sales. In the rectory, the hallways have old paintings and newer photographs of those same bishops and priests. One can find, at the parish school, the list of members of the Immaculate Heart Sisters who, as principals, have helped guide children from ignorance to knowledge, from poverty to opportunity. But nowhere—in parish, rectory or school—can you find a plaque, photo or list of the sacristans who have served the church between 1890 and today. And that, I think, is exactly how they would want it.

We sacristans are an unremarkable lot. We lay out vestments and books, chalices and ciboria; we switch the frontals to the right color, light a coal in the thurible, ring bells and then head for our pews. Good sacristans, at their best, are *not* noticed. A good homily is obvious, but how the bread made it into the ciborium should not be. It is simply expected to be there.

Sacristans are rarely mentioned in spiritual writings. Blessed Jordan of Saxony does mention us, but not in a good way. He admonishes theologians not to be “like sacristans, whose familiarity with the church causes them to forget to genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament.” The good Dominican was right about the hazards of the role. Many times have I hurried by the tabernacle with only the quickest of head nods.

But the role also comes with many blessings. In looking more closely at what sacristans do, we might move closer to the spiritual truths found in all of us—from the pope in Rome to the discontented teenager in the pew behind you. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (a real page turner) mentions sacristans as having “a liturgical function,” which does not offer us much to work with. In contrast, the *Ceremonial of Bishops* has more to say about sacristans. The first reading of it seems dull, mundane even. But to dwell with the text for a little is to glimpse the heart of the spirituality of a sacristan. For sacristans dare to believe—with their hands as much as with their hearts—that dull, mundane things are the thresholds between the earthly world and the divine: instruments of transformation.

So what do we do? The *Ceremonial* says we arrange “the books needed for the celebration” and lay out “vestments, cruets, chalices, ciboria, linens, oils, processional crosses, candles, and torches.” Who “takes care of the ringing of bells”? Why, the sacristan, of course. We also aim to keep everything in good condition and send certain items for “gilding or repair.” We wash linens and iron them too, light sanctuary candles and clean holy water stoups. And of course we check to make sure that there is “a ready supply of fresh hosts and of duly authorized wine.”

Each thing we do is tangible. We lay our hands on things and feel in their ruddy goodness the readiness for God. We even hope for our own readiness for God. None of this is alien to anyone who has served at table or hosted a dinner. It is the stuff of every day. The more spiritual among us might forget the holiness of the ordinary, but the sacristan simply cannot. And as we clean wax off yet another altar cloth, we cannot forget that we too are ordinary. (Priests are too, but that is more easily forgotten, as it is their hands that elevate the host, anoint with oil and absolve in the darkness of the confessional booth.)

While some may scoff at a sacristan’s concern for liturgical details, we know to let this roll off our backs. Love is as much shown in small acts of care and attention as it is in big words and bold deeds. A sacristan’s task is to attend to those small acts of care in a world and

church that are too often inattentive and careless.

Ordinary things and small acts do not sound like the makings of a vocation, but in fact they are at the heart of every vocation. You cannot help but remember this as you put unconsecrated hosts and low-quality wine into vessels and send them on their way to become not only holy but actually “the body, blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.” If wine of that caliber can become Jesus, what can I become if I let God work on me? Of course, the cheap wine doesn’t make itself divine, God does. We are not so different.

This is the lesson the sacristan’s role has for the church: Remember that amid all the ordinary “stuff” of a sacristan’s ministry, we are elevated not by what we do but what God does. Still, we do, by God’s grace, do something. Or maybe, more accurately, we help others do something. Nothing I will ever do will consecrate the holy Eucharist, but I do get the hosts from the basement closet. I will never anoint a dying person, but I have retrieved cotton balls and the *oleum infirmorum* so the priest could. I have even changed a lightbulb in a confessional. All we do is enable the holy work of others. And that, too, is holy.

I will not get a plaque or a portrait in a church, but that is fine. At the end of Sunday Masses, I grab a taper and light one wick in the candlestand before Mary’s altar and one before Joseph’s. If I don’t, people won’t have a flame with which to light their candle. Recently, a woman touched my arm and said, “Thank you” and then lit her candle, knelt and prayed.

In this, the spirituality of sacristans sheds a little light on the spirituality of, well, everyone. Parents enable their children, teachers their students, priests their flocks. We cannot be the people our children will be for them, we cannot learn on behalf of our students, or convert our flocks by ourselves. All we can do is lay out what is needed, prepare what requires preparing and then join the congregation in expectation of the God who does the real work anyhow.

Terence Sweeney is an adjunct professor at Villanova University and scholar in residence at the Collegium Institute at the University of Pennsylvania.

The Grace of Growing Old

Learning from faith and experience

By Mary Kay Jordan Fleming

I distracted myself with my phone during a long wait for my sister's appointment with a pain specialist. An elderly woman maneuvered into the seat across from me. I shifted in my chair and retracted my outstretched legs as she reeled in her walker and situated her belongings. Baggy clothing hung from her tall, thin frame. My gaze drifted downward to her shoes, the right one untied.

I pointed. "Can I tie that for you?"

Her watery blue eyes locked onto mine. "Oh, yes, thank you."

I fumbled for words as my casual courtesy suddenly felt intimate. "My own shoes are untied half the time, too," I said.

As I reached for the armrest to pull myself up, the woman placed her wrinkled hands atop mine. "God bless you! Thank you!" she repeated three times, cocooning my fingers in her warmth. Now my eyes became watery, too.

This took place five years ago. And it has taken me those five years to figure out why the old woman's gratitude moved me to tears.

I too have begun to struggle with bending over, getting up from the floor and maintaining balance on uneven ground. Undeniable evidence of my own aging. Now in my late 60s, I am the person getting dropped off close to buildings to save walking. I am the one hoping for ramp access instead of stairs. At some point, I may need help tying my shoes.

I should not be surprised at any of my body's changes—my entire career prepared me for what to expect. For 38 years, I taught nursing students about human development and aging. But for all my attention to achy joints and dwindling reserves of energy, I may have failed to consider the emotional cost of those limitations. Most people do not welcome the slowing of movement, restricted range of mo-



tion and loss of sensory acuity that often accompany later life. Coping with these changes is a significant challenge.

If I could go back and do it all again, I would shift the emphasis in my teaching a bit, telling my students about the woman at the pain clinic. I would ask them to empathize with the physical limitations and frustration that elicited such effusive gratitude for a simple fastened shoe, or perhaps with the loneliness that prompted her to caress my hands.

Science may explain physical aging, but life experience and faith are teaching me far more about how to cope with it. Among the many lessons of my late 60s: Give grace. We who aren't as fast, agile or sharp as we used to be once fancied ourselves young and quick and indestructible, too. Until we weren't.

For all I knew, the long arthritic fingers that enveloped



We live, we age and we will die. How should we accompany one another on our journeys?

departed down the hallway.

He stopped in his tracks, stood full upright, and turned to face me. “I receive that!” he proclaimed with a broad smile and a nod, hand over his heart. That was the day I was taught not only how to give grace, but how to receive it.

It is easy to think of older people as always having existed in their current condition. Does it make us feel younger to think that way? More superior? Perhaps we hope it holds our own mortality at bay.

Life does not work that way.

We live, we age, and we will die. How should we accompany one another on our journeys?

That day in the pain clinic, I was tempted to simply disappear into my phone, safe and unbothered by anyone else. But I would have missed an important lesson had I stayed there. Apathy and isolation never summon our better angels.

Father Richard Rohr said, “If something comes toward us with grace and can pass through us and toward others with grace, we can trust it as the voice of God.”

It took my own aging to teach me this lesson, to see these encounters as the voice of God, and I still fail more often than I succeed at living it. But I am committed to learning.

Mary Kay Jordan Fleming is professor emerita of developmental psychology and a freelance essayist whose work has appeared in Next Avenue, on the website Pulse: Voices from the Heart of Medicine and in several anthologies.

mine in that waiting room belonged to a concert pianist. Or perhaps a ballerina who laced up toe shoes for decades before acquiescing to the sensible sneakers I tied. This woman was young and invincible, too, before the chronic pain that now dominated her waking moments.

The week after my encounter with the elderly woman, I met a new mailroom employee at my office. Watching me struggle to carry several bundles from my car, he opened the door for me. I thanked him and we introduced ourselves. The man’s advanced age and labored gait surprised me, considering his job required so much walking and lifting.

He said he was 73, diabetic and trying to lose weight to reduce knee pain. He lifted his pant leg to show me a new compression sleeve that provided some relief, and suggested it for my own painful knees. I thanked him for his recommendation and offered a casual “God bless you!” as he

‘SPORTS ARE A WAY TO BREAK BARRIERS’

Jesuit High School player Sofia Bell moves to the N.C.A.A. with a ‘likeness deal’

By J.D. Long-García



Juliana Kromminga

Growing up, Sofia Bell played basketball with boys at the local community center. She said that experience made the transition to club basketball a lot easier.

“We had a hoop outside of our house, and I played every day,” Ms. Bell, a senior at Jesuit High School in Portland, Ore., told **America**. Her father, Greg Bell, helped a lot too. He played basketball for the University of Oregon, where Ms. Bell will start her college career next year.

“I was able to get training from him,” she said, explaining how much support she’s felt from her family. “We do a lot of things together. They come to all my games.”

Ms. Bell was recently selected to play in the 2023 McDonald’s All-American Games and had offers from schools like Gonzaga, Notre Dame, Stanford and the University of Southern California. She chose Oregon because she has been a fan all her life, loves the coaches and already knows some of the women she will be playing with next season. She also signed a name, image and likeness deal with Portland Gear, a local lifestyle apparel brand. In 2021, the N.C.A.A. began allowing college players to benefit from such deals.

Her Jesuit education has prepared her for the next level, according to Ms. Bell. She chose to attend Jesuit High School for a number of reasons, including the strong culture, academics and athletic programs.

“Also, having known some Jesuit graduates, their own experience at the school was very positive,” she said. “In our faith classes, we’ve had the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be open to growth. And just being a better person overall. That’s something I’ll take with me.”

It is something that Jason Lowery also took with him when he graduated from Jesuit in 1993. He is now a counselor and the head women’s basketball coach at the school. With two young children, he stepped away from coaching men’s college basketball in 2010.

What stands out to Mr. Lowery, after coaching in other

places, is that the students here are used to meeting high standards. Those include not only the academic rigor and the demanding athletic program, but also the development of character.

“Being women for others—that’s what being on the team is all about,” he said. “It’s about being there for others and that’s what makes coaching here so special. It’s about so much more than basketball. And our girls live that every day.”

During the season, Ms. Bell practices every day that she does not have a game. Afterward, she works on strength and conditioning and also runs drills with a trainer. In the off-season, she plays with a club team based in California, which requires a lot of travel.

“Balancing that with school is obviously a challenge, but I’ve gotten used to it,” said Ms. Bell, who also plays tennis for her school in the spring. “Part of it is just having good study habits. I always prioritize my academics and make sure everything is done on time.”

Mike Hughes, the athletics director at Jesuit, said Ms. Bell is not only talented, but also a team player. “She’s very humble and other-centered,” he said. “She’s not showy. That wouldn’t really fit with our coach or with our school’s culture.”

Mr. Hughes, who studied at Boston College, applies principles he learned from Thomas Groome, a theology professor there. “We talk about the informational level, the formational and the transformational,” he said of the approach to coaching at Jesuit. Information, Mr. Hughes said, includes techniques and tactics. Formation includes learning dedication, determination and work ethic. But transformation goes beyond that.

“We use the opportunity of sports to talk about things like humility, service, justice and caring for your fellow men and women,” he said. “If we’re truly a Jesuit school,

Sofia Bell, a senior at Jesuit High School in Portland, Ore., was selected to play in the 2023 McDonald's All-American Game on March 28 at the Toyota Center in Houston, Tex.

we believe in finding God in all things. Certainly God can be found in the Eucharist or in the sacraments or in prayer. But we believe that God can also be found in academics, in the pursuit of wisdom and in something like sports.”

Other teams at Jesuit also expect athletes to offer service. The head varsity baseball coach, Colin Griffin, and his players team up with Children’s Miracle Network to run a baseball tournament for young people with disabilities. A cross country and track coach, Tom Rothenberger, has his athletes clean up trash after track meets. Brian Valley, who also coaches track, had students write thank-you letters to their parents during practice.

“So making them think about and write a caring letter, will that help us win games? I don’t really care if it does. It’s the right thing to do,” Mr. Hughes said. “Does picking up trash make you a better athlete? Indirectly, I think it does. In the sense that little things matter.”

Details like clean uniforms and a tidy locker room reflect the focus on character, he said. Winning is a goal, but not the purpose of the athletics program. Its purpose is to form people of conscience, competence and compassion, he said.

Of the approximately 800 students who play sports each year at Jesuit, 30 to 35 get college scholarships. In that respect, Jesuit is one of the top schools in the state. But the success of the high school athletics program should not be

measured by the number of athletes who play in college, according to Mr. Hughes. Instead, he said, success should be measured 10 years later.

In college, Ms. Bell plans to continue serving the community as she did during high school. She has volunteered at sports youth camps in the past and intends to do so again this summer. Ms. Bell believes sports can be a unifying force.

“I’ve met people from all over the country, and from other countries, just by playing basketball,” she said, noting how some W.N.B.A. players will join leagues overseas in the off-season. “Obviously there are differences, but just having that commonality in sports really brings people together.”

Ms. Bell plans to be a business major and is considering a focus on sports marketing. She wants to stay around sports and after college hopes to both keep playing basketball and serve her community.

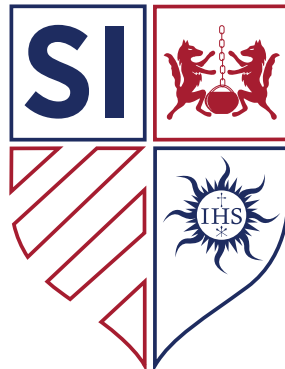
“Sports are a way to break barriers,” she said, “whether they’re financial or even language barriers. Everyone can participate in sports in all sorts of ways. Having that to bring people together is pretty cool.”

 *Jesuit School Spotlight is an occasional feature focusing on Jesuit middle and secondary schools.*

J.D. Long-García is a senior editor of *America*.

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U2's Larry Mullen Jr. and Bono perform at Twickenham Stadium in London in 2005.

Bono & Bob: A Tale of Two Audiobooks

By Bill McGarvey

“Hey, are you still there?” A voice asks this question with a conspiratorial whisper. “It’s incredible that we’re here, right?” It is the final line in Bono’s new memoir, *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story*, and it is delivered with the indefatigable sense of optimism and faith that permeates the book. But you won’t find the line anywhere in the hardcover or ebook editions; it appears only in the final 12 seconds of the audiobook.

For anyone who is a bit of an obsessive completist (like me) and hangs on all the way through the end credits of an audiobook, the line is a nice little bonus. After 20 hours and 25 minutes listening to the U2 frontman narrate his life story, the moment feels disarmingly intimate: a secret message to the growing number of consumers who have jumped onto the audio bandwagon, and a small window into how the format creates a unique and compelling experience for consumers.

Whether you have been listening or not, an audiobook revolution has been going on for quite some time. According to the Audio Publishers Association, the industry has experienced double-digit growth in sales in each of the past 10 years. The audio streaming giant Spotify is betting big that the \$10 billion global audiobook market could eventually grow to \$70 billion. Prior to this, the Swedish company had already invested \$1 billion on the audiobook’s episodic

and shorter-form cousin, the podcast, which has experienced even more explosive growth.

The creative ways audiobooks are being embraced by artists-turned-authors like Bono, or Bob Dylan in his recently published *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, are creating a new category of content that is different from conventional book publishing. We are only at the beginning of the journey into this storytelling form.

Bono is nothing if not a storyteller. *Surrender* finds the Dublin native pulling out every tool in his arsenal to tell his life story through the lens of 40 U2 songs. It is no surprise that the iconic singer and frontman is a charismatic narrator, or that he can powerfully re-imagine and perform the band’s songs in this format (both of which he does very successfully). But who knew he was a talented mimic and voice actor as well?

Peppered throughout the audiobook’s production—and make no mistake, this is a production—are aspects that resemble a radio play. In addition to the use of sound effects and musical beds to help set various moods or experiences, Bono uses his skills as an impersonator to recreate scenes throughout his life.

In addition to the voices of friends and family, we encounter Bono’s imitations of Frank Sinatra, Dylan, Arnold

Schwarzenegger, John Kasich, Harry Belafonte, Jesse Helms, Bill Clinton, James Carville—the list goes on. As it turns out, Bono has known and worked with a lot of people in many different fields and is a pretty deft imitator.

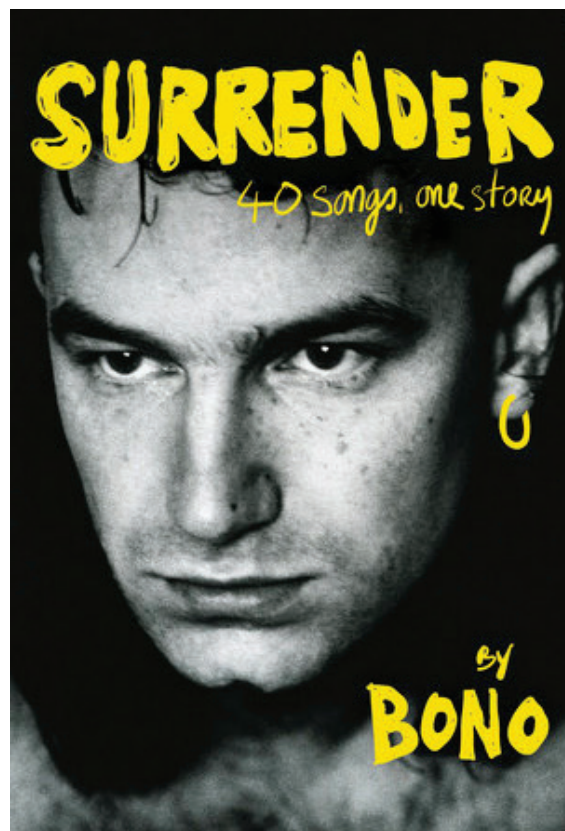
Whether it was his earnestness in the '80s, his '90s Me-phisto character dripping with irony and draped in devil's drag, or any number of variations since then, the singer has always been larger than life and easy to mock. After his many decades in the global spotlight as an outspoken artist and an activist, few rock stars elicit the type of eye-rolling reactions that U2's singer does. But if he is able to transcend that critical assessment, it is because his self-deprecating sense of humor is his saving grace.

Bono is a force of nature who has harnessed his intelligence and enormous ambition to incredible effect. When not creating era-defining albums like "The Joshua Tree" or "Achtung Baby" or mounting record-breaking global tours, he has taken on large-scale humanitarian work. He helped run Jubilee 2000's Drop the Debt campaign and then focused his energies on fighting H.I.V./AIDS and extreme poverty. By all accounts, his activism is not superficial. He is not a rock star tourist just lending his name for publicity. According to the experts in the fields he works alongside, he is deeply immersed in human suffering on the ground as well as the political dimensions and potential solutions to the issues with which he is engaged.

"I always thought mine was a gift for finding top-line melody not just in music but in politics, in commerce and in the world of ideas in general," he says in *Surrender*, offering some insight into how he orders his world. "Where others would hear harmony or counterpoint, I was better at finding the top line in the room, the hook, the clear thought. Probably because I had to sing it or sell it."

The pop culture landscape is littered with celebrities who support causes and do charity work, but Bono occupies a category all his own. He has redefined what informed, celebrity commitment can look like. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for his work on reducing the debt of developing nations and promoting AIDS awareness in Africa. It would not surprise me if he became a strong contender again at some point.

Surrender mercifully lacks any showbiz tell-all intrigue. Bono's prose style is that of a poetic raconteur who can be self-indulgent and yet relentlessly on-point and on-message. The downside of his gift for finding the top-line melody is that it can also be exhausting for the listener. At times, his persona can feel like a charm offensive that doesn't know when the battle is won and it is safe to stand down. It is clear that being Bono is a 24/7/365 proposition.



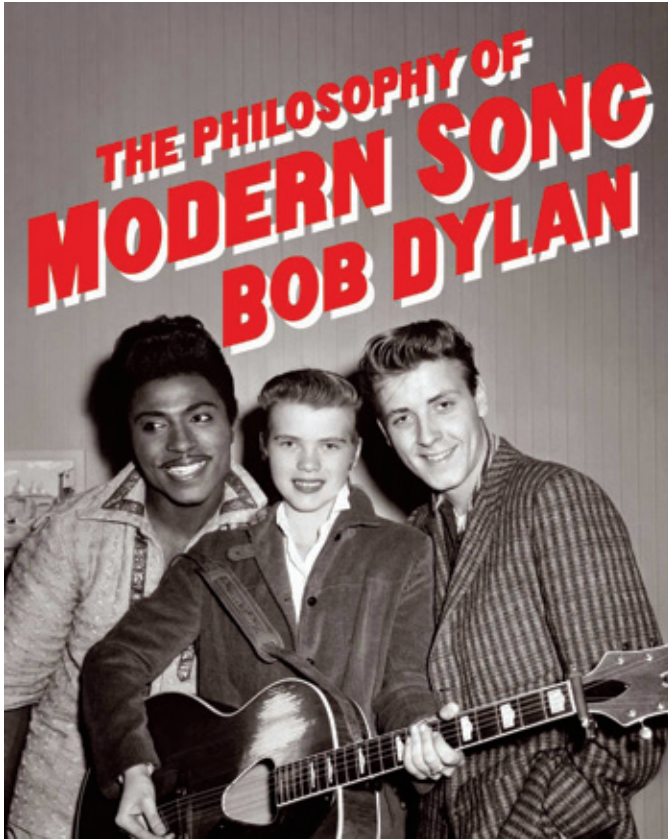
Knopf / 576p \$34

It was helpful to me as a listener to be able to take a break from the narration from time to time and just revisit the band's music.

Bono's boundless optimism and activism is an extension of his band's deepest convictions. U2 must have the most unique backstory of any band of their stature. They met in high school in 1976 and bonded over their love of the punk music that was then exploding out of London. But along with their musical inspirations, Bono and two of his bandmates (The Edge and Larry Mullen Jr.) were passionately committed to the radical Christianity practiced by a church group in Dublin called Shalom. Bono says that he and his friends found resonance with the group's embrace of "a kind of naïve first-century Christian life." It was "an entirely countercultural life" in which everything was held in common.

"It was entirely anachronistic and also kind of beautiful," says Bono. The band's commitment to the church group was so intense that U2 briefly broke up after their first experience of real success on their first album and tour. The band was receiving pressure and criticism from the group and weren't sure they could be both a band and believers at the same time.

The weight of that type of judgmentalism ultimately caused Shalom's demise altogether, Bono says: "In truth, something never sat right with us about this 'in or out'



Simon & Schuster / 352p \$45

Christianity.” As artists, Bono and his band were “slowly uncovering paradox and the idea that we are not compelled to resolve every contradictory impulse.”

The tension between fervent belief and band life has been at the heart of U2’s music for decades. If the band’s musical stock-in-trade has been its ability to create epic cathedrals of sound, then lyrically Bono has played the role of St. Augustine rattling around inside that cathedral pleading, “Lord, give me chastity and continence, but not yet.”

For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, Bono has been writing about faith for his entire career. From “I Will Follow,” “Gloria” and “40” on their earliest albums to massive hits like “With or Without You,” “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For,” “Vertigo” and countless others, he has created a veritable hymnal of songs for believers who cry out to the Lord for help with their unbelief.

There are no doubt millions of U2 listeners who are unaware of, or uninterested in, this Christian dimension, but it is impossible to understand *Surrender* without it. The book is suffused with the Christianity that is foundational to Bono’s life. It is not an evangelical faith looking to save souls but something more challenging. It is faith grounded in a deep, dynamic and necessary engagement with the world rather than a brittle judgment of it. It is born out of

his realization decades ago that the attraction to the radical Christian community and the punk music that set him and his bandmates on fire as young men are not in opposition but are simply opposite vantage points for the same experience of transcendent mystery. They are intimations that a reality that is sacred, holy and fully alive exists and that it carries a responsibility worthy of surrender.

Then there is Bob Dylan.

When the venerable singer/songwriter announced in early 2022 that he was releasing a new book, *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, it promised to offer Dylan’s “extraordinary insight into the nature of popular music.” The volume touted more than 60 essays by Dylan on songs by songwriters and artists ranging from Stephen Foster, Hank Williams and Nina Simone to The Clash and Elvis Costello.

As a student of the folk song tradition for over 60 years and the most revered living practitioner of that tradition—not to mention the winner of the Nobel Prize for literature—who better than Dylan to write on the nature of song?

There is ample proof that, now in his early 80s, he is still creative and vital. At the outset of the pandemic, Dylan released a late-career masterpiece, the beautiful and elegiac song “Murder Most Foul.” Even the pre-publication information about the audiobook was encouraging, as it promised narration by Dylan himself along with a star-studded cast of readers including Jeff Bridges, Helen Mirren, Steve Buscemi, John Goodman, Alfre Woodard and Oscar Isaac.

My hopes were high that *The Philosophy of Modern Song* might be a companion to Dylan’s 2015 MusiCares award acceptance speech, in which he offered some uncharacteristically direct comments on songs and songwriting. What he delivered instead with this book was an idiosyncratic and impressionistic rumination on over 60 songs. The audience is left to assume his choices of music are important or consequential for some reason, but that reason is never articulated. Interspersed throughout are evocative images of Americana, ads and photographs that act as visual time capsules for the themes discussed in each chapter. Most of the essays contain one section that describes the historical context and story behind a particular song or recording, and another that can best be described as the author’s free-association musings on the same song. In the audiobook, the celebrity readers handle the former to great effect; guess who handles the latter?

There are bright moments scattered throughout, and some of the better essays feel like jumping-off points for Dylan’s thinking on broader themes. In his essay on Hank Williams’s “Your Cheatin’ Heart,” his praise of the record’s

ability to work on multiple levels for the listener is an opportunity to decry the lifelessness of our narrowcasting today. “That’s the problem with a lot of things these days,” Dylan writes. “Everything is too full now; we are spoon-fed everything. All songs are about one thing and one thing specifically, there is no shading, no nuance, no mystery. Perhaps this is why music is not a place where people put their dreams at the moment; dreams suffocate in these airless environs.”

His take on Edwin Starr’s “War” yields a wide-ranging reflection that draws on the wisdom of labor and civil rights activist Asa Philip Randolph, who said back in 1925—decades before the term “military-industrial complex” had been used—“Make wars unprofitable and you make them impossible.”

There are even small nuggets that shine through, as in the chapter on the song “Volare,” in which Dylan discusses why certain languages simply sing better than others. “Sure, German is fine for a certain type of beer-fest oompah polka,” he writes, “but give me Italian with its chewy caramel vowels and melodious polysyllabic vocabulary.”

But more often than not in the audiobook we are subjected to endless passages of Dylan reading his own impressionistic riffs on songs; his voice drenched in reverb that makes him sound like he is being held hostage in a “Tales From the Crypt” episode.

His riff on The Who’s “My Generation” is just one of many examples:

This is a song that does no favors for anyone, and casts doubt on everything. In this song, people are trying to slap you around, slap you in the face, vilify you. They’re rude and they slam you down, take cheap shots. They don’t like you because you pull out all the stops and go for broke. You put your heart and soul into everything and shoot the works, because you got energy and strength and purpose. Because you’re so inspired they put the whammy on, they’re allergic to you, and they have hard feelings.

Huh? As a reader these sections are mystifying. As a listener and a fan of The Who’s signature song, my only reaction was “I hope I die before I have to listen to that ch-ch-chapter again.”

As a musical artist and singer, Dylan is a master. He possesses the gift—common to all great singers—to make us believe the words he sings. Truth telling in song, as he mentioned in his MusiCares speech, is a supreme value for



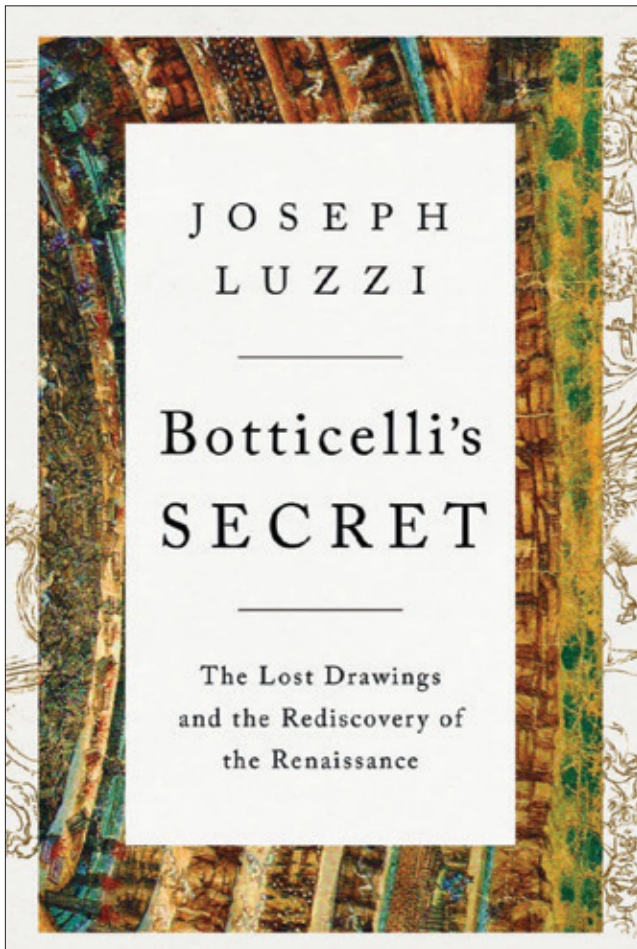
Bob Dylan performs at the Azkena Rock Festival in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain, in 2010

him. Which is why, in comparison, his offerings outside of music can be so frustrating.

As I wrote in my 2005 review of his autobiography in **America**, Dylan has long courted mystery as an end in itself. Whether it was his 2004 memoir, his 2019 “pseudo-documentary” film “Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story by Martin Scorsese” or *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, Dylan uses formats generally designed for explanation and clarification as exercises in obfuscation and mystification. Trickster figures in folklore and mythology play important transformational roles, but Dylan appears to relish becoming a trickster figure in the telling of his own story. It is a valid choice that he is free to make, but it smacks more of adolescent contempt for an audience than artistry.

Bill McGarvey, a musician and writer, is the author of *The Freshman Survival Guide* and owner of *McG-Media.com*.

ILLUSTRATING DANTE



W. W. Norton & Company / 352p \$29

In the beginning, it was a project to illustrate all 100 cantos of what is arguably the greatest of all European poems. Then it was a magnificent portfolio of unfinished drawings hidden away for centuries. Then, in 1882, a shrewd German scholar orchestrated the purchase of 85 of them from a London bookseller and packed them off to Berlin as part of the Kaiser's campaign to glorify the only recently unified Germany. Now it is a collection unequally dispersed among three great museums.

The story of Sandro Botticelli's creation of a series of drawings to accompany Dante's "The Divine Comedy" is just the beginning of the tale. Trying to determine what happened to the drawings after Botticelli's death is complicated, puzzling, marked by gaps and subject to scholarly disagreement. With *Botticelli's Secret: The Lost Drawings and the Rediscovery of the Renaissance*, Joseph Luzzi, professor of comparative literature at Bard College, has written a fascinating narrative that tells the story of the drawings and seeks to revise our understanding of the phenomenon traditionally known as the Renaissance.

Luzzi excavates the cultural production of works that have at last come to be appreciated as more than a series of mere illuminations of a great poem. The portfolio of Botticelli's drawings comprises the existential meditations of one talented artist on the work of another. Luzzi's research is extensive, his approach accessible, his understanding substantial, his accomplishment considerable.

"The Divine Comedy," a poem of over 14,000 lines, substantially written and completed by Dante in exile (1302-21), became well-known very quickly. Eight hundred manuscript copies circulated in Italy before the first printed edition (in the late 15th century), and that does not reckon its widespread popularity in oral traditions. But "The Divine Comedy" was not, as Luzzi suggests, "a preferable alternative to the word of God," but rather a complement to it. In the mid-to-late 15th century, Dante's poetry gave way to Petrarch's verse in the estimation of Italy's scholars and intellectuals; but it retained its privileged position with other poets and artists.

Three of the greatest artists of the Renaissance were said to have undertaken the task of illustrating "The Divine Comedy": Botticelli, Michelangelo and Leonardo (the last two, probably not, though Kenneth Clark believed that several of Leonardo's drawings kept in the Royal Collection at Windsor were intended for that purpose). Of the three, we now have only the drawings of Botticelli.

Trained in the *bottega* (workshop) of Fra Filippo Lippi, Botticelli won the favor and patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici, the powerful, cultivated ruler of 15th-century Florence. Botticelli's fortunes were intricately linked to those of the Medici family; so long as they remained in power, Botticelli flourished. With the death of Lorenzo (April 8, 1492) and that of his ally, Pope Innocent VIII (July 25, 1492), Botticelli's commissions dwindled. And when the artist fell under the influence of the rabble-rousing Dominican Fra Savonarola, who preached a severely ascetic doctrine denouncing works of art, Botticelli all but gave up painting, according to Giorgio Vasari (1511-74), the Florentine artist sometimes considered the "father of art history."

Here, as elsewhere, Vasari is not altogether reliable, but something had changed. Certainly Botticelli's "Mystic Nativity" (1501) does not compare to his "Primavera" (c. 1480) and "Venus" (c. 1485). If indeed Botticelli became a follower of Savonarola after his martyrdom in 1498, we don't know how many of Botticelli's works were cast into the flames in one of the "Bonfire of the Vanities" on Shrove Tuesday in 1497 or 1498.

What about the "Secret" of this book's title? Luzzi uses "secret" not to describe something deliberately hidden

away or obscured but to indicate something private, not public. These illuminations for Dante's poem undertaken by Botticelli during his years of public acclaim were a private endeavor. Ironically, they would be hidden away for many years afterward.

Botticelli was not a dilettante but a serious reader of Dante's poetry. He had studied with Cristoforo Landino (1424-98), a poet, humanist and author of an important commentary on "The Divine Comedy"; he was a close friend of the great scholar Manetti, considered the greatest contemporary commentator on the poem. When Luzzi calls Botticelli an "impressively learned painter," he revises the historical portrait and restores the great painter's reputation as a meditative reader of texts.

In 1480, at the age of 35, Botticelli began the project, originally conceived of as a series of 102 illustrations—one for each canto, except for "Inferno XXXIV" (two drawings), plus a "Map of Hell." Actually, Botticelli embarked on two projects: one, printed for mass production to accompany the text of "The Divine Comedy," edited by Landino; and a second, limited to just one hand-lettered text, commissioned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, a ward of Lorenzo de Medici (1449-92) known as "Il Magnifico," who was a Florentine politician, scholar and patron of artists, including Michelangelo and Botticelli.

The first project was an abysmal failure: The first edition of the Landino volume had no engravings at all, while subsequent editions included only Botticelli's engravings for Parts I to XIX of "Inferno." Poorly executed by an incompetent workman, these engravings nonetheless were part of all other editions published between 1482 and 1487. Botticelli completed the second project sometime after the death of Il Magnifico. It was a remarkable portfolio of skillfully rendered drawings, etched with a silver-point stylus on white vellum (goatskin parchment, 18½ by 12½ inches). Though Botticelli evidently intended that all his drawings be fully colored, only three have some color, while another (a map) is fully colored.

Debates about the extent of Botticelli's personal involvement ensued—and are not resolved yet. Yet for some, Kenneth Clark's conclusion 50 years ago is persuasive: "this great enterprise [was]...too near his heart" for Botticelli to allow assistants to have a hand in the project; even the retracing in ink of the lines (the vellum had not been properly prepared) was done by Botticelli himself, in Clark's estimation.

Scholars who have examined the manuscripts have noted that the later drawings are incomplete, slighter than the earlier efforts. Some speculate that these alterations

were due to the pressures of meeting a deadline; others, like Clark, suggest that Botticelli felt unequal to the task—that what Dante felt could not be rendered in language, Botticelli felt he could not represent in lines.

When this magnificent edition was "completed," it was likely presented to the French king Charles VIII when he entered Florence en route to conquering Naples (1495). This would explain why all the drawings were kept in France for decades. Largely because of Vasari's dismissive comments about the artist, the great secret of Botticelli's drawings accompanying the text of Dante's poem remained secret for two centuries. In Luzzi's words, "both the artist and his Dante project fell into the dustbin of history."

Decades later, enter the enigmatic Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-89). Succeeding to the throne at the age of 4 but unable to rule on her own until she reached adulthood (1644), Christina was extraordinarily well-educated, learned in philosophy and religion, and fluent in eight languages. She was a generous patron of the performing arts (opera, ballet, theater) and an avid collector of books and manuscripts. At her invitation, Descartes established an academy in Sweden.

In 1651, Christina suffered a nervous collapse and abdicated shortly thereafter, before becoming a Roman Catholic on Christmas Eve, 1654. Though she traveled frequently and far, she established residence in Rome, where the pope gave her an apartment in the Vatican. In 1658, Christina bought eight of Botticelli's Dante drawings from an unknown Parisian bibliophile. After her death (1689), Pope Alexander VIII bought her entire library, including the Botticellis, which remain in the Vatican to this day.

In 1803, 85 of the drawings, sold by the Parisian book-dealer Claudio Molini, became part of the collection of the 10th Duke of Hamilton, who amassed an impressive private collection of paintings, sculpture, manuscripts and *objets d'art*. Two scholars visited Hamilton Palace, viewed the drawings and concluded they were not done by Botticelli. Some years later, to pay off debts, the debt-ridden 12th duke sold the portfolio to a London dealer.

In 1882, the 85 drawings, for sale in a catalog issued by the London dealer Ellis and White, were set to be auctioned off at Sotheby's. Friedrich Lippmann, director of prints at the Royal Museum of Berlin, examined them and determined they were by Botticelli (and kept his own secret until he persuaded the Kaiser's government to buy the lot). Despite strenuous efforts by the eminent art critic John Ruskin to raise the funds necessary to keep them in England, Lippmann won the prize. The drawings were bought and shipped to Berlin in November 1882. Divided between

two museums, all but one (now lost) remain in Germany.

Joseph Luzzi has brought the wisdom of many years of study to fruition in *Botticelli's Secret*. His time in Florence and at Bernard Berenson's spectacular villa outside the city, I Tatti, now the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, has enhanced his appreciation for Dante and his world. Luzzi now brings that knowledge to a contemporary general reader in a narrative at once informative, reliable and accessible. It is at times too accessible, given an irritating stylistic tic of using 21st-century jargon with phrases like "infernal trash talk," "the editorial dream team," "celebrity tweet" or "her champagne dreams exceeded her beer budget." While *Botticelli's Secret* was not intended to be a scholarly monograph in the tradition of John Pope-Hennessy's *Sandro Botticelli: The Nativity*, it is, nonetheless, too often marked by elements of an informal level of diction not in keeping with its subject or audience.

Of greater concern are other matters. First, Luzzi pays scant attention to the drawings themselves. Though a dozen or so are reproduced in small, not altogether clear form, none are reproduced in actual size and clarity; moreover, none are discussed in detail. *Botticelli's Secret* would have profited from close critical examination, if only of a few representative drawings.

Those who seek that attention would do well to consult Kenneth Clark's scholarly volume, *The Drawings by Sandro Botticelli for Dante's 'Divine Comedy'* (1976), with its densely informative 24-page introduction and economical, evocative description of many drawings. Fresh photographic images of all the extant drawings, approximating the size of the originals, enhance the text. Though more recent scholarship has corrected Clark on several minor points (e.g., Hein-Thomas Altcappenberg: *Sandro Botticelli: The Drawings for the Divine Comedy*, 2000), his erudition and unflappable style have held up.

Second, and of greater import, is Luzzi's intended objective of redefining the term "Renaissance," by its very nature a difficult if not futile task. That aim has prompted Luzzi to create a solid narrative of political, religious and cultural life in 15th-century Florence. He has judiciously drawn upon some of the best sources for history (Michelet, Burckhardt, Gilson, Goldthwaite) and for art (Pater, Ruskin, Gombrich, Warburg, Pope-Hennessy, Berenson, Clark).

Unfortunately, Luzzi's discussion drops this thread of redefinition for substantial portions of the book. The matter is only summarily recapitulated in the final pages of *Botticelli's Secret*. It does include a curious, not directly relevant, digression about the Harlem Renaissance, an important moment in American cultural history, to be sure,

and worthy of discussion elsewhere, but of negligible connection to Luzzi's real subject.

Luzzi's narrative, though interesting and well-documented, simply does not sustain his thesis that in Botticelli's drawings we have "a group of unfinished drawings that would shape the way we understand the monumental term *Renaissance*." If such a claim is to be fully convincing it needs revision and more evidence. In the absence of such evidence, perhaps "might well enhance the ways" instead of "would shape" would have been a better choice of words.

Nevertheless, by contextualizing Botticelli within the milieu of 15th-century Florence and chronicling the creation and disposition of Botticelli's magnificent suite of drawings, Luzzi has made a substantial, significant contribution to cultural studies. *Botticelli's Secret* helps us to appreciate properly a profoundly synergistic encounter between two renowned artists, one meditating on the work of the other. It is time for the secret to be told, and Luzzi has done this.

Robert E. Hosmer Jr., a retired professor of English, is working on a book about the faith and fiction of Muriel Spark.



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THE RETURN OF CORMAC McCARTHY

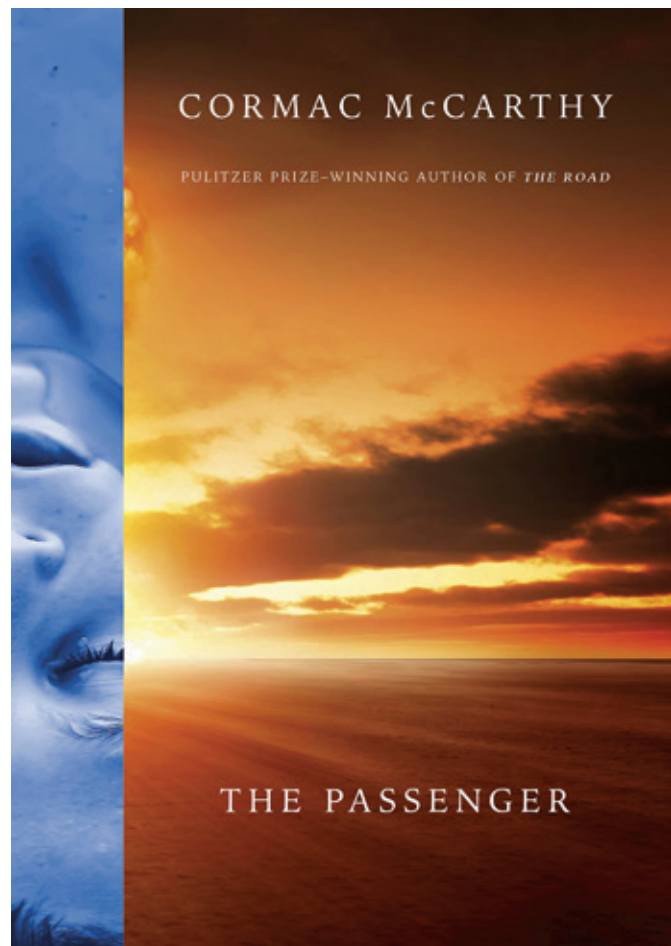
Cormac McCarthy is 89 years old. He has outlived his idols, outlasted his contemporaries and lived long enough to find himself closer than just about any other serious American writer to being a household name. This fact goes a fair way toward explaining *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*, his elegiac, disputatious and deeply odd pair of new novels.

McCarthy is the author of 12 novels, including *Blood Meridian*, *Child of God* and the National Book Award-winning *All the Pretty Horses*, as well as a handful of plays, scripts and short stories. Since winning the Pulitzer Prize for 2006's *The Road*, he has published rarely, creating a sense of great expectation around these linked novels. Would they be a career summation? A judgment upon a changing society? One last horse ride into the sunset? Thankfully, McCarthy has always nursed a perverse streak, and the results are considerably stranger.

The Passenger opens on the image of a young woman in a white dress hanging from a tree in a wintry forest. Her name is Alicia Western, and her absence lingers throughout the novel, the greatest of a great many voids in the story. Her brother Bobby has become a salvage diver, and his grief over her has become a kind of permanent condition, a stasis from which he can never wake. When the reader meets him, he is living in 1980s New Orleans. An early-morning diving job to investigate a crashed JetStar private plane reveals a cabin that is one passenger short, and the flight log missing. Bobby's suspicions quickly mount: No one saw the plane crash; no one could have seen it in the water; and no one could have opened the door before him, unless that person had come from the inside of the plane.

This sounds like the setup to another McCarthy pot-boiler, perhaps called *No Country for Slightly Younger Men*. For a while, *The Passenger* keeps up, introducing pairs of shadowy government agents, a mysterious death and the discovery of a rubber raft rolled up on an island off the coast. But McCarthy's interests are elsewhere, and certainly not in plot. In a series of strikingly tender, talky chapters, he introduces the milieu of outcasts, petty criminals and gutter intellectuals through which Bobby drifts, ranging from the diabolically mellifluous (Long) John Sheddan to Debussy Fields, a trans woman whose journey toward reconciling her inner and outer selves McCarthy renders with surprising (given his age, anyway) generosity. He lays out the geography of dirty spoons and dive bars that made up the pre-gentrification city he drifted through as a young man. His characters drink a lot of wine, and eat a lot of lunch, and never come any closer to solving the novel's inciting mystery.

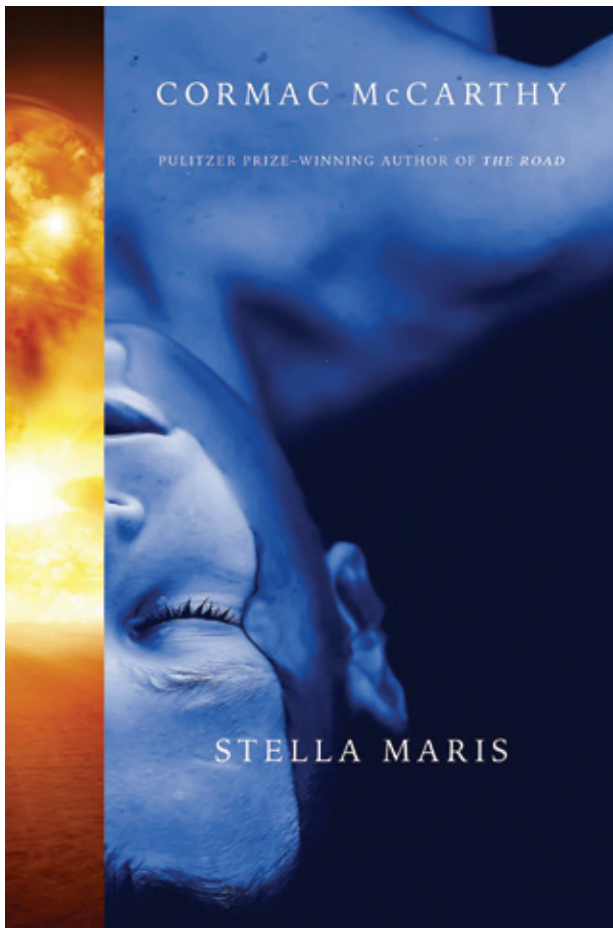
Which is to say, *The Passenger's* stasis mirrors Bobby's



Knopf / 400p \$30

own. The novel employs a chopped-up structure, slipping backward and forward in time without a clear destination. Every significant event seems to have happened before page one, from the invention of the atom bomb (Bobby's father was a physicist at Los Alamos) to whatever conspiracy placed that plane in the bay. Like other McCarthy protagonists, Bobby doesn't speak much about his inner life. We get memories of his childhood, his father and, in a particularly beautiful sequence, his sister's performance of "Medea" in an old quarry in the Tennessee hills. But even this is remembered as pain. "I'm sorry. It's all just darkness," Bobby thinks. "I'm sorry."

The novel is full of these vignettes. In one particularly unsettling chapter, Bobby takes a job on an oil derrick off the coast of Florida. But once he arrives, he finds the platform completely empty, and a storm bearing in. As he sits below decks, "the sound of the outer storm muted in the structure," he becomes convinced that someone else is on the rig with him. A remnant of the crew? A member of the conspiracy? Bobby never figures it out. But McCarthy does not discount the possibility of another figure—one defined by its absence, the presence felt but never confirmed. That



Knop / 208p \$26

figure remains a void.

Bobby's life includes many such voids, none greater than that left by his sister, who is the subject of the companion novel *Stella Maris*. Alicia was a mathematics prodigy—a gift, McCarthy strongly implies, left by the fallout of the atom bomb. She was also a paranoid schizophrenic. McCarthy opens nearly every chapter with an italicized incident from the girl's short life, in which Alicia spars with a set of hallucinations she calls "horts" (as in "cohorts").

These hallucinations take the form of a troupe of vaudeville performers led by the Thalidomide Kid, a tiny, scarred man with cauliflower ears and flippers for hands. They intrude upon her sleep, rifle through her papers, perform moldy and out-of-date acts. Yet Alicia cannot say why they are coming to her. As she tells her psychiatrist in *Stella Maris*, "Each figure...all but shimmers with reality." And how did they get here? Like everyone else, says the Kid. They rode the bus.

McCarthy has never been particularly interested in well-balanced debates; he prefers his conversations one-sided. In fact, one might distinguish McCarthy's characters as Speakers and Interlocutors, those who talk and

those who facilitate. *Stella Maris* is presented as a series of psychiatric evaluations between the young woman and a Dr. Cohen, but despite a few references to his personal life, the doctor never takes on real substance. It is Alicia who speaks at great length, discoursing on mathematical problems, the laws of music, the relationship of the unconscious to language and how it might feel to drown in Lake Tahoe.

What she will not talk about is Bobby. As becomes clear, Alicia and her brother were deeply in love, an unconsummated passion that Bobby cannot dismiss, even as his sister's certainty disturbs him. Yet where he wavers, she acts. *Stella Maris* takes place across October 1972, the final autumn of Alicia's life. Bobby is in a coma after a race car accident and seems unlikely to emerge. With her brother gone, Alicia sees no reason to live. This isn't a recent urge. For a long time, she tells Dr. Cohen, she just did not want to be in the world. But with her soul's love dead to the world, nothing remains for her to hold onto. That winter, she will commit suicide, and Bobby will wake up and not know what to do with his love, or with the listless life he is condemned to lead.

Some critics have described these novels as bleak, and there's certainly some truth to that. After all, we're dealing with the story of an impossible, incestuous love interrupted by suicide, while the presence of weapons that could destroy all life on earth thrums in the background. But I don't think that McCarthy despairs over the human condition, and neither do his characters. There are too many other questions to answer.

Throughout these novels, the Westerns speak at length about a series of mathematical and physical theories. McCarthy reportedly took great pains to render these ideas with the greatest accuracy, and I'll have to defer to his presentation. In one initially odd chapter, Bobby reels off a list of various important 20th-century physicists to a writer in a leather jacket who then disappears entirely from the novel. As drama it's awkward, and as education hopelessly obscure.

Yet on re-reading, McCarthy's purpose clicked: All of these scientists sought to explain the fundamental basis of our reality, and yet few of their theories can be reconciled with one another. For McCarthy the modern condition is one of absolute uncertainty. Old systems, whether religious or scientific, have failed, but nothing has satisfactorily replaced them. Theories lead to other theories, conspiracies to further conspiracies without resolution. Our lives are pocked with unfillable voids. As Alicia says to her psychiatrist: "Just another mystery to add to the roster."

To return then to McCarthy's great age: *The Passen-*

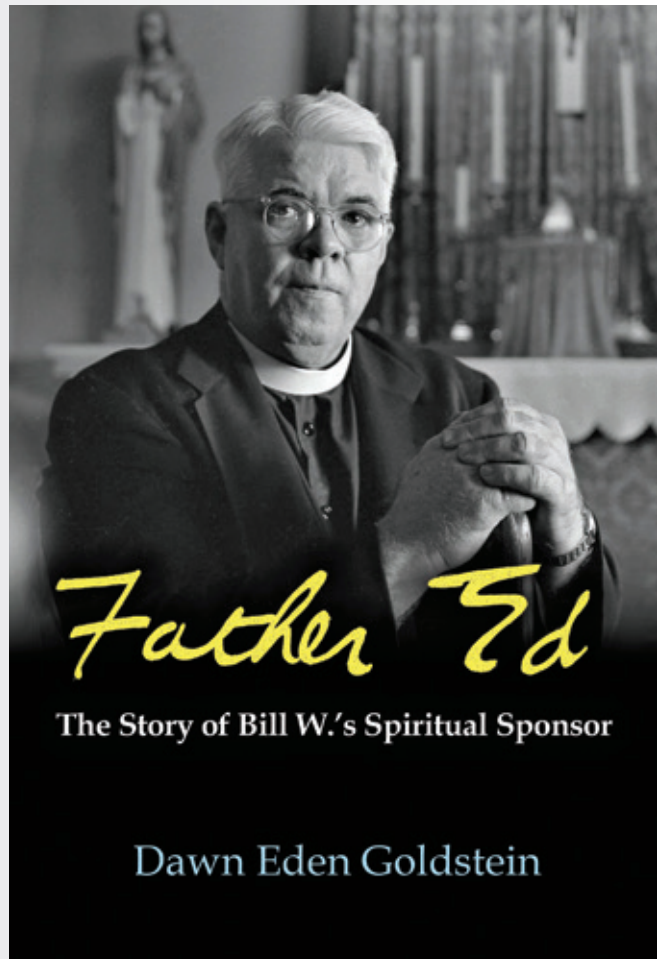
APOSTLE TO A.A.

ger is filled with the sense of a life narrowing down and emptying out. As the novel progresses, the many colorful characters begin to disappear and die off, and the narrative comes to feel like an elegy for a city, an era and a way of life that McCarthy cannot find in the world anymore. Yet the effect is a great tenderness, even love.

In giving characters like Long John and Debussy plentiful page space, he allows them to speak for themselves, to extoll their personal philosophies in ways that contradict Bobby's ambivalence and his author's pessimism. Even McCarthy's once grandiose prose has been whittled down into a series of evocative fragments, as if the author has grown skeptical of his own sentences. Perhaps he prefers to let life flourish in the gaps.

Both novels dwindle down, easing inevitably deathward. All of us are headed there; McCarthy knows he is closer than most. *The Passenger* leaves us with the image of a man persevering despite himself, outlasting his family and his friends for no clear purpose other than to hold onto the image of his love, a memory that will die with him but not yet, not yet.

Robert Rubsam is a writer and critic whose work has been published in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, *The Baffler* and *Commonweal*.




Orbis Books / 408p \$30

“Funny, eccentric and amusing” are not descriptions one usually applies to a Catholic priest, but Edward Dowling, S.J., was not a typical cleric. In *Father Ed: The Story of Bill W.'s Spiritual Sponsor*, by Dawn Eden Goldstein, we encounter a remarkable individual whose intellect, enthusiasm and humility helped Alcoholics Anonymous burgeon into a worldwide haven for spiritual growth for those struggling with addiction. (An excerpt from the book was published in the February 2023 issue of *America*.)

Though he died in 1960, Father Dowling foresaw (and hoped for) many of the changes in the Catholic Church initiated by the Second Vatican Council—most notably, the active participation of the laity in the Mass and other pastoral activities. He was a vivid communicator, as comfortable quoting Shakespeare as he was with streetwise humor.

Dowling's sense of social justice anticipated Pope Francis by decades, as he argued that the Catholic faithful were morally obligated to vote, remedy social ills and participate in civil disobedience. He supported labor unions and deplored overreaching capitalism. He identified abortion as “among the symptoms of a society that failed to care for the poor.” In the 1930s and '40s,



Dowling considered sitting with A.A. members an experience of being in ‘the presence of holiness.’

Dowling pointed out that George Washington was a slave master and aristocrat, an idea that shocked his contemporaries.

Was he perfect? No, and he would be the first person to admit as much. His vices included overeating to the point of obesity and excessive smoking. Eden Goldstein also notes that Dowling was drawn to Senator Joseph McCarthy because they both aligned with U.S. isolationism and anti-communism. He also briefly supported the conservative “America First” movement in 1941. The author surmises that Dowling may have quit the organization as its antisemitic rhetoric came to the fore. Father Dowling’s name disappears from the committee’s rolls shortly after Charles Lindbergh addressed two rallies. (Senator Gerald P. Nye had also “stirred up a crowd” at an America First rally with accusations against Hollywood studio heads Louis B. Mayer, Darryl Zanuck and Sam Goldwyn and others—and members of the audience began to shout mockingly after nearly every one of them, “Jews! Jews!”)

It is to the author’s credit that she points out Dowling’s foibles, demonstrating not only the breadth of her research on the subject but her own objectivity.

Edward Patrick Dowling was born in St. Louis on Sept. 1, 1898, into an Irish-American family. In his youth, he proved to be a strong athlete who could “fire a baseball from home plate to second base without getting off his haunches.” He was even offered a tryout with the Chicago White Sox while attending St. Mary’s College in Kansas City, Kan. All of that changed in his early twenties. For many of his 62 years on earth, Dowling suffered from a painful condition called ankylosing spondylitis, a long-term inflammation of the joints. Walking, dressing and traveling proved difficult and painful, but Father Ed, as he was called, managed to live

an active existence filled with a passion to heal others—be it from alcohol addiction, marital strife or generalized anxiety.

One of the worst traumas of Dowling’s life was the death of his brother James during the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918. There is some evidence that Dowling might have been the source of James’s infection. James’s death shattered the family and “forced Puggy [Ed’s nickname] to grow up more quickly.” Eden Goldstein recalls the tensions of a world war and the pandemic that Dowling lived through. Readers today will certainly relate to those stressors as Covid-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine weigh upon us over a century later.

Though he was drawn to the priesthood and felt a “gentle pull toward the Eucharist,” Dowling started working for the St. Louis Globe-Democrat newspaper after graduation from St. Mary’s. Initially, his lifestyle did not seem to comport with a religious vocation. According to the author, Dowling liked staying out late, sleeping in and living as a newspaper reporter. Eventually, however, he made the decision to enter the Society of Jesus around 1918. He entered the Jesuit novitiate in Florissant, Mo., in 1919.

But if this was where Dowling sought peace, it was not to be. The rules of the novitiate required the maintenance of silence save for two hours a day, a daunting reality for a gregarious young man. Further, physical contact was barred—even a handshake or a pat on the back. He admitted in a letter to his sister Mary that “there were weeks in the novitiate when I felt that I could not honestly remain a Catholic.” Dowling found comfort in his correspondence and visits from her, who would remain a lifelong source of support. He also found solace in the pages of Thomas à Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ*.

Over 20 years later, the sting of his time at Florissant remained. At an A.A. gathering in 1944, he said, “I am not utterly unacquainted with atheism. I know and respect agnosticism, and I have been a bed-fellow of spiritual confusion.”

Dowling professed his first vows on Sept. 27, 1921. To say that this was the start of an illustrious career would not even begin to describe the energetic, productive, life-changing years that followed. Even as his physical condition deteriorated, Dowling wrote, lectured, counseled and advocated for a number of causes he fervently believed in: social justice, racial and gender equality, and proportional representation in voting.

Though plagued with doubt about his faith and tormented by a sense of unworthiness, Dowling lit up when ministering one-on-one with people. He found strength in helping the anxiety-plagued student, the troubled married

couple, the addict. These “wounded souls” became the center of his ministry and the mainstay of his contentment.

Eden Goldstein notes that it was not until he began his work with Alcoholics Anonymous that he attained “the lasting sense of interior peace that came with knowing he was exactly where God wanted him to be.” He considered sitting with A.A. members at a meeting an experience of being in “the presence of holiness.” He not only recognized and related to their struggle, he found the words and counsel they needed to mend their lives.

Working with Bill Wilson, the founder of A.A., as a spiritual advisor, Dowling helped launch what was then a fledgling group into a “presence [that] can be found in approximately 180 nations worldwide, with membership estimated at over two million, according to Alcoholics Anonymous. There are more than 123,000 A.A. groups around the world and A.A.’s literature has been translated into over 100 languages.”

Perhaps no one benefited more from Dowling’s guidance than Bill W. himself. Although Bill had conquered his drinking habit, he was beleaguered by depression and also struggled with how to feed and care for his family. Finally, Bill W. struggled with how to adequately express the ideas embodied in A.A. All of these difficulties were met head-on by Dowling, who saw the promise of fellowship as a mechanism for healing. Bill W. found the comfort, support and spiritual buttressing he needed to grow A.A. into a global institution.

Perhaps more important, Dowling related to Bill W.’s troubles as one who had experienced “the peaks and valleys of the spiritual life...the dark night of doubt...as well as the certainty of God’s presence.”

Dowling was drawn to A.A.’s unique call to “self examination, conversion and trustful surrender to God’s transformative grace.” If these aspects sound familiar, it may be because they mirror the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. He believed that the Twelve Steps “would guide the alcoholic...to interior knowledge of the love of God.”

On a more practical but important level, Dowling worked to ensure that A.A. was racially integrated. In correspondence with his friend Joe Diggles, who reported that some A.A. groups in Chicago were excluding Blacks, Dowling wrote:

I believe that any A.A. group could telescope months and years of spiritual progress by the presence of Negro members. I am glad you are working on that dining-car waiter, and if he comes to St. Louis...ask him to look me up.

According to the author, Dowling put forces in motion that sped up the creation of the first Black A.A. chapter, which formed in 1945.

As someone who has witnessed a close family member’s sobriety and spiritual growth through A.A.’s Twelve Steps, I appreciated Dowling’s contributions. I only wish my father, an alcoholic who died of cirrhosis, could have found his way to A.A. before it was too late.

There is more to Dowling’s life achievements than can be summarized in a review. For instance, he counseled married couples through Cana conferences and spoke candidly about the female orgasm and the inability of many married women to achieve it.

Eden Goldstein writes:

Dowling was saying that God *cared* about their sexual satisfaction. Not only should they refrain from feeling guilty for wanting their sex life to be satisfying, they should take their sexual problems—along with their intimacy issues—into their prayer life.

This was not just coming from a priest, but a priest in 1947. It demonstrates how Dowling appreciated the humanity of his flock in all aspects of their lives.

Eden Goldstein’s biography demonstrates her affection both for Dowling and for the Catholic Church. The scholarship, writing and research are impeccable.

At the conclusion of the book, Eden Goldstein describes the humble circumstances of Dowling’s funeral. She writes “In the hierarchy of Jesuit elites, Father Ed was the lowest of the low. He was not on the staff of *America* magazine, neither was he a professor.... All he did was counsel people with problems—including drunks, drug addicts and the mentally ill.”

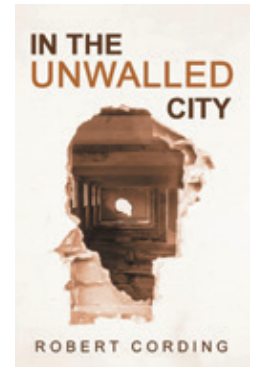
One might be tempted to compare Dowling’s lack of credentials and lowly companions with the life of Christ. But Father Ed would most certainly scoff at this idea. He did not seek the glory of fame or material possessions but prayed incessantly for greater faith. In this way, he lives on as an example and inspiration for living a life for others.

Patricia Lawler Kenet *practiced law for 15 years before returning to journalism and creative writing. Her essays have appeared in The Washington Post, The New York Times and The Rumpus.*

Finding the Divine in Anything and Everything

A review of the year in poetry

This year's poetry roundup takes us from the streets of 1920s Harlem to modern-day Ukraine, from the wait for the Covid-19 vaccine to a sea that becomes a "whirlpool of grace." We get a reflection on the near-sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Abraham, and a poem in which Lucky Charms features prominently. Whether explicitly stated or not, these poets find the divine in anything and everything. They alert us that God is not only in the details, but in the details of the details—and the more these poets drill down into sheer reality, the more they reveal the Spirit beneath.



In her new poetry collection, Jill Peláez Baumgaertner displays her mastery of setting and imagery, expertly placing her reader directly next to her everywhere she goes—from Cuba to the former concentration camps of Poland to the Orkney Islands of Scotland. And even in those poems not set in a specific location, such as those in Part I of the book, which is centered around the liturgical year, *From Shade to Shine* takes the reader on a journey through Jesus' life as we experience it in the church's calendar. In "Death is the mother of beauty," not only is Jesus present and his "hands are splayed/ against the wood," but also:

*the clouds of witnesses,
not always seen but felt,
their multitudes
never crowding,
always standing,
sparking light,
sitting, even reclining
into the plush of grasses.*

This is one of Baumgaertner's talents, calling our attention to the smallest details that then bring us to a greater understanding both of her poems and of the world they illuminate.

The book also includes "Libretto for Cantata," based on Psalm 139. Written in the style of J. S. Bach's cantatas, it outlines a dialogue between a stubborn human soul and the ever-merciful Jesus. Though this is the longest poem in the book, it is by no means unconquerable. Baumgaertner provides enough of a thread throughout the collection to tie her poems together so that no idea becomes trite and no detail goes unburnished.

Jill Rice

In the Unwalled City, the 10th volume of poetry from Robert Cording, takes its name from the quotation from Epicurus that opens the volume: "Against other things it is possible to obtain security, but when it comes to death, we

human beings all live in an unwalled city." Inside this unwalled city is where Cording's poetry lives as he processes the devastating death of his son, Daniel.

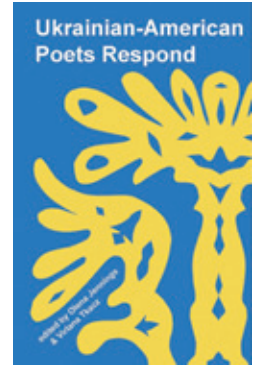
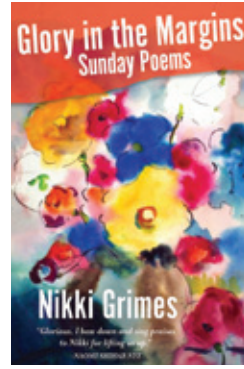
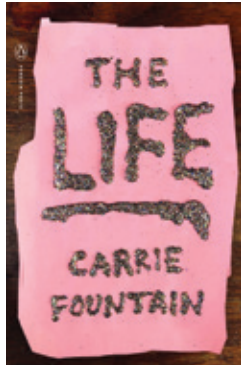
As meditations on love and loss, the poems are concentric circles of grief. Like ripples on a pond, they spread outward from the central dropped stone of Daniel's early death. They engulf every part of the poet's life and spiral out to encompass the natural world: "A Pair of Roseate Spoonbills," which Cording desperately wants to show the deceased Daniel, or "Bobcat," whose appearance in the backyard a day after Daniel's death the poet wants to—but can't—take as a sign.

As the circles ever widen, we learn more about Daniel's death. First, the horrible empty space his death leaves behind. Then Daniel's struggle with chronic back pain while he was alive. The volume ends back at its beginning, the final poem revealing, "My son died of an accidental drug overdose"—Daniel's opiate pain medication. *In the Unwalled City* is starkly beautiful in its devastation and in its grappling with spirituality and grief. It is Cording's way to ensure that Daniel is "never dead. Never nowhere./ Call it The Perpetual-State-of-the-Beloved// who lives in the world/ of Never-To-Be-Found-Again."

Sarah Vincent

Sometimes you can judge a book by its cover. That's the case, at least, with *The Life*, by Carrie Fountain. The cover resembles a child's art project: jagged-edge construction paper, subjected to the unmerciful godhood of a child with scissors, bearing the title in glitter glue. It is as good an introduction to *The Life* as any, a collection exploring the intersections of motherhood, faith and the loving mess of small children.

One of the linchpins to the work comes early in the volume, a poem titled "How Has Motherhood Changed the Way You Write?" This question runs throughout the work, grounded as it is in the realities of family life; the answer is a combination of love, exhaustion, and the war between uncertainty and faith. ("First" opens with the lines "There



is a holiness in exhaustion,/ is what I keep telling myself.”)

The Life is accessible, tender and meditative of seeming mundanities: a list of cartoon characters like a litany of saints, a poem about Lucky Charms and a running toilet, a stack of enchilada casseroles that “wait in the freezer/ for their big moment.” Some poems embrace self-doubt, while others celebrate the ability to be “moved by/ love, destroyed by love, and replaced/ by love.” Tying both together are poems like “After the Ascension,” which finds the Apostles discovering “This/ is the feeling of rising with faith alone”—a familiar struggle in both religion and motherhood, and the beating heart of this volume.

Sarah Vincent

Meet Me at the Lighthouse, by the former poet laureate of California, Dana Gioia, is a nostalgia-soaked tribute to Los Angeles and the poet’s own life. Containing both original work and translations of poems by Antonio Machado, Rainer Maria Rilke and Pablo Neruda, the volume starts with the titular poem, which recalls remembered nights at a shabby nightclub in “the summer of ’71,/ When all our friends were young and immortal.” Throughout the collection, the golden glow of memory ties together the disparate threads of old friends, old haunts and old ancestors.

“Three Drunk Poets” recalls poetry recitations with friends stumbling home from a bar, while “The Ballad of Jesús Ortiz” uses what Gioia calls the traditional poetic form of the poor to tell the story of his *vaquero* great-grandfather. The poem is followed by three self-proclaimed psalms about Los Angeles praising Gioia’s ancestors, “the unkillable poor,” that invoke the “juvenescent rapture of LA/ Where ecstasy cohabits with despair.”

If that which is golden has passed, what can the future offer? It is not a question that *Meet Me at the Lighthouse* asks, but a question the volume leaves after it finishes.

Sarah Vincent

As the poet laureate of Madison Street Church, a Brethren in Christ congregation in Riverside, Calif., Nikki Grimes

has devoted herself for years to writing poems to complement the Sunday sermons. She notes in the preface to *Glory in the Margins: Sunday Poems* that “if you’ve spent any time steeped in Scripture, you know that the Bible is rich in poetry, that poetry is one of its staples.”

Grimes highlights this richness in this collection, gathering about 100 poems that each delve into a text or two from the Bible. Because Grimes has organized the book to match the calendar year, January to January, with about eight poems per month, readers get to feel the rhythm of the church year as well.

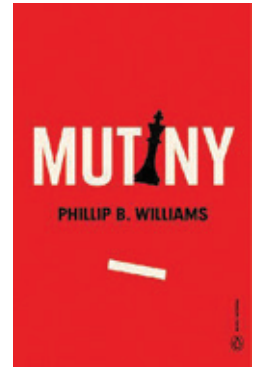
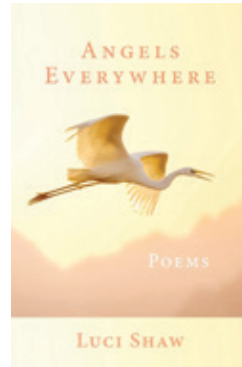
In some places, the language is somewhat simplistic or the images and figures too familiar. Overall, the book falls into the category of devotional poetry—those unfamiliar with the genre could pick it up and choose a text for the time of year as part of a *lectio divina* practice.

The best of the poems meld contemporary images with the themes of her Scriptural sources. “Indelible,” for example, describes a searching mind looking at the Bible:

*magnifying glass in hand
desperate for some special decoder
or that universal translator
we’ve seen on Star Trek
that can convert our tears
to language El Shaddai can hear.*

Lisa Ampleman

I felt chills run across my neck a dozen times, despite my warm room, while reading the evocative poems in the anthology *Ukrainian-American Poets Respond*. The editor, Olena Jennings, explains that many of the poets featured read their works at two virtual events in March and April 2022. All write with Ukrainian heritage and culture in mind, implicitly or explicitly, and while their themes are often the same—the smoke over a burning city, the sounds of bombs, the trauma of forced migration—each brings his or her unique perspective to the tragic invasion of



Ukraine by Russia.

The poet Lila Dlaboha, who was born in the United States, has volunteered on and off with children in war zones in Ukraine since 2016. The poems paint a raw picture of living in a war zone: Even the sound of shaking out a shirt after washing it sounds like a bomb. "I jolted from the sound of a bomb in my palm," she writes in "Day After" about a mundane act turned terrifying.

Vera Sirota's "Despite all odds" encapsulates the resilience found in many of the poems and within the Ukrainian people. "Hope animates my heart/ despite all odds/ because this is a national trait," begins the final stanza. With the anniversary of Vladimir Putin's 2022 invasion on Feb. 24, these poems remind those of us who are far from the war that it is still a brutal reality for millions of people.

Jill Rice

In a re-release of Claude McKay's first book of poems published in the United States (now in the public domain), Angelico Press shines a light on religious themes in the poet's early work. The very first poem of *Harlem Shadows*, "The Easter Flower," situates the speaker as "a pagan" who worships at the "shrine" of the "resurrection flower.... Yielding my heart unto its perfumed power."

McKay, a central figure in the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, is most known today for poems in meter and rhyme like "If I Must Die," a plea for Black Americans not to be killed "like hogs/ Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot," and the book itself echoes today's conversations about racial justice.

An introduction by the Catholic poet James Matthew Wilson acquaints readers with McKay's conversion to Catholicism in the 1940s and situates the book in McKay's biography. The 23-page essay reads more like an academic paper examining McKay's Catholicism later in life, however, than a straightforward explanation of the importance of *Harlem Shadows* as an anchor for the Harlem Renaissance.

I was surprised by how much of the book mourned

McKay's lost Eden, Jamaica, where he grew up. In "The Tropics of New York," for instance, McKay describes a shop window full of fruit, which reminds the speaker of "fruit-like trees laden by low-singing rills,/ And dewy dawns, and mystical blue skies/ In benediction over nun-like hills."

Lisa Ampleman

The Gospel of Wildflowers and Weeds, Orlando Ricardo Menes's seventh collection of poetry, narrates the travels of a man with complex feelings about God. With roots in Peru, a childhood in Havana and Florida, and recent visits to Spain and Turkey, he shows us how a global life can affect one's relationship with both art and the divine.

In "Blackberry Tree," early in the book, Menes describes a young boy thinking about Mary breastfeeding Jesus. "Fifty years on I now know that His Law slants/ to love," he says, "and I will not eat their bread of shame/ leavened with fear." Here and elsewhere, he objects to some messages from the institutional church, including priests who link the body to sinfulness. Similarly, "The Sacrifice of Isaac," in addressing Abraham, concludes that "Love, not the law/ Will be my prayer. The human, not the divine—/ This ragged, restless world my only shrine."

Other poems, though, demonstrate a desire for grace ("Grace" begins "We cannot buy it at Trader Joe's") and a quest for spiritual connection. In one spoken by Théophile Gautier, a 19th-century French poet, Menes says, "Watch me bless the dawn, watch me charm your sea into whirlpools of grace./ I will not desist in finding God, mine & yours, on these alleys & cul-de-sacs." Menes's poems, alive with sound and unexpected words, are as vivid in their descriptions of a multifaceted faith.

Lisa Ampleman

In *Holy Land*, Angela Alaimo O'Donnell explores the Middle Eastern region known as the Holy Land, then many other lands made holy simply by the presence of God. Inspired by a pilgrimage she made to the places where Jesus walked,

the collection begins on the Mount of Beatitudes and then travels to Collegeville, Minn.; Baltimore, Md.; and Ireland.

From “Lazarus”: “Your story bigger than you and us./ Four feet tall, ten feet under-/ ground,” to “The Land of Forgetting”: The words “slipped out of the fissures of my mind,/ wandered off and found another place/ to dwell.” Each poem is a bite-sized walk through daily aspects of life, and O’Donnell adeptly guides the reader along the journey. While every poem is savorable, none drags on at a too-slow pace; each is eminently well-paced. Her connections to the present and to the places she is in let the reader in on the experiences she has had. These include standing at the Western Wall with the praying women and awaiting a new grandchild as the world awaited a Covid vaccine.
Jill Rice

Luci Shaw, author of more than 35 books, writes poems that focus on how the small, ordinary moments of a day reveal the mystical: “Each minor detail is for me a message, a glimpse of a fleeting angel, a creative word from God,” she says in the foreword to her latest, *Angels Everywhere*.

While some poems in the book feel like lineated prose, unadorned with the sounds poets can use to make a piece sing, this approach would work well for those who appreciate directness. Shaw often also employs familiar tropes (the individual as a candle flame, life as a journey across the sea), but the book’s strengths are in its surprises, including the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and early lockdowns. This is evident in poems like “Quarantine,” which argues that to “love one another,” per Jesus’ command, might mean “to write/ a note to your granddaughter who/ struggles with distance learning.”

Shaw shows the importance of poetry for Catholics in particular in poems like “A Simple Service”—which begins, “The poet’s job is to notice/ and take notes”—and “Jesus Writes a Poem”:

A poem is made of metaphors: this is that; those are these—emblems and actualities both. So naked and raw, these images. They invite us into conversation with Jesus. Into our own thirsty souls and famished bodies.

Lisa Ampleman

Phillip B. Williams’s book *Mutiny* opens with a kind of Genesis: “In the beginning, I suspect my index is on fire.” The rest of the piece, titled “Final First Poem,” pictures God as “bored too with ransom for art, allusions/ stacked

like reluctant saints on a pyre: Eliot, Alighieri,/ Homer.”

These opening lines act as a foundational mythology for the rest of *Mutiny*, an overthrowing of the historic tyranny of white Western canon. Throughout *Mutiny*, Williams instead builds his own index, alluding to African folk tales, Nina Simone, James Baldwin, Kendrick Lamar, Afro-Brazilian religion and Kiswahili philosophy.

In tense, tightly controlled, intricate verse, Williams rises in a nearly cacophonous crescendo. Among other things, his poems tackle sexual violence, Black identity, faith, and the death of his grandmother. Several address white consumption of Black pain, one poem calling out white literary journals seeking a tokenized Black “mascot,” mockingly asking, “You gots anymo uh dem po-lice poems wit duh/ Hippi-ty Hop references wit dem thugs and da trees?”

A standout of the volume is “Final Poem for ‘The Black Body’”: a drawing of a slave ship filled with the word “ditto,” referencing a ship’s inventory that listed one “negro man” and “negro woman,” with every other captive only labeled “ditto,” namelessly interchangeable. Below, Williams writes, “I tried to love them out of their caricature, back into a name, to love a name onto them.” It’s gut-wrenching. *Mutiny* is a powerful volume deserving of a slow read and a deep unpacking of the new index Williams builds for himself.

Sarah Vincent

We would also like to highlight new collections released over the past year by poets whose work has appeared in our pages: *Maker of Heaven &*, by Jason Myers; *Raising the Sparks*, by Jennifer Wallace; *All That Will Be New*, by Paul Mariani, and *Begin With a Question*, by Marjorie Maddox.

Lisa Ampleman is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *Mom in Space* (2024) and *Romances* (2020). She is the managing editor at *The Cincinnati Review* and poetry series editor at *Acre Books*.

Jill Rice is an O’Hare fellow at *America*.

Sarah Vincent is an assistant editor at *Reader’s Digest* and a former O’Hare fellow at *America*. She has also written for *National Catholic Reporter* and *Sojourners*.

It Is Wonderful in Our Eyes

April brings hints of Easter and spring, and hope of summer warmth. As Lent recedes, the church welcomes the Easter birth of renewed vision and enkindled faith. The readings this month prompt the question: Is this not wonderful in our eyes?

In the month of April, Psalm 118 will be sung on two consecutive Sundays (the First and Second Sundays of Easter). This psalm captures the transitional moment from Palm Sunday, when we remember the Lord's Passion, to Easter Sunday, when we celebrate the Resurrection. "The stone rejected," sings the cantor, "has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done and it is wonderful in our eyes" (Ps 118:22-23). The Paschal mystery that we contemplate this liturgical season is indeed remarkable. It is wonderful especially for the newly baptized and all who make an effort, as the first disciples did, to understand its implications for their faith.

The readings for this Easter month show the earliest disciples struggling to understand how the Passion of the Lord fit into God's plan. What does the resurrection of the Lord reveal? In this struggle to understand, we read about Peter, who weeps bitterly at his betrayal of his friend and Lord. The other disciples deal with the mystery of this transition in their own way too. Mary of Magdala runs passionately to the empty tomb. Thomas fiercely doubts the stories of the risen Lord. The disciples walk away from Jerusalem with their eyes of faith still adjusting to this new light.

On the last Sunday of April, the Gospel of John reminds his readers that the sheep will listen only to the voice of their shepherd. In these actions of the disciples who weep, run, doubt, walk and listen, Easter is a time to allow the gift of faith to ease the struggle of the human condition. The readings challenge us to let go of the doubts to which so many tightly cling.

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION (A), APRIL 2, 2023

Standing with Peter, who weeps bitterly

THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD, THE MASS OF EASTER DAY (A), APRIL 9, 2023

Running with Mary of Magdala to the empty tomb

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER, SUNDAY OF DIVINE MERCY (A), APRIL 16, 2023

Doubting with Thomas the Apostle

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER (A), APRIL 23, 2023

Walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (A), APRIL 30, 2023

Listening to the voice of the Shepherd



Victor M. Cancino, S.J., lives on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana and is the pastor-delegate for St. Ignatius Mission. He studied Sacred Scripture at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.



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Biden's Unjust Asylum Rule

Death cannot be an acceptable part of our immigration policies

By Mark J. Seitz



In 1937, the Russian mystic, priest and refugee Sergei Bulgakov wrote provocatively that the church “must always remain in relation to the state an anarchic force.”

Having been forced into exile by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Bulgakov could be forgiven his rhetorical excess. He went to Paris, where he would become one of the brightest theological minds of the century. Many of his countrymen were able to cross borders in Europe and Latin America as refugees before ultimately building a future in the United States.

For many people at or near the U.S.-Mexico border today, affected by the reality of forced migration, an opportunity like that might soon be impossible.

In May, President Biden's new asylum transit ban is set to go into effect. While there are exceptions, the ban unnecessarily places onerous hurdles before migrants obliged to pass through multiple countries on their way to the United States. It is temporary, but it is not difficult to imagine the policy being extended when it expires in two years. The ban's overall effect will be to further diminish the rights of vulnerable persons on the move at the border.

The new policy will increase burdens on neighboring countries, like Mexico, that are already wrestling with displacement due to violence and instability. And we can expect an increase in both the exploitation of migrants by traffickers and migrant

deaths, now at record levels, which occur whenever legal pathways at the border are restricted.

The administration will provide temporary entry to a limited number of individuals from Latin America. But those options are not connected to asylum, which is what the most vulnerable coming to the border are hoping to access. And the administration has not provided those options for those fleeing northern Central American countries, perpetuating a longstanding pattern of discriminatory policies in that region. A policy that leads to adverse outcomes because of the national origin of those in need is indefensibly regressive.

There was hope that after the damaging immigration policies of the previous administration, the Biden administration would redress the wrongs done and begin putting into place policies more consistent with justice, human dignity and the longstanding contributions of migrants to American life.

Some of the worst policies have been rolled back, even as congressional inaction remains an intractable obstacle to passing broader reforms. But in many instances, the administration's actions have been tepid and fear-driven and, in the case of the asylum transit ban, harmful.

In my work as a bishop in a border diocese, this is an urgent pastoral issue. In the river that runs alongside my community and defines our border with Mexico, too many mothers and fathers and children continue to drown.

And even more are dying in the desert as a result of our national indifference.

Government must regulate the border and guarantee the rights of asylum seekers and all vulnerable migrants. Policies that fail to secure protections for the vulnerable are morally deficient. Death simply cannot be an acceptable part of the overhead costs of our immigration policies.

Following the horrific mass displacement of World War II, U.S. leadership was key in developing global protections for refugees and asylum seekers. At a time when innovating and strengthening these protections are required, we are instead chipping away at them, placing asterisks and caveats on the progress we have made.

In this moment of frustration, during our Eastertide eucharistic celebrations, we might reflect with more intention on how our sharing of the transformed gifts of bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, can generate a culture of renewed solidarity and hospitality. And on how the real liturgy of welcoming the flesh of Christ in the poor and migrant, which finds expression in our works of charity, might provide, perhaps not an “anarchic force,” but a creative counterexample that uproots fear and shows that humanity and compassion are possible.


The only crisis at the border is a moral crisis. And the only failure is one of courage and justice.

Mark J. Seitz is the bishop of El Paso, Tex.


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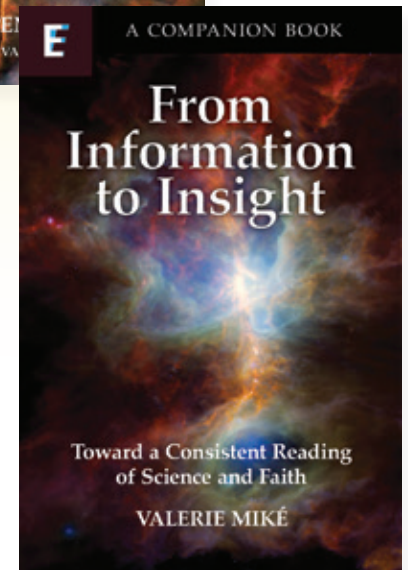
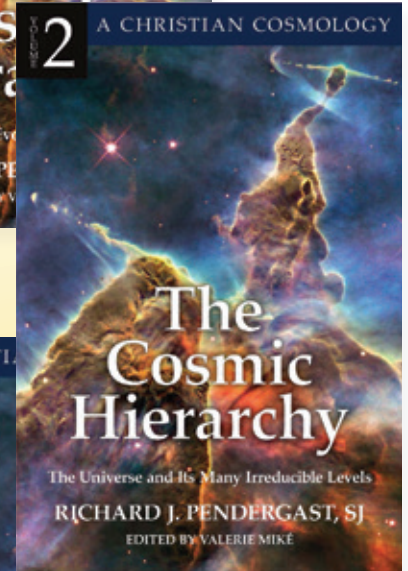
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