America

MAY 13, 2019

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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Confirming Bias

Since last summer I have taken part in about a dozen panels and programs across this country that were organized to discuss the causes and consequences of the crisis of sexual abuse of minors by members of the Catholic clergy. I have visited several cities and met people from every walk of life—victims, survivors, bishops, priests and religious, lay leaders, moms and dads, young and old. It has been humbling, enlightening and inspiring to take part in these important conversations—the most important conversation we could ever have.

As you might imagine, there are recurring insights and themes. And not a few people have named what they believe to be the principal cause or causes of this catastrophic phenomenon. Even Benedict XVI, the pope emeritus, recently weighed in, arguing in an open letter that the cultural and sexual revolution of the 1960s created the conditions in which evils like sexual abuse could flourish. After 1968, he wrote, "there could no longer be anything that constituted an absolute good any more than anything fundamentally evil; there could be only relative value judgments." The danger of relativism is not a new theme for Benedict. And I have expressed similar concerns about the loss of absolutes, often citing his insights about this phenomenon in this column.

But it is precisely this familiarity that troubles me. The cause of the greatest crisis facing the contemporary church just happens to be the very same thing about which Benedict has been concerned for his entire career? That seems suspicious, almost as if he might have had his answer before he had his question, the kind of inverted reasoning one usually finds in ideological and similarly circular forms of thought. Of course, even if such thinking is at work, it doesn't necessarily follow that Benedict's conclusion is wrong. But it does give me pause, all the more because I have discerned a similar pattern in the observations, commentaries and conclusions of many people in the U.S. church, some of whom are sympathetic to Benedict's worldview and some of whom are not.

I have heard, for example, from a number of people who have been concerned for many years about homosexuality per se, or the presence of a large number of homosexuals among the Catholic clergy, that what caused the sexual abuse crisis in the church was homosexuality per se or the large number of homosexuals among the Catholic clergy. Similarly, I have heard from a number of people who have been concerned for many years about the lack of female ecclesiastical leaders that what caused the sexual abuse crisis in the church was the lack of female ecclesiastical leaders. I have also heard from people who have expressed deep concern over the years about the culture of clericalism in the church that what caused the sexual abuse crisis was the culture of clericalism in the church.

You see my point. There appears to be a kind of circular reasoning at work. Again, it does not follow that these conclusions are necessarily wrong. But if the cause of every major ecclesial scandal just happens to be that thing that you hate and have railed against for years, then you should ask yourself whether your view may be biased.

Ideological bias structures much of the public discourse. That is a long-term menace, but on most days, it is mainly a nuisance. But we cannot allow it to structure our ecclesial conversation and we certainly cannot permit it to shape our thinking about a topic as fundamentally important as the causes and consequences of sexual abuse. Undoubtedly, the sexual abuse crisis in the church has causes and consequences that are specifically ecclesial and specifically Catholic. But prudence dictates that we avoid jumping to the conclusion that those causes and consequences are obvious or that they necessarily involve our usual suspects, whoever or whatever they might be.

It is also certain, however, that the sexual abuse crisis in the church has causes and consequences that are not specifically ecclesial or Catholic, and we should allow for the possibility that those factors might be even more decisive. If this were not true, the list of institutions facing sexual abuse crises—the federal government, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Boy Scouts, the Chicago public school system, the New England private school system—would not be growing daily.

Our search for the causes and consequences of these atrocious crimes must be fearless, exhaustive and without bias. Since we are dealing with sin, however, we must also bear in mind that the ultimate cause and consequence is beyond reason. For while some may say the cause is the sexual revolution and others might say the cause is clericalism, the third chapter of the Book of Genesis tells us that it is somehow neither and somehow both.

Matt Malone, S.J.
Twitter: @americaeditor

THE ISSUE

GIVE AND TAKE

DISPATCHES

FEATURES

Christophe Petit Tesson, Pool via AP

Debris inside Notre Dame cathedral in Paris on April 16.

Cover: University of St. Mary at Arizona State University, Tempe
Photo Courtesy: University of St. Mary

FAITH IN FOCUS

POEM

IDEAS IN REVIEW

THE WORD

LAST TAKE

What criteria should guide college admissions?

Asked the above question, our readers ranked six criteria—extracurricular activities, standardized test scores, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, athletic skill and legacy status—from "most important" to "least important." Most respondents believed that extracurricular activities and standardized test scores should be considered "most important" in college admissions." In fact, extracurricular activities barely outranked standardized test scores.

"A kid that can do schoolwork and good grades while doing extracurricular activities can multitask," wrote Christina Padilla of San Juan, Puerto Rico. "That should be considered more important than a standardized test, which only accounts for one day's work."

Overall, respondents suggested de-emphasizing legacy status and making the process less score-driven. They said that admissions should be more holistic, with some suggesting mandatory interviews. About 42 percent of respondents believe that public colleges and universities should be free.

About half of respondents indicated that legacy status should be considered the least important factor in the college admissions process. "Legacy status...should not even be considered," wrote Renata Rafferty of Richmond, Va., as it has "no academic or societal value when trying to build a well-rounded community of people and learners."

Most important factors for college admissions

1. Extracurricular activities
2. Standardized test scores
3. Socioeconomic status
4. Race/ Ethnicity
5. Athletic Skill
6. Legacy Status

Walking Away

Re "#MineToo," by Cecilia González-Andrieu (4/29): In many instances I think women are loyal to their parish. If the leadership is good, the preaching is thoughtful, learned and joyful, and the community is supportive, we focus on the parish and push the "church" to one side. To leave would mean leaving a community that has, with all its faults, often been the source of love, friendship, support and prayer.

Jane Lawson

Unconditional Love

Re "Same-sex Marriage Plaintiffs Create Scholarship for L.G.B.T. Catholics," by Michael J. O'Loughlin (4/29): Jesus preached love. In none of his sermons did he say "I love you if..." or "I'll love you as long as...." There were no restrictions on Jesus' love and compassion. He is the definition of unconditional love. To assert otherwise is slander.

Anna Bock Mullins

Persecution

Re "After ISIS: Can the Christian Community in Northern Iraq Survive?" by Kevin Clarke (4/29): Thank you for continuing to highlight this. The persecution of fellow Christians should be the number one external issue supported by the church. I wish the church were more forceful and outspoken on this matter. I am afraid we will look back at this, like many tragedies in the past, and wish we did more.

Robert Boyle

College Is Not for Everyone

Re "College Is Not for Everyone. Catholic Schools Should Recognize That," by Mary McAuliffe (4/1): As a Catholic educator I agree that college is not for everyone. I have told my students that if you want to be a carpenter, a plumber, an auto mechanic, a baker—great. Be an educated carpenter, plumber, auto mechanic, baker. Be educated so that you can fully participate in your parish and the community.

Edward J. Higgins

These results are based on reader responses to a poll promoted on Facebook, Twitter and in our email newsletter.

Suriname, South America

Jesus loves me, this I know.

AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

Photograph by Ruben Timman, Netherlands Bible

Accountability: a More Pressing Question Than Impeachment

After the release of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report, Democrats have been debating whether or not to bring impeachment proceedings against President Trump. If begun, impeachment could succeed in the House; but conviction and removal from office would almost certainly fail in the Senate along partisan lines. The question is whether such a result would express (1) a commitment to the rule of law in the face of a president and his partisan supporters who subordinate it to political advantage or (2) the determination of partisan opponents to repudiate a president whom they never accepted in the first place.

These two possibilities are not equally weighted. The concerns raised by the report's description of a president whose determination to interfere in an investigation was thwarted by his staff's refusal to comply with his instructions are too serious to be dismissed as a "witch hunt," even if some partisan motivations are in evidence. But noting the two extremes of interpretation also raises a question even more pressing than impeachment: Who will call the president to account? Who can demand that he acknowledge and take responsibility for his ethical lapses? If impeachment and removal is the only mechanism to do so, then the United States already has a problem that impeachment cannot solve.

This is a joint crisis of accountability and credibility. Many Republican politicians have abandoned their duty to criticize Mr. Trump's repeated violations of political and civic norms. Senator Mitt Romney has offered the strongest response thus far from any national G.O.P. official, describing himself as "sickened at the extent and pervasiveness of dishonesty" from Mr. Trump. Yet he opened the same statement by saying that since the report clears the president of the charge of having conspired in Russian election interference, "the business of government can move on." He thereby joins his less-sickened colleagues in absolving themselves of the need to inquire any further into Mr. Trump's willingness to obstruct justice.

On the other hand, in the eyes of many of Mr. Trump's supporters, Democrats cannot credibly question the president's motives or actions because they are only using the special counsel's report to vindicate their pre-judgment of the president as unfit for office. While necessary, congressional hearings and further exploration of Mr. Trump's misuse of his office are likely to be similarly dismissed.

The Republican commentator Charlie Sykes wrote that the Mueller report "suggests any judgment about Trump's motives should be 'informed by the totality of the evidence.' The totality of evidence is damning." This is the kind of response we need to hear from elected Republicans as well. Democrats should prioritize recruiting more Republicans to join and lead the effort to investigate and criticize President Trump's efforts to impede the investigation of Russian interference and his ongoing disregard for constitutional checks and balances. If those Republicans cannot be found and the party continues to back Mr. Trump for political advantage regardless of ethical cost, then impeachment will be insufficient, and the United States faces a problem that must be resolved at the ballot box.

Border Security Will Not Solve the Immigration Crisis

The myth that border security alone will stem surges in unauthorized migration persists in the Trump administration. More than two years into a presidency notorious for its harsh enforcement measures and efforts to curb both legal and illegal immigration, conditions have only gotten worse.

"The unprecedented surge in unaccompanied children and family unit migration is overwhelming our ability to provide humanitarian aid within our immigration system," Kevin McAleenan, acting secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, said on April 16. The practice of releasing asylum-seeking families with notices to appear in court, according to a new report from the Homeland Security Advisory Council, is supposedly the major "pull" factor that brings mothers, fathers and children to the United States. To "fix" this pull factor, D.H.S. recommends emergency legislation to allow longer detention of children when accompanied by parents.

The notion that asylum seekers are traveling thousands of miles to exploit this so-called loophole is absurd. These migrants, increasingly from agricultural backgrounds, are not legal experts who have devised a way to crack our nation's complex immigration system. They are desperately flee-

ing gang violence or dire poverty. Twelve-year-old girls are dismembered for not accepting the advances of gang members. Fathers' lives are threatened for reporting police officers who rape their daughters.

Those who are fleeing poverty, while they may not qualify for asylum status, do so out of sheer desperation. The greatest "pull factors" drawing people to the United States are its safety, security and opportunity—and compared to what they are fleeing, even much harsher enforcement is unlikely to overcome that pull. It is far more likely to channel immigration into even more dangerous and unregulated forms.

Instead of barriers, the nation needs more immigration judges to hear cases and address immigration backlogs. Simply speeding up hearings—a measure that was proposed by the administration—is a clear violation of due process. There also must be consistency in asylum decisions. As it is now, whether asylum seekers are granted legal status or not largely depends on which judge hears their case rather than on their personal circumstances.

Measures that address only the migrants who arrive today do nothing for those who will arrive tomorrow. The only lasting solution is to make ongoing substantial investments in Central American countries. That means sustained efforts to improve education and infrastructure and to create lasting jobs in those countries. And it means standing shoulder to shoulder with allies to rid these countries of tyrannical gangs and networks of human smuggling once and for all.

Enforcement alone will never be a solution when human beings are involved. A permanent resolution will come only by addressing root causes. The United States must recognize its duty to reach beyond its borders.

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Perinatal hospice care respects life, however brief it may be

My teenage daughter recently developed a headache and fever bad enough for her to tell me: "Mom, I need to go to the emergency room. Please, take me now." At the emergency room we learned not only that was she running a fever of 102, but that her heart rate was well above what it should have been for a 15-year-old. "We'll start an I.V.," the nurse said. "Oh, and her swab just came back positive for Influenza A. You're going to be here for a while." My daughter began to cry; I held her hand as she lay on the gurney. As any parent knows, there is nothing worse than seeing your child in pain.

That particular fear—having to witness a suffering child—was repeatedly cited in the media coverage of New York's new abortion law signed in January, which permits elective terminations up until the moment of birth, as well as similar legislation in Illinois and other states. Much of this coverage was based on the assumption that late-term abortions involve dire medical conditions that would either be fatal to women who continued their pregnancies or result in the child being born with disabilities. One woman, a member of the abortion-access lobbying group Naral, wrote in USA Today about the "crystal clear" choice to have the procedure out of "the purest mercy" for her child. Late-term abortion was portrayed as a zero-sum game in which a mother had no other option but to abort.

This concern does not match the data on late-term abortions, which suggest that most are not done for reasons of maternal or fetal health. In 2013, for example, the Guttmacher Institute, which advocates for greater access to abortion, published a study by two University of California researchers who concluded, "data suggest that most women seeking later terminations are not doing so for reasons of fetal anomaly or life endangerment." More common reasons included the fear of raising a child alone, addiction problems and delays in seeking an abortion after discovering a pregnancy.

The idea that late-term abortions are sometimes the only way to spare children from a life of constant pain is also unsupported. Conspicuously absent from this debate, and from the typical conversation between doctors and women receiving adverse prenatal diagnoses, is any mention of perinatal hospice and palliative care. Perinatal (which means "around the time of birth") hospice care employs many of the principles of compassionate care that the standard, better-known hospice provides for other patients with terminal illnesses: nutrition and hydration, comfort care, pain control, and time with family for bonding, prayer and expressions of love.

Perinatal hospice does not seek to hasten death. Rather, it "follows the child," presenting a model of accompaniment for both the child and the parents. Physicians, nurses, social workers, chaplains and other trained professionals work to ensure that families are able to cherish the time they have with their child, however brief.

I was made aware of perinatal hospice when one of my friends discovered her unborn daughter had a rare form of anencephaly. She was strongly encouraged by doctors (pressured, actually) to end the pregnancy, but she declined and asked for a cesarean section to give the baby the best possible chance of extended survival. Although she lived only six hours, Mary Bernadette was baptized, held, sung to and even taught a few words of Czech by her grandmother (so she would be ready to meet her relatives in heaven, grandma explained). She died peacefully and painlessly in her father's arms, surrounded by her family.

A few days later, Mary Bernadette's parents learned that her donated heart valves had been used to save the lives of two critically ill infants. This is not always possible for such infants, but to her parents that knowledge was a tremendous consolation.

Studies report that women who opt for perinatal hospice have far better outcomes, in both physical and mental health, than their counterparts, especially related to anxiety, depression and grief. Nebraska has recognized this and now requires health providers to provide information about perinatal hospice care to any "pregnant woman who finds out that her baby has a life-limiting condition and who chooses to continue her pregnancy." In contrast to the narrative of a zero-sum game of termination, which pits mother against child, perinatal hospice is a positive-sum game, one in which all participants benefit.

Beyond who wins or loses, perinatal hospice promotes the dignity of all, especially those who will travel with us for just a short time and go to wait for us until we can join them.

Mary Hallan FioRito *is an attorney and the Cardinal Francis George Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., where she specializes in human life issues and issues related to women and the Catholic Church.*

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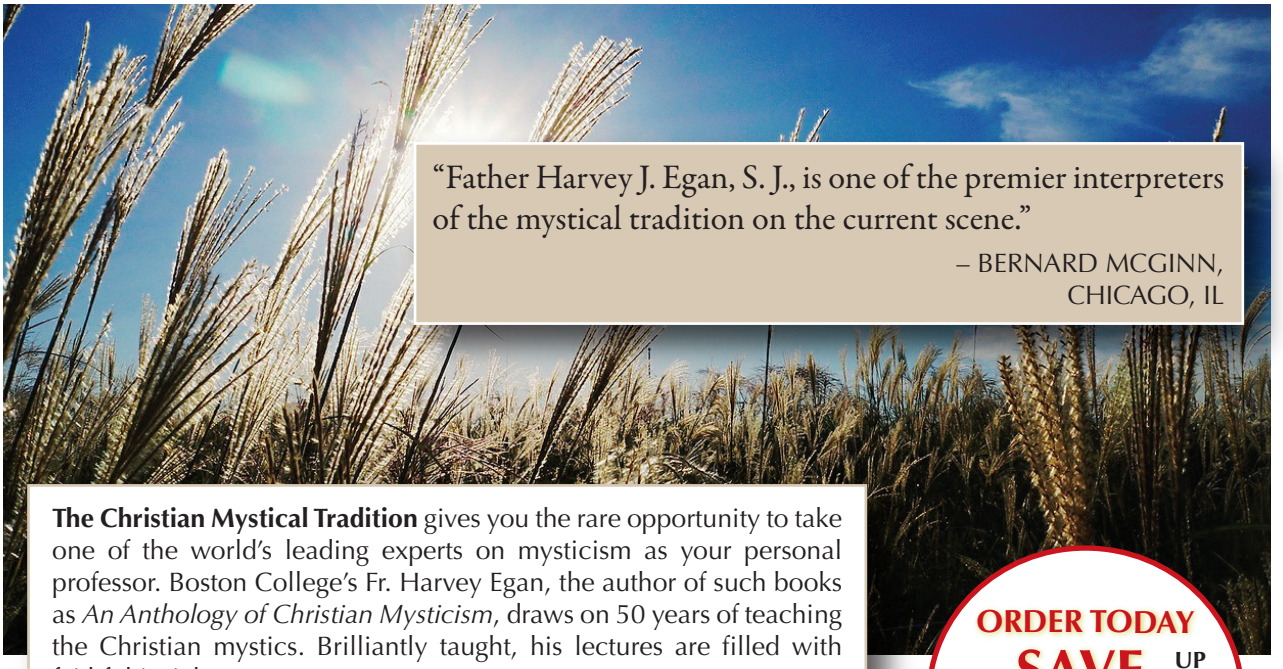

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Parisians look for meaning after Notre-Dame's Holy Week fire

By Melissa Vida

Paris woke up in a hazy smoke the day after fire devastated the historic Notre-Dame Cathedral. Under a gray sky, thousands of Parisians and the city's many visitors came to see the city's Grande Dame. The air was still thick with smoke and the ash burned the eyes of the onlookers, who were relieved to see the cathedral still standing. For many Catholics, the coincidence of the blaze occurring at the start of Holy Week spoke of the greater mysteries of Easter.

On the evening of April 15, a fire was detected under the church's oak roof. As crowds gathered on the banks of the Seine, the fire grew until it consumed the roof and Notre-Dame's slender spire. The world watched aghast and breathless. After nine hours of uncertainty and fear, a brigade of 450 firefighters managed to control the flames. According to officials, had the fire not been extinguished when it was, in just another 15 to 30 minutes it would have been too late—Notre-Dame would have collapsed.

Blanche de Bourbier, a student at the nearby university Sciences Po, was stupefied to see flames that appeared to be consuming the cathedral and to hear what she believed were windows popping under the pressure. "We can't really imagine that it could happen," she told **America**, because Notre-Dame "is so great, so beautiful; it is a bit untouchable."

She went to pray on the riverbank until 2 a.m. with thousands of other people. Fear, grief and faith bonded strangers together.

Nearly two-thirds of the roof buckled under the flames, but the nave and the iconic front towers, with their 42-foot-diameter rosettes, have survived. French authorities believe that an electrical short circuit was the likely


AP Photo/Thierry Mallet

A shocking Paris skyline on April 15 as Notre-Dame de Paris burns

cause of the blaze.

The images of the fire shook France and the whole world. Notre-Dame is a symbol of history, culture and faith that has stood for centuries. Completed in the 14th century, the cathedral has witnessed the Crusades, the Renaissance, the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, two World Wars and the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015. Notre-Dame is literally at the heart of France—it is the "kilometer zero," where the measurement of distances begins in France.

"The historic and religious symbols are not opposed," Grégoire Catta, S.J., the director of the National Service for Family and Society at the Bishops' Conference of France, told **America**. "It is both a place of history and a spot that connects our personal stories because we have lived big events there."

Notre-Dame's blend of grandeur, darkness and light shone through its stained-glass windows, inviting contemplation. Before the fire, the cathedral typically received 30,000 visitors every day, with hundreds of them proceeding to confession inside its walls.

Bernard Gillibert, S.J., was one of the priests who listened to people from all over the world in his confessional at Notre-Dame. He would ask those who had never spoken to a priest before why they had chosen that moment, and people would answer, "I don't know; it feels right."

"They would be struck by the grace of Notre-Dame," Father Gillibert said with a soft chuckle. "Especially in the long, dark and cold winter evenings, the atmosphere of prayer was stunning."

The day after the fire, Ms. de Bourbier returned to nearby Place Saint-Michel to join a vigil organized by Catholic youth groups. Her anxiety transformed into hope. "Every generation has its share of reconstruction to do," she said.

The vigil brought together 1,500 young people. The improvised congregation filled the square, and people climbed up behind the fountain and on fences for a better view of the ceremony.

Relief, serenity and hope characterized the gathering because Notre-Dame was saved but also because the fire happened during Holy Week, seen as a prophetic sign of the resurrection to come.

A photo taken of Notre-Dame's central altar after the blaze, in particular, has renewed the faith of the young people. The picture captured the blackened nave of the cathedral, with a gaping hole in the ceiling and rubble tumbled in front of the altar, but beyond that a bright cross suspended by two cables, unscathed.

"[The photo] means everything," Ms. de Bourbier said with enthusiasm. "For me, it represents the Easter message that everything is falling apart but at the same time, there is hope. Despite the pain, the cross is still with us."

For many Catholics, the fire that partially consumed Notre-Dame served as a metaphor for the paschal mystery and might help the Catholic Church in France—struggling after recent revelations of sexual abuse and its concealment—emerge from its troubles. For some, the fire symbolized the purification of the church that will eventually rise from the ashes.

"We are still very persecuted in the world, and the stories of pedophilia put us through an internal tragedy," Father Gillibert said. "And in fire, there is death, but it is a purifying death. And then it leads to resurrection."

Other priests, like the Rev. Emmanuel Coquet, secretary general of the Bishops' Conference of France, urged fellow Catholics not to make hasty links between the fire, the abuse within the church and Easter.

"There can be no direct comparison between rebuilding a church, which is still just a building, and the tragedy of the lives that have been ravaged by abuse," he said.

"We will work and rebuild [the cathedral]; we have more money than what we've hoped for it, but what affects the church will take longer than the reconstruction of Notre-Dame," he said. Restoring the French church may need a time of repentance, silence and recognizing that some things may never be repaired. "We must remain at the foot of the cross," he said gravely.

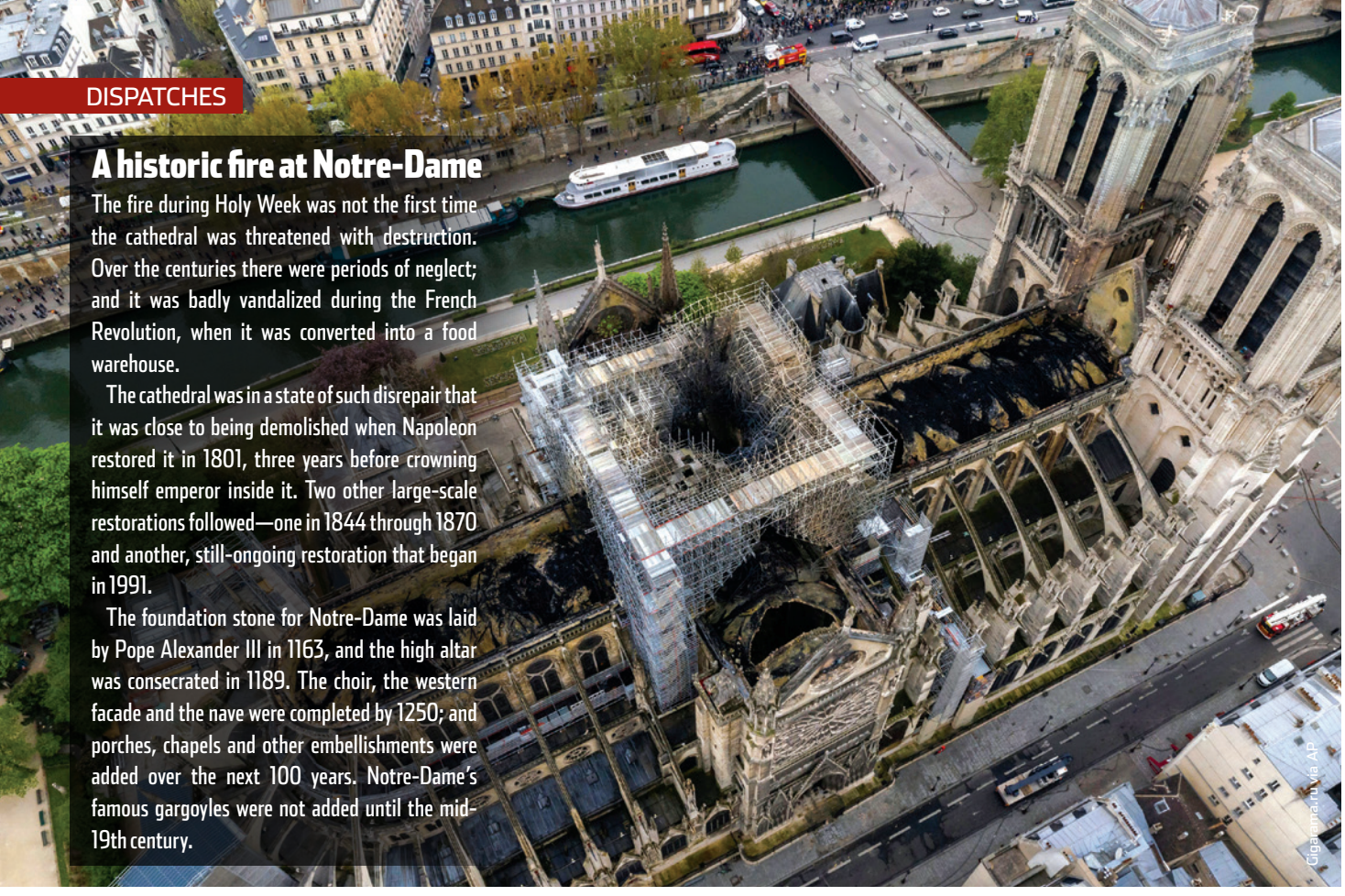
Melissa Vida, *Brussels correspondent.*
Twitter: @MelissaVidaa.

A historic fire at Notre-Dame

The fire during Holy Week was not the first time the cathedral was threatened with destruction. Over the centuries there were periods of neglect; and it was badly vandalized during the French Revolution, when it was converted into a food warehouse.

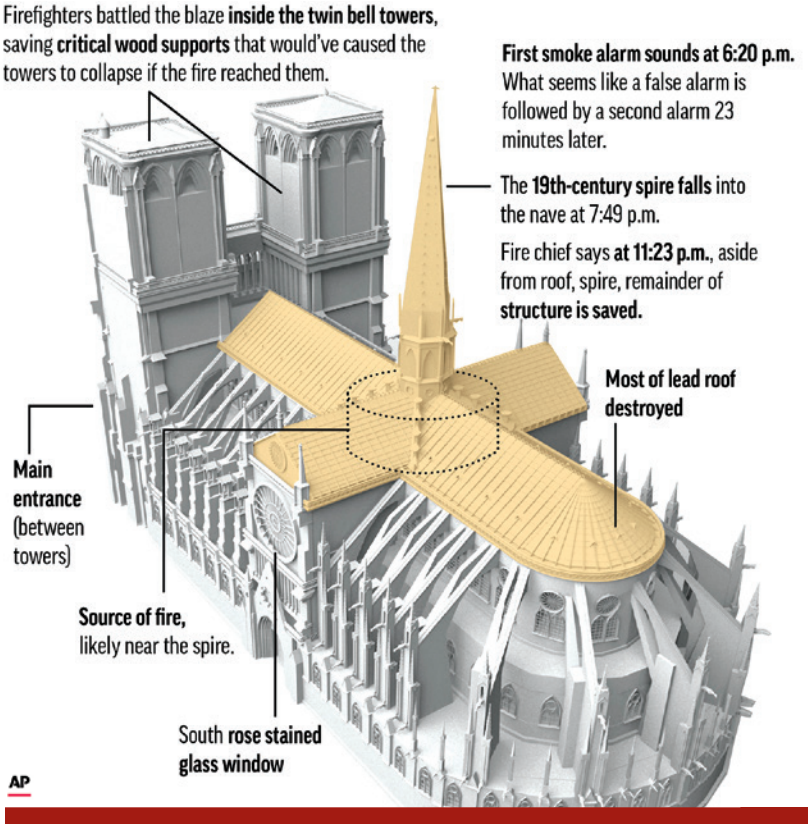
The cathedral was in a state of such disrepair that it was close to being demolished when Napoleon restored it in 1801, three years before crowning himself emperor inside it. Two other large-scale restorations followed—one in 1844 through 1870 and another, still-ongoing restoration that began in 1991.

The foundation stone for Notre-Dame was laid by Pope Alexander III in 1163, and the high altar was consecrated in 1189. The choir, the western facade and the nave were completed by 1250; and porches, chapels and other embellishments were added over the next 100 years. Notre-Dame's famous gargoyles were not added until the mid-19th century.



Gigaprama.ru via AP

THE NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL SAVED BY FIREFIGHTERS



RESTORATION

MORE THAN $1 BILLION HAS BEEN RAISED SO FAR

French President Emmanuel Macron has suggested a 5-year timeframe for rebuilding the cathedral. Restoration experts consider that target unworkable.

BEFORE THE FIRE

12 MILLION VISITORS A YEAR

50,000 each day during the summer, the most visited site in Paris.

Though its rooftop "forest" of 1,200-year-old oak beams has burned, **NOTRE DAME'S TOWERS SURVIVED**, its holy relics were rescued by firefighters and its **8,000-PIPE ORGAN WAS UNDAMAGED.**

Sources: The Associated Press (illustration); Reuters; Time magazine; CNN; notredamedeparis.fr; notredamecathedralparis.com.

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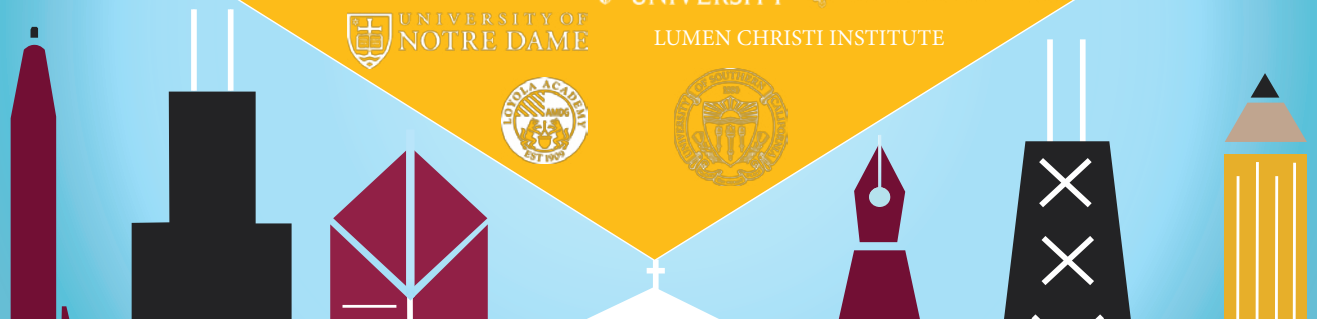

CNS photo/Paulo Whitaker, Reuters

The Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida

Brazil convenes new advisory panel for the protection of minors

Brazil has become one of three nations hosting a pilot project to respond to the church's abuse crisis, an advisory panel for the protection of minors. The new group is based on a recommendation from the Vatican commission working on guidelines for the prevention of child sexual abuse. Part of its goal will be to assist bishops and develop church policy and best practices on confronting abuse from the perspective of victims. The Catholic Church in Brazil has also instituted a "zero tolerance" sexual abuse response policy that has been finalized and approved by the Vatican.

Nelson Giovanelli Rosendo dos Santos, the only Brazilian member of the Pontifical Commission for Protection of Minors, is coordinating the project with leaders of Brazil's national bishops' conference. He is a consecrated layperson and one of the founders of an internationally known not-for-profit organization that works on the rehabilitation of drug addicts, Fazenda da Esperança (Farm of Hope).

Speaking from his home in Guaratinguetá, in the state of São Paulo, Mr. dos Santos told **America** that at least half of the chemically dependent people who arrive at the program's farms suffer from traumas related to sexual abuse, either during childhood or in adult situations of vulnerability.

"Chemical dependency is the tip of the iceberg of deeper problems that are sadly linked to the issue of abuse, which is very much present in the family and in other social contexts," he said.

The problem of sexual abuse by members of the clergy has been a high-profile issue in the United States, Ireland, Australia, Chile and other places in recent years. In many other nations, the church has been slow to respond or has even denied that abuse was an issue that affected their members. The creation of survivor advisory panels was proposed by the Vatican's abuse commission in 2018 as a way to address that problem.

Brazil, the Philippines and Zambia were the countries selected for the experiment, each intended to establish a national advisory panel. According to Mr. dos Santos, the advisory panels should assist and counsel their national bishops' conferences. "The members of these groups can instruct, with their own experience, how to deal with the issue of abuse, especially when it comes to listening to victims and accompanying them," he said.

In Brazil, the first members of the survivors' panel have already been chosen; they will have their first meeting in the spring during a conference on sexual abuse at one of the *fazendas*. All the panel members are people being assisted by Fazenda da Esperança.

"They will describe their difficult experiences of healing wounds, reconciliation, forgiveness.... I'd like the approach of this group to be very positive," Mr. dos Santos said.

"I'd like to offer a hopeful perspective: You are not required to carry on your own this burden caused by someone in the past. You shall feel welcome, listened to, taken seriously, and then you can begin to walk again and help others," he said.

"The pope is opening the way to make us help the whole society to address this issue," Mr. dos Santos said, "all sectors of society, but the church is our first target. I think it's a bold move on his part."

According to Mr. dos Santos, Pope Francis wants this commission to offer a "maternal look at victims."

"This is what I experience on our farms. Giving the possibility that the survivor speaks out, they should have a voice, not be afraid," he said. "Only then they will find a way to be free, not slaves of a wound imposed on them. They will live again. Just like the risen Christ: He shows the wounds on his side, hands and feet, but is alive among us."

Filipe Domingues, *São Paulo correspondent.*
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Sri Lanka stunned by Easter bombing attacks

Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Colombo, Sri Lanka, has blamed the country's authorities for security lapses that allowed a series of suicide bombing attacks on Easter Sunday at three churches and two hotels to occur. "The government should hold an impartial inquiry and find out who is responsible for these attacks," Cardinal Ranjith said.

After initial reports of a death toll as high as 359, Sri Lankan authorities drastically revised the number of people killed to 253 on April 26. President Maithripala Sirisena of Sri Lanka has asked for the resignations of the defense secretary and national police chief, a dramatic shake-up after security forces shrugged off intelligence reports warning of possible attacks on Easter.

Cardinal Ranjith traveled to the fishing village of Negombo, where more than 1,000 people gathered to mourn the dead in a service he led. "The security forces have not cleared the situation yet.... There could be more attacks on public gatherings," he told reporters.

In a statement released on April 23, Dexter Gray, S.J., the superior of the Jesuits in Sri Lanka, denounced "these cowardly attacks," which "have shown how vulnerable this country still is to terror strikes."

The Jesuit headquarters is just a few kilometers from St. Sebastian's Church in Negombo, north of Colombo, where 122 people were killed. The church's neighborhood is known as Little Rome, Father Gray said. "When I visited, it was deeply saddening to see the church with bodies on the ground, blood on the pews and a destroyed roof," he said. "The victims include close relatives of the Jesuits. This parish had given many vocations to the Society in the recent past."

Sri Lankan officials said on April 22 that the Easter Sunday attack may have been intended as retaliation for the attack against Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15. "People of Sri Lanka, please don't allow your politicians to do partisan and selfish politics in this time of national tragedy, and don't be hoodwinked by their gestures and words of pseudo-empathy," J. M. Joseph Jeyaseelan, C.M.F., the Claretian superior in Negombo, implored in a statement released on April 22. "And honorable sirs and madams...kindly don't try to advance your petty political agendas during this time of grief. You all have done enough damage and we don't want more."

The government blamed two Islamic extremist groups, Jammiyathul Millathu Ibrahim and National Thowheeth Jama'ath, for attacks that targeted three churches and three luxury hotels. By April 23, authorities had arrested 40 people in connection with the bombings.

But at least one prominent peacemaker in Sri Lanka was not eager to jump to conclusions about the origins and

CNS photo/Athit Perawongmetha, Reuters

Surveying the damage at St. Sebastian Catholic Church on April 22 in Negombo, Sri Lanka

motives for Easter Sunday's violence.

"The question to ask in this case is why did suicide bombers want to give up their lives to attack Christians in a country in which the Christians are themselves a small minority of about 6 percent of the population," said Jehan Perera, the executive director of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, in a statement released on April 23. Mr. Perera described Christian-Muslim relations in Sri Lanka, which is mostly Buddhist, as "generally good, as they join hands in common causes that affect them as minorities."

The bombings have ended a decade of relative peace in Sri Lanka, a country with a long history of battling terrorism during civil war between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

"Apart from caring for the victims and their families, the most urgent task at this time is to preserve the social peace and interreligious coexistence that prevails in the country," said Mr. Perera. "The speculation that Muslims may have played a leading role in the attacks has generated tensions at the community level and even anti-Muslim acts that could grow."

Staff/AP/CNS

Sister Nazik Matty

Kevin Clarke

GOODNEWS: A Dominican sister restores Catholic schools in northern Iraq

Thousands of Christian families found refuge in Erbil, in Iraqi-Kurdistan, as ISIS raged across Nineveh Province in 2014. During the crisis, Sister Nazik Matty and her fellow Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena created an ad hoc Catholic school system for refugee children from Nineveh. Now, with ISIS driven from the cities they occupied, she plans to do the same in reverse, rebuilding schools as Christians return.

Sister Matty said that many of the children she and her sisters work with are suffering from trauma related to the loss of their homes and their flight from Mosul, Qaraqosh and other Nineveh communities. "Some children are completely silent; they don't talk all day. Some don't play."

Others are angry and disorderly, she said, but she believes they cannot be disciplined as they might have been in the past. The sisters understand the origins of the behavior.

Uncertainty about the future remains the "biggest and worst challenge" her families confront, she said. "We are ready to forgive and continue our work," she said, "but if we are waiting only for a different version of ISIS to return, that would not be fair."

It is a challenge Christians in Iraq have long contended with, she argues. The suffering visited on Christians by ISIS was severe but nothing all that new, she said, reciting a sorry litany of the people and events that have long brought persecution for Iraqi Christians: "Saddam, Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, the U.S. invasion, ISIS.

"Personally, I believe that living in the Middle East is really beyond our [individual] powers and our abilities," Sister Matty said. "To keep the cross in the Middle East, I think, it is not just our dream; it must be the dream of God as well."

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

Catholic Colleges Go West

More schools are trying to find a home in the Southwest. Can they survive?

Sunrise over Benedictine University Mesa in Arizona. The university, whose main campus is in Lisle, Ill., is one of several institutions trying to bring Catholic higher education to a fast-growing region that until recently had none.

J.D. Long-García

By Jonathan Malesic

When Janet Forde, the librarian at Benedictine University Mesa, moved from Chicago to her current job in Arizona in 2017, the campus library consisted of 16 computers and a small reference collection. She describes a 40-volume, 1930s edition of Ludwig von Pastor's *History of the Popes* as the "highlight of the collection" at the time.

Ms. Forde has built libraries from scratch throughout her career, from the Caribbean to the Midwestern United States. So when the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration closed their monastery in Tucson and moved back to Clyde, Mo., Ms. Forde acquired the library shelving they left behind and 6,000 books on behalf of her university. She is slowly cataloging those books and putting them out for circulation. The library is now a study space, too, with lounge chairs where students slouch over laptops. "Hopefully we're going to get a door," she says, gesturing to the open entryway between the library and a café.

Benedictine University, whose main campus is in Lisle, Ill., is one of several institutions trying to bring Catholic higher education to a fast-growing region that until recently had none. The Diocese of Phoenix, which includes Mesa, is home to 1.2 million Catholics; 60 percent of them are Latino, and most of them are young. This massive population is not matched by a number of Catholic institutions sufficient to meet its needs. As Kevin Broeckling, executive vice president of Benedictine University, who oversees the Mesa campus, which opened in 2013, said, "It's kind of a Catholic higher-ed desert right here, literally and proverbially."

In the past decade, several Catholic colleges have

> Even a 2,000-student institution would leave the region underserved.

When Janet Forde, the librarian at Benedictine University Mesa, moved from Chicago to her current job in Arizona in 2017, the campus library consisted of 16 computers and a small reference collection.

come to the Valley of the Sun. A few withered. Benedictine seems to be taking root. Another, Mary College at ASU, a branch of the University of Mary, whose main campus is in Bismarck, N.D., is pursuing symbiosis with Arizona State University. Meanwhile, the Catholic University of America is bringing a national reputation and $2 million from the Charles Koch Foundation to a new campus in Tucson, two hours' drive to the south.

The next few years will be critical to whether or not Catholic higher education can bloom in the desert. If it does, it may provide a vital service to a population that represents the future of the Catholic Church in the United States.

Serving Students Where They Are

Benedictine University's Gillett Hall—a former hospital building—sits across from a vast, empty concrete lot in downtown Mesa, a sprawling city of half a million whose Main Street is quiet on a Friday morning. The building is at the end of a light rail line that leads to the busier cities of Tempe and Phoenix. There is an orange tree out front, picked clean of every fruit within arm's reach.

In 2012, the mayor of Mesa called for proposals from private universities throughout the country to open branch campuses that would help fill the city's education gap and revitalize its downtown. Five proposals were accepted—two of them from Midwestern Catholic institutions, Benedictine University and the College of St. Scholastica, in Duluth, Minn.—and the universities began offering classes in city-owned buildings in 2013.

Success was not immediate. "We opened up the doors, and nobody came," said Benedictine's president, Charlie Gregory, who at the time was the university's executive vice president. The Mesa branch started with just 71 students.

Six years later, Benedictine has nearly 500 students, and it is the only one of that initial group of colleges that still offers in-person classes in Mesa. In 2017, it converted an 1890s hotel into a dormitory for 56 students. Currently, a plurality of the students are Hispanic, and about 60 percent are first-generation college students. The campus is about seven percentage points behind the main campus in its graduation rate, Mr. Broeckling said.

The branch was funded initially out of the university's budget, with the physical space financed in partnership with the city. Mr. Broeckling said the campus is now "on the verge" of self-sustainability. "On the balance sheet, we're very close to recouping our investment here," Mr. Gregory said. He anticipates further growth "by doing a few things and doing a few things well but never veering from our mission of who we are."

As the branch grows, the main campus faces challenges common to private universities in the Midwest and Northeast: reduced enrollment and difficult budgets. Inside Higher Ed reported that Benedictine University ran deficits in 2015 and 2017. Enrollment diminished from about 6,500 in 2012-13 to fewer than 5,000 in fall 2018.

Athletics are a big part of BenU Mesa's growth strategy, Mr. Broeckling said. When I approached a table of three students in the campus café and asked why they came to BenU, they said, in unison, "Sports." About 60 percent of the student population play a sport, according to Mr. Broeckling. The baseball team alone lists 73 names on its roster.

As a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics institution, BenU Mesa can offer athletic scholarships to students like Paige Padilla, a first-year health sciences major from nearby Gilbert, Ariz., who plays volleyball. The coach's outreach got her interested in Benedictine. Ms. Padilla said she is Catholic, but she was not looking at other Catholic colleges. She had friends who had gone to BenU, and she wanted to stay close to home. "Family is pretty important to me," she said.

Other students are drawn to the university's Catholic identity. Sef Norton is a theology major from Mesa. After graduating from a local Catholic high school, he studied at a seminary in Denver and at Mesa Community College before transferring to BenU Mesa. He now wants to be a high school theology teacher, and he wants to stay in the Phoenix area. He described Benedictine as his "only option," the only university in the state where he could complete an in-person bachelor's degree in theology.

Ramon Luzarraga, an assistant professor of theology and a founding faculty member at BenU Mesa, said the presence of Catholic colleges can help the state and the di-

J.D. Long-García

ocese overcome the challenge of "brain drain." Too often, he said, "Arizonans go out of state to study, then stay out of state," limiting the pool of talent for both the local economy and parish leadership.

The university recently launched the St. Procopius Leadership Institute, a cooperative venture with the diocese to help students develop as lay leaders within the local church. BenU Mesa is also working with the diocese to start a master's degree program in theology conducted entirely in Spanish.

"The people are here. The commitment is here. What we need are the institutions," Mr. Luzarraga said. "We need to have more structures to help the church achieve its mission." Benedictine cannot do it alone, in his view. "Even a 2,000-student institution would mean the region is underserved," he said.

The Education Gap

BenU Mesa and the other new campuses are opening against the backdrop of a massive demographic shift in American Catholicism. The center of gravity is moving to the Southwest, a region with large numbers of Latino Catholics. But Arizona ranks below the national average in rates of educational attainment; and as a group, Hispanic Catholics in the United States have a low rate of college experience. In 2017, 28 percent of Latino Catholics had some college education, compared with 63 percent of white Catholics.

Phoenix and Tucson are not the only growing, heavily Latino Southwestern cities underserved by Catholic higher education. In Texas, the Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston areas, the fourth and fifth largest U.S. metro regions, have millions of Catholics but only one small Catholic university each: the University of Dallas and the University of St. Thomas. Austin also has one. El Paso, Las Vegas and the Rio Grande Valley have none. New Mexico's lone Catholic college closed in 2009. San Antonio, the 300-year-old seat of Spanish colonialism, has three Catholic universities. For comparison, the Philadelphia area, with a similar population, length of Catholic history, and number of Catholics, is home to 10.

BenU faces the challenge of being new in an area where there is little history of private college education at a time when families are increasingly concerned about college costs. Cost is especially important to first-generation college students. "The population that needs the education is the population that can't afford it," said Christine Fletcher, associate professor of theology at BenU's Lisle campus. "The church as an institution is in a real bind."

The seven Catholic high schools in the Diocese of Phoenix—six diocesan and one Jesuit—enroll about 5,000 students. Mr. Broeckling said that he at first expected graduates of these schools to come to his campus in solid numbers. "But it didn't happen," he said. "We finally heard directly from one of the guidance counselors that 'We needed to make sure that you were going to make it before we started referring our students to you.'"

Courtesy University of Mary

In Tempe, students attend class at Mary College at ASU, a branch of the University of Mary, whose main campus is in Bismarck, N.D.

For families trying to navigate among factors like distance, size, prestige and cost, a new college is not an obvious choice. Katie Widbin, a college counselor at Brophy College Preparatory, a Jesuit high school in Phoenix, said, "The biggest challenge to newer colleges is the base of experience and alumni." So far, there are few BenU alumni in the region. And for some families, "The return on investment is important to them, and part of that is the name recognition of the school," she said.

Still, Ms. Widbin recognizes a need for Catholic higher education in Arizona. About 20 percent of Brophy Prep graduates leave the state to attend Catholic colleges. "If we had an in-state Jesuit university here, I imagine we'd have a lot of applicants and a big enrollment," she said.

Diocesan officials recognize the need, too. "We're in one of the fastest growing dioceses in the United States, and that's exciting," said the Rev. Fredrick Adamson, vicar general and moderator of the curia for the Diocese of Phoenix. "Whenever a university inquires with us, we want to explore the possibilities." A diocesan spokesman said that the diocese was not aware of additional proposals for Catholic college campuses in its territory.

A Catholic School on a Secular Campus

At the corner of College Avenue and University Drive in Tempe, there is a red brick church among the burger joints, parking decks and palm trees of a city dominated by Arizona State University and its more than 50,000 students. The church was constructed by Mexican American laborers in 1903, making it ancient by central Arizona standards. It is the home of Mary College at ASU, a branch of the University of Mary that opened in 2012. The church, once a foothold for missionaries, is now a library, lecture hall and office space.

Inside, on a Thursday evening, about 30 students, faculty members and staff from Mary College at ASU and elsewhere sat at tables among the bookshelves—a shelf for Cardinal Newman, one for Joseph Conrad—conversing over burritos. At one table, students talked about the necessity of living life in a way that makes possible a good death. At another, they discussed divine foreknowledge, free will and multiverse theory with one of their professors. A student who describes himself as an atheist said coming to these events is changing his life.

The gathering concluded with evening prayer. Rows of chairs were arranged facing each other, like the choir stalls in a monastery chapel. Jonathon Hofer, program coordinator of Mary College at ASU, explained how antiphonal prayer is done. When the prayer ended, several students joined their peers at ASU's Newman Center, which operates out of a complex next door, to go on a service project.

Mr. Hofer hopes the students' "integrated experience of education lights something in them."

Mr. Hofer arrived on campus in January, after working in student life on Mary's main campus in Bismarck, N.D., and its Rome campus. He refers to the students as "pilgrim learners."

The campus began after the bishop of Phoenix, Thomas J. Olmsted, invited the college's president, Msgr. James Shea, to bring undergraduate education to the diocese. Monsignor Shea then approached Arizona State officials after reading ASU president Michael Crow's strategic plan for the university. "He talked about partnerships, radical

Sef Norton, a theology major from Mesa at BenU Mesa, wants to be a high school theology teacher in the Phoenix area.

Students at BenU Mesa study outside the university cafe.

engagement...and engagement with private entities," Monsignor Shea said. "And we're a private entity."

The partnership resulted in Mary offering courses toward a major or minor in two areas, theology and Catholic studies. ASU students could transfer the credits to satisfy general education requirements. At the program's height, 50 students were taking classes.

That number is 17 now, seven of whom came south from Bismarck on a "domestic exchange," whereby they take classes at Mary College and at Arizona State and help build a community that can organically attract ASU students interested in Catholic studies. Monsignor Shea describes the exchange program as a "reboot" of the campus.

The students from the North Dakota campus seem enthusiastic about what they are studying. They warm quickly to guests. Cecilia Nicklaus, a philosophy major from the main campus who went to Tempe to take classes at ASU and at Mary College, said, "When I miss my Catholic studies classes, it's like I'm missing part of myself."

When Monsignor Shea was asked to describe success, he stood up from an armchair in the church's choir loft and looked down to the sanctuary, imagining it filled with students assembled to hear a speaker who is engaging with the great human questions "and the students themselves are feeling enriched, clarified, inspired and engaged on that level. That would be success."

Practically, that means having enough students to enable him to hire full-time faculty and thereby create "a communion of scholars." Monsignor Shea estimated the college could be sustainable with 120 students but said he would like to see 500, with some of them living in dedicated housing. Ultimately, he said, Mary College is "an investment not just for the University of Mary, but, we think, in an innovative model for Catholic higher education going forward."

The Search for a Niche

In the past decade, several Catholic universities have failed to take root in the Phoenix area. St. Scholastica was among the initial group of colleges in downtown Mesa, offering degrees in social work and nursing. It left in 2018, and the dean of the college's School of Health Sciences, Bruce Loppnow, told The Duluth News Tribune that "there really was not a viable path to develop what we would consider to be a thriving presence in Arizona without a whole lot more resources." Saint Xavier University, whose main campus is in Chicago, opened a branch in a $37-million building constructed by the city of Gilbert, just southeast of Mesa, in 2015. The university closed the campus less than a year later, citing budgetary concerns related to state funding of higher education.

Speaking of what the diocese has learned from the closure of those campuses, Father Adamson said: "Starting a second campus is very complex. When we talked to [Saint Xavier officials] at the very beginning, I said you have to look at a long-term commitment, that those first few years are going to be rough, because it's so new."

There is also plenty of competition from universities both small and large, as cities in the Phoenix area attempt to attract institutions of higher education the same way Mesa and Gilbert did. Ottawa University, a Christian institution from Kansas, signed a 65-year lease for a campus in the city of Surprise. It opened with 434 students in 2017

and hopes to have 3,000 within a decade.

A few Catholic universities have more specialized programs in the region. Creighton University has operated a nursing program in downtown Phoenix for a decade, and it is now creating a health sciences center that will house a four-year medical school, among other programs. Faculty from Franciscan University of Steubenville's online theology degree programs meet Phoenix-area students in person at the local Institute of Catholic Theology.

The biggest competitor, however, is Arizona State, which is rapidly expanding. ASU's student population grew by 5,000 students on its five metropolitan Phoenix campuses between 2012 and 2016; that growth is approximately the size of the entire student population at Benedictine's main campus.

The University of the Incarnate Word, whose main campus is in San Antonio, briefly offered classes in the city of Goodyear, west of Phoenix, but left in 2009. The Arizona Republic reported at the time that the university pulled out after ASU indicated it wanted to open a campus in Goodyear, with Incarnate Word officials saying they did not think they could compete with the public giant. Ten years later, there is no ASU campus in Goodyear.

Arizona State now plans to open a campus in Mesa in 2021.

The last boom in new Catholic colleges in the United States occurred after 1945, when rising demand among the children of Catholic immigrants for higher education—and the means to pay for it through the G.I. Bill—coincided with historic highs in the membership of religious orders who could staff the colleges. Now, in the Southwest, there is rising demand among Latino Catholics seeking to join the professional class, but both the federal money and the zealous labor pool of vowed religious have diminished.

Msgr. James Shea, president of the University of Mary, greets students outside All Saints Catholic Newman Center in Tempe, Ariz. The university is partnering with Arizona State University to offer classes in the Southwest.

New universities in the region will have to rely on the zeal of committed laypeople. Ms. Forde, BenU Mesa's librarian, is a Benedictine oblate of Holy Wisdom Monastery in Madison, Wis. "We're doing what the Benedictines did in Lisle" more than a century ago, she said, noting how monks from St. Procopius Abbey in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood established the university in what was then a remote agricultural community to educate first-generation college students. "They aimed at serving a community that wasn't being served. And we're certainly doing that here."

Jonathan Malesic *is a writer living in Dallas.*

NEW LIFE GOES OLD SCHOOL

A number of Protestant churches, like New Life in Colorado Springs, Colo., have begun incorporating more traditional liturgical practices.

Courtesy New Life

Why megachurches are embracing (some) Catholic traditions

By Anna Keating

I grew up in Colorado Springs, Colo., a Catholic girl in the evangelical New Jerusalem. In addition to Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs is home to more than 100 evangelical ministries. I spent my adolescence defending myself against evangelicals who did not believe I was saved or who argued that liturgy and ritual were dead because they were formulaic or routine.

So I was surprised to learn that New Life Church, a nondenominational, charismatic evangelical megachurch in Colorado Springs, with more than 10,000 members, recently embraced more traditional liturgies as well as social justice work without evangelization. New Life now recites the Nicene Creed, which it uses as its statement of faith, offers Communion at most of its locations on Sunday mornings, teaches its members about the liturgical calendar and has a home for unwed mothers experiencing homelessness called Mary's House—as in Mary, the Mother of God.

The Rev. Glenn Packiam, the lead pastor of New Life Downtown, played the decisive role in bringing traditions, like a Good Friday service that ends in silence, to his congregation.

New Life Downtown now concludes its Sunday service with a beautiful a capella rendition of an Anglican Doxology, a hymn of praise to the Trinity. Doxologies are found in eucharistic prayers and Catholic devotions like novenas and the rosary, time out of mind, but when was the last time you heard a doxology sung in a Roman Catholic church? In practice, many Roman Catholic churches have become increasingly low church.

These changes are noteworthy because New Life is one of the most important megachurches in the United States. In its 34-year history, New Life has been a visible and politically active congregation embracing nationalism and the prosperity gospel and hosting celebrity preachers like Benny Hinn. Its founding pastor, Ted Haggard, was once an adviser to President George W. Bush. President Bush Skyped in to speak at New Life services from the White House. Pastor Haggard served as the head of the National Association of Evangelicals. (After a scandal, he resigned in 2006 and is no longer affiliated with New Life.)

So what is happening at New Life is noteworthy. More intriguing yet, it is happening at evangelical megachurches and formerly iconoclastic mainline churches all across the country. Whether it is a move of the Holy Spirit toward greater unity or cultural appropriation on a massive scale, old school Catholic practices are in. Yes, that celebrity Protestant pastor is wearing a stole with Our Lady of Guadalupe on it.

New Life, at its roots, is a "seeker-friendly" church, visible from the interstate, aggressively casual and extraordinarily welcoming. A woman tells me: "From the first moment I walked into the auditorium I felt welcomed and valued. It's really chill." A big screen in the auditorium says, "You look great this morning. We're glad you joined us. ☺"

People come and go during services or watch them on their laptops at home. You can bring your coffee into the auditorium. One Sunday morning, I watched as two friends took a selfie and uploaded it to Instagram during the service.

Before the turn toward more traditional liturgical practices in 2012, the typical worship experience consisted in about an hour and half of upbeat praise and worship music, announcements and a collection, a sermon on a Scripture passage picked at random, more praise and worship music, and then some kind of altar call, an opportunity to come up and be prayed over by a small team. The services were nonliturgical and nontraditional, more focused on what pastors feel the Holy Spirit is doing now than on church history, theology or formation by ancient ritual gestures like kneeling or the sign of the cross.

For decades, the appeal of a charismatic style of worship was strong, and these churches grew at astonishing rates. Who does not long to feel welcomed and loved and to experience the Holy Spirit in a life-changing way? I went to a revival at New Life when I was in middle school and found it powerful. A woman preached. That alone made a huge impression on me as a Catholic girl. It was dark in the auditorium, and there was a smoke machine and a worship band and hundreds of kids holding up their hands, saying the name of Jesus and crying.

Positive, Uplifting and Relevant

Megachurches are typically known for their concert-like worship experiences, lasers, smoke machines, espresso bars, worship bands full of young cool people and a pastor in jeans and T-shirt preaching on short passages of Scripture in a way that is positive, uplifting and immediately relevant to everyday life. There is much there that is appealing to worshipers, so why make a change now?

Historically, much of what is popularly considered charismatic megachurch worship has its roots in Pentecos-

talism, a 20th-century movement indigenous to the United States. In 1906, led by William J. Seymor in Los Angeles, members of the Azusa Street Revival began speaking in tongues. The idea that the Holy Spirit frequently speaks directly to and through individuals helped launched the Pentecostal movement.

Differences exist among the various groups, but typically this strand of evangelical Christianity adopts a version of *sola scriptura*, albeit a version that many of the early reformers would not recognize, combined with the gift of tongues as its starting place. George Marsden argues in his history, *Fundamentalism and American Culture,* that the goal was to "set aside all intervening tradition and return to the purity of New Testament practice. The Bible alone should be one's guide.... The individual stood alone before God." No creed but the Bible. This despite the fact that the New Testament canon was not fully compiled until almost 400 years after the death of Jesus.

In megachurches and smaller Bible churches, Scripture is understood as inspired and without error. It is the final authority and the rule of faith. The Bible alone suffices and stands in direct opposition to any sort of human authority (like the church fathers or tradition) that does not arise from the Holy Spirit speaking directly to an individual with a message that can be confirmed in Scripture. The first line of the statement of faith of the National Association of Evangelicals reads, "We believe the Bible to be inspired, the only infallible, authoritative word of God." They believe that ancient ritual gestures, sacraments and rote prayers like the rosary get in the way at best. At worst, they are idols to be despised.

Acceptance into the faith does not require baptism but rather a simple admission of faith. When I was in high school, street preachers told me: "The Bible is the word of God. Jesus is the Son of God. And if you accept him as your personal savior, your salvation is 100 percent assured." It felt like an Amway pitch. I could get saved right on the sidewalk before sixth period—no long, boring catechumenate required.

This concept of an individual with a Bible who stands alone before God versus a person who needs a church and practices to help mediate God's grace, represents a deep and real divide that has consequences for how evangelicals see themselves relative to more traditional groups. As recently as 2006, Wheaton College, the most prestigious evangelical college in America, fired Professor Joshua Hochschild for being received into the Roman Catholic Church.

One megachurch in Texas observes a liturgical calendar, recites the Apostles' Creed and fasts during Lent.

As a result of these historical differences, as well as those I experienced personally, I was fascinated when I walked into New Life Downtown and the pastor, wearing faded jeans, was standing behind an altar with his hands elevated saying a version of a eucharistic prayer. Pentecostalism has its own embodied spiritual practices, but receiving the "body and blood" of Christ, as Jesus instructed on the night before he died, has not typically been at the top of the list.

Simon Scionka, a former evangelical youth minister, left his megachurch for the Orthodox Church of America, in which he is now a deacon. "When I was growing up we had a Communion service twice a year," he says. "It wasn't seen as important." Grape juice and crackers in individual plastic cups. No penitential act. No eucharistic prayer. No "Behold the Lamb of God."

A Move Toward Tradition

New Life is not alone in its shift toward more traditional worship. The Village Church, a Southern Baptist megachurch in Flower Mound, Tex., with more than 14,000 members, has Matt Chandler as its pastor. His sermon, distributed by podcast, is frequently one of the top three Christian podcasts on iTunes. Southern Baptists have been historically antiritual, antiliturgical and even anti-Catholic. When I was growing up, Southern Baptists defined themselves in many ways in opposition to Rome. Today, The Village Church observes a liturgical calendar (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost), recites the Apostles' Creed and fasts during Lent.

Willow Creek, a megachurch near Chicago with more than 24,000 members, now offers a traditional liturgical-style service. Mars Hill, founded by Rob Bell in Grand Rapids, Mich., in 1999, has subsequently rediscovered the Nicene Creed, the church calendar and the importance of

weekly Communion. It has also decided to limit the special effects. In its sanctuary, a former shopping mall, there is now a homemade wooden cross and an altar with altar cloths that are changed to match the color of the liturgical seasons. New Life in Colorado Springs has also scaled back, even returning to a parish model. It now has six locations in addition to its main campus. The Rev. Glenn Packiam, the pastor of New Life Downtown, tells me, "Not everyone wants to come to a giant building on Sundays."

Epiphany Church, a megachurch in the Dallas/Fort Worth, Tex., area, uses incense and candles every week, picks its readings from the Revised Common Lectionary and has its members recite ancient prayers in unison and from memory. After Scripture readings you hear, "The Word of the Lord" and "Thanks be to God."

Why Now?

For many reasons, these Christians are not, to paraphrase Blessed John Henry Newman, getting deep into history and ceasing to be Protestant. So why is this evangelical *ressourcement* happening? Why are megachurches and formerly iconoclastic mainline denominations looking more like Catholic parishes in terms of liturgy and practices even as some Catholics are, late to the party as usual, imitating evangelicals and building churches with big screens that look more like suburban dentist's offices than places where heaven and earth kiss.

In some instances, it is the fruit of sincere conversion. For some megachurch pastors, the move toward liturgy and tradition is about a desire to go deeper in forming their congregations in faith. Pastor Packiam's office is full of books I recognize: N. T. Wright, James Martin, S.J., the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. As he speaks, I cannot help but wish Pastor Packiam was a Catholic deacon or priest. He is kind, intelligent, passionate about his faith and gracious with his time. Pastor Packiam played the decisive role in bringing old things, like a Good Friday service that ends in silence, to New Life.

Pastor Packiam's desire for something deeper came from a painful period in New Life's history. After Pastor Haggard's fall from grace in 2006, Pastor Packiam says, "I became concerned about the way evangelical worship highlighted an individual at the center of it all"—the celebrity pastor. He began reading books by authors like Henri Nouwen and Eugene Peterson, "I realized that something was missing in our worship; and that something was Eucharist, was sacramentality." He looked at Anglican, Orthodox and Presbyterian churches but decided to stay and help his congregation "resource from the tradition." For him, "This is a move of the Spirit toward theological depth and historicity."

For others, it is about survival. Megachurches are big businesses with lots of people on payroll, and part of the change is about marketing, rebranding, consumer choice and retention. You want a contemporary service? We offer that. You want traditional? We have that too.

Pastor Packiam says, "Downtown is where people have fled to get away from evangelicalism. So New Life Downtown tends to attract people who may be burned out on some of the shallowness of church services that don't connect to theology. When we do the Nicene Creed, it's tethered to history; it says, 'We're not making this stuff up....' When we say, 'Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,' that moves people."

People can be entertained on devices 24 hours a day; they do not need a church for that. They need a church for silence, reverence, community, ancient wisdom, the opportunity to be of service, the real presence of God. Megachurches have realized that many are leaving to find that elsewhere.

Eighty percent of the congregation of Holy Theophany Orthodox Church, also in Colorado Springs, are converts from evangelical and Protestant backgrounds. Their priest, the Rev. Anthony Karbo, became a Christian through participation in Young Life, a national evangelical youth organization headquartered in Colorado Springs. He says, "As a Protestant I met Christ. In the Orthodox Church I met the rest of his family, including his mother." Orthodoxy both challenges and appeals because its liturgy has not changed much since the fourth century and neither have its teachings. Unlike the Catholic Church, it has not tried to seem less pagan, less foreign, less strange. It has stayed weird.

Eric Jewett, a deacon in the Orthodox Church and a former Free Methodist youth pastor, says, "In the ancient church I encountered the fullness of the faith as it had been lived and preserved since the time of Christ and his apostles."

Deacon Scionka, the former evangelical youth minister, describes falling in love with their style of worship: "My background is Bible-centered, which led to me think that liturgical worship was extra-biblical, but in reality it's very biblical. The whole service is scriptural, and it centers on our unity in Christ. It floored me." He tears up describing his first Christmas in the Orthodox Church.

"At the end of the Nativity Vigil, this long beautiful candlelight service, it hit me that this was the first time in

Worship music still plays an important part of the liturgy at New Life in Colorado Springs, Colo.

my life that I had gone to church for Christmas and it was really celebrating the birth of Christ," he said. "No big performances. No distractions. Just a dark, beautiful, candlelight service all about Christ."

Some former evangelicals used vibrant seeker churches as a stepping stone, eventually leaving for Orthodox, Anglican or Presbyterian communions. For many, leaving evangelicalism for Catholicism would mean losing careers, even family and friends. Ken Craycraft, a theologian who was received into the Catholic Church from a Church of Christ background, says, "In certain segments of American evangelicalism, including the Church of Christ, becoming Catholic is worse than becoming an atheist, and I say that without irony because, not only are you saying you've renounced belief; you're embracing evil, you're embracing the anti-Christ described in Revelation."

With the exception of Mr. Craycraft, no one I interviewed for this article even considered Catholicism. In part, this was because of doctrine. Mary and popes remain oddities to many. In part, it was because of the crisis of sexual abuse by members of the clergy. And despite the interest in some Catholic traditions, many felt our Masses and parish life still were not compelling.

It is easy to find both Catholics and Protestants who are starving for something less shallow, more challenging and more embodied than the typical American experience of faith. Many Catholic parishes, too, could benefit from a renewed interest in the sacred art, music and architecture that have shaped the Catholic imagination for millennia. As the Catholic Church continues to work to keep people in and attract people to the faith, it would do well to remember that the pull of tradition can be an attractive one, even or perhaps especially for the millennial generation, which is famously interested in old things, from record collecting to jarring pickles. If evangelical and "next generation" worship have been, in part, about making church cool, ironically, there is nothing cooler than a first edition, and the Catholic Church is about as vintage as you can get.

Anna Keating *is the co-author of* The Catholic Catalogue: A Field Guide to the Daily Acts That Make Up a Catholic Life *and the Catholic chaplain at Colorado College.*

Coming This Fall: An America Media Journey to Ireland

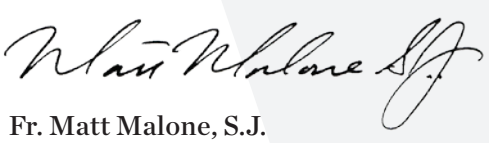
It should come as no surprise to readers of this magazine that we have always had a special place in our hearts at America Media for the Emerald Isle. (We used to joke that the masthead was our own version of the "O Antiphons": "O'Brien, O'Hare, O'Keefe, O'Toole..."). Even today, we have many Irish-Americans on staff, and we still cover news from Ireland with some frequency, from the visit of Pope Francis for the World Meeting of Families last summer to an in-depth feature on the struggles of the Irish church last spring.

Over the past several years, we have also been leading pilgrimages to various holy sites in Christian history, from our yearly trips to the Holy Land and visits to Rome and Ignatian sites in Spain. In addition to the many spiritual fruits of these pilgrimages, they have also allowed me and many of our staffers to get to know our readers better. Friendships have been formed on those trips that will last lifetimes.

So why not add to that list a journey into Ireland, we wondered. In addition to the many holy sites and "thin places" of Ireland, it is also a land rich in literary history. Imagine: celebrating Holy Mass at the Marian shrine at Knock; touring the ruins of monasteries 17 centuries old on the Aran Islands; seeing the Book of Kells up close at Trinity College; taking a literary tour of Dublin through the eyes of Joyce, Yeats and Beckett.

With that in mind, James T. Keane, our literary editor, and I are delighted to invite you to join us on our America Media journey through the land of saints and scholars, from **October 20 to 28, 2019.** More details can be found in the advertisement alongside this letter, and as always, feel free to contact us with any questions. But don't delay too long to sign up: We're limited to 45 travelers!

Sláinte,



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AN INVISIBLE MARK

What a priest, two poets and doubting Thomas taught me about love

By Emily Dagostino

In a story read at Mass on the First Sunday after Easter, Thomas says it's malarkey when his buddies tell him they saw Jesus, who had come back from the dead. His friends do not throw him out. Instead, they sit with him, break bread, drink wine. Then Jesus comes back again, and invites Thomas to reach his hands right into Jesus' wounds. Thomas finally understands.

"My Lord and my God!" he cries out.

Jesus tells him, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Which, the priest says, is all of us.

•••

A week later, I am listening to the poet Marie Howe read at the Festival of Faith and Writing at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. Howe's latest collection of poetry, called *Magdalene,* begins with a quote from the Gnostic Gospel According to Thomas: "His disciples said,/ When will you be visible to us?/ and when will we see you?/ Jesus said, When you undress and are not ashamed."

For so many years, by so many men, Mary Magdalene was depicted as a prostitute, and in that way, Howe says, was a foil to Jesus' mother, the Virgin Mary. "And therein is the wound so many of us women have lived with for centuries," Howe says. "The split between the body and the spirit, between the secular and the sacred, between the virgin and the whore."

Before Howe became a mother, she says, she used to go to a monastery overlooking the Hudson River to write. Once it was snowing, and she was thinking of a story about Jesus: how he comes back after he is tortured and killed, and Thomas doesn't believe his friends who tell him they have seen him. Thomas tells them he will believe it when he puts his finger in Jesus' side and in his wounds.

At the festival, Howe then reads "The Snowstorm," in which the protagonist is walking through snow that is elbow deep. There are deer tracks in the snow. There are tiny prints of a bird. There is no deer nor bird. Only the tracks.

"Put your finger here and see my hands then bring your hand and put it into my side," the poem goes. She reaches her hand into one track to touch the bottom of an invisible hoof, then reaches a finger into the mark left by the jay.

•••

The next day is the Saturday before the Second Sunday of Easter. I'm in the Calvin College chapel listening to the poet Natalie Diaz read. Diaz is introducing a poem, saying the rate at which Native American and indigenous women "are disappeared" is alarming.

"For so long the non-white female body has been the object of desire and pleasure that bordered on violence for someone else," she says. Diaz says it is easy to see the brown body as the body of trauma. She says the brown body and pain have become a sort of currency; the wound, in some ways, a kind of performance.

"We can reference the doubting Thomas, but in some ways we're all walking around saying, put your finger in here," Diaz says.

I think: It is remarkable that here is yet another reference to doubting Thomas. Three times. Three people. Less than one week.

Later that day, I am driving home from Grand Rapids in an April snowstorm, going 85 miles per hour in a 70-mile-per-hour zone because I am way too anxious and I do not want be alone anymore after three days at the conference and two nights in the last room the motel had available af-

ter the first room they tried to put me in had Cheetos stains and cigarette burns on the sheets. My thoughts are flying as sleet whips against the windshield, and I think of the priest and the poets, of doubting Thomas, the invisible hoof and the invisible jay. I think of pressing a hand or a finger into a wound in order to see, in order to believe.

Then I remember the girl.

Seven years ago, there was a girl with a brown body staying in my home for a day or a few days, or maybe it was a few weeks, or maybe it was longer than that. Every day with her, my first child, a foster child, was a lifetime. I carry her with me still, in some wound, from some split she caused, or maybe my mother caused it, or maybe her mother did, or maybe it's been there all along.

She was young when she came to me, and when she had been still younger, only my daughter's age, barely 4 years old, she reached her small hand into the wound a bullet from her mom's boyfriend's gun made in her mom's neck and pressed her fingers down. Was she trying to see and believe, or was she only trying to keep her mother alive? Her mother split open. Disappeared before her eyes. And the girl coming a few years later to me and my husband, Sean, trauma incarnate, daring us to put our finger in her wound, learning to live with it for a few days or a few weeks or a few years or for all of the centuries since the first bite of the first apple from the first tree.

One night there came an end to our breaking bread. Still, I remember her. The memory of the wound strikes me, driving home way too fast from Grand Rapids, like a bat swung through my chest, my body the tee, my heart the ball. In what was that baby girl being asked to believe when she was made to see and feel that wound, to press her fingers into the mark in her mother's neck?

I don't know what Jesus would have to say to that.

•••

We don't go to church on the Second Sunday of Easter. The next day, Monday, we wake to snow on the ground. I am hurrying my daughter, Magnolia, out of our house to our car because it is mid-April and I am tired of being cold. I am tired of all the snow. I am tugging the sleeve of her coat, and she stops on the middle step down our back porch, rubbing her toe back and forth in the thin blanket of snow that has accumulated.

"Wow," she says, dreamily.

"Come on," I say, impatiently, and tug her sleeve.

"It is so *beautiful,*" she says, like an enchanted bird.

"Let's go," I say, and she starts to move. When we get to the grass, I say I'm sorry.

"It is beautiful, isn't it?" I ask, apologetically, knowing I was being a jerk, hurrying my daughter and myself through her wonder.

I'm feeling guilty again in the car about having rushed her off the back stairs.

"I'm sorry I was hurrying you," I say. "What were you making back there on the porch in the snow with your shoe?"

"A smoosh angel," she says. "It was beautiful."

When my son Henry comes home from school the Monday after the Second Sunday of Easter, yellow paint stains his fingernails. I ask what it's from. He says they were painting petals on flowers that day.

"There's a little tiny plant inside of the seed, and there's a coat for it to keep it warm," he says. "But if the coat breaks, it won't grow."

"Why?" I ask.

"Because it has to be warm. If it's cold, it might not work."

When Henry and I leave the house later that day to pick up Magnolia from preschool, most of the snow outside has melted. I head down the stairs from the back porch and am sad that the only thing left of Magnolia's smoosh angel is my memory of it.

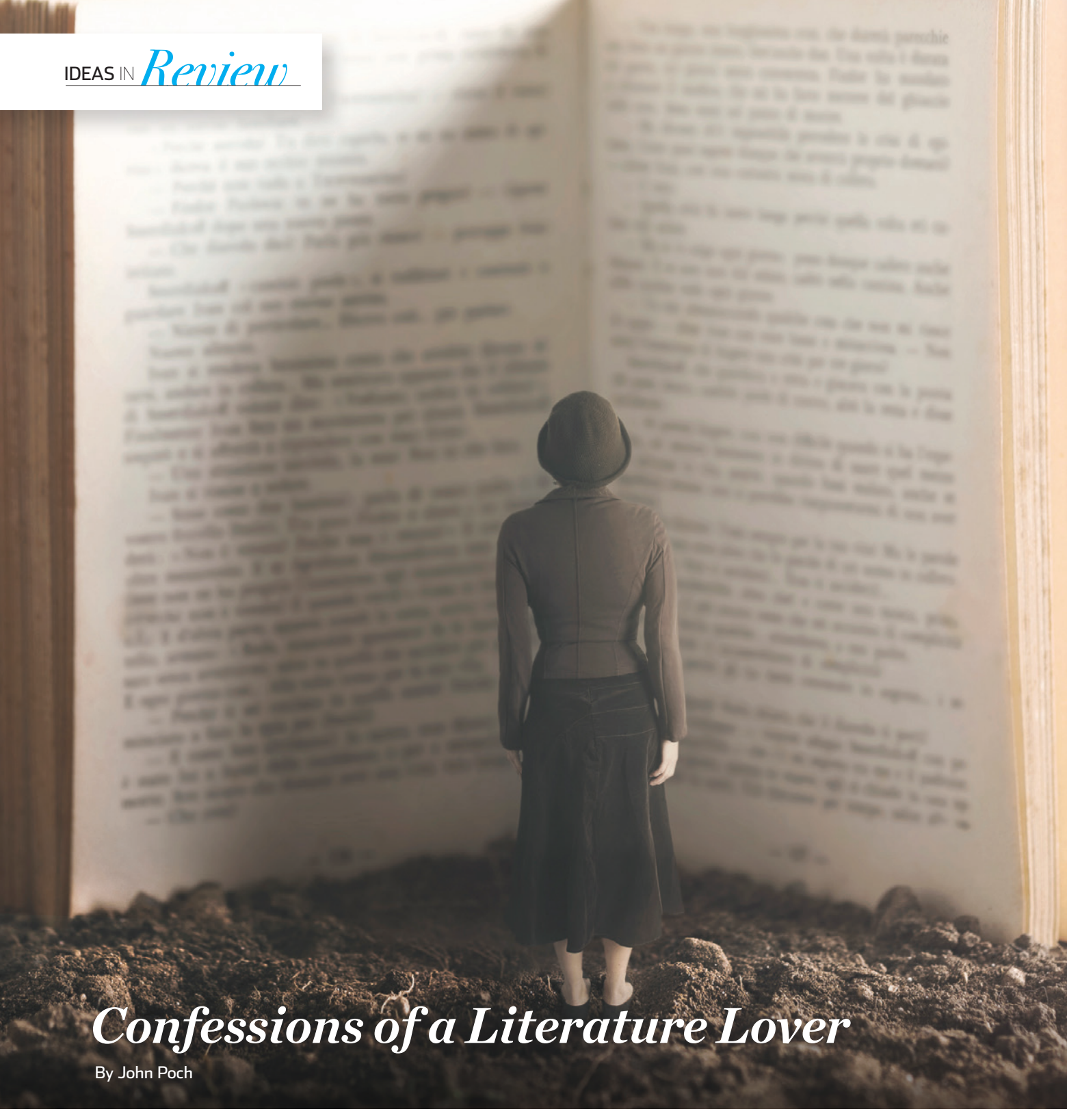
At some point that Monday between Magnolia's leaving and Henry's arriving, between all the snow outside and then none, I looked out the window at the snow in the trees and remembered another snowstorm seven years earlier when the girl with the brown body, who was my first daughter, my foster child, was staying with Sean and me. In that snowstorm, the snow had fallen way past elbow deep. So deep there were no tracks. There were no cars or deer or birds. We had to shovel a path so our dog, Lola, could do her business.

Our foster daughter ran through the snow. She followed it over the fence into our neighbor's yard and helped him shovel. She chased Sean into the front yard and ran into the street. There was no danger. There were no cars. The snow was so deep.

She threw her hands into it and her feet into the air, and she cartwheeled. Joy incarnate, her body flew around and around as she reached her hands into the snow. Over and over, until she grew tired and cold and went inside, where for a day or a week or a lifetime, Sean and I helped keep her warm and safe, and she reached her hands back for more, leaving her mark.

Emily Dagostino, *a writer, lives in Oak Park, Ill. Read more of her work at emilydagostino.com.*

MICHAEL F. TUNNEY, S.J. *Cross, Knot, Stripes: A Mural for Keenan Commons.* Acrylic on canvas, 31'5" x 8'8", 2018-19.



Confessions of a Literature Lover

By John Poch

In most university English departments, literature professors are greatly attracted to academic theories that are uninteresting, if not boring, to most undergraduates. They approach their specialized areas (18th century fiction, Modern British, Asian-American literature, etc.) through a theoretical way of reading texts rather than through appreciating them as art works.

But most students who read liter-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These days the idea of philology, the love of language, is laughed at in most English departments.

ature have done so most of their lives because of beauty, because they love being lost (and found) in the story of a novel or the song of a poem. They have not read books because of their attraction to literary theory. Clearly there is a divide between the approaches of contemporary academics and most of their students. Theory is divided against beauty.

These days the idea of philology, the love of language, is laughed at, though not by me. I often feel myself longing for those good old days when people loved literature. Granted, many literature professors claim a love of story and lyric, but much of the excitement over the craft of writing that used to be at the heart of English departments has been pushed away from the literature courses (reading) over to the creative writing programs (writing). And even many of these writing programs have become intoxicated by theory.

When I talk about a love of literature, I do not mean standing on top of a desk with my hand on my chest spouting passages from Keats. I only mean that I find, say, this combination of metaphors, or those rhymes, or that allusion to be so pregnant with meaning that, as Elizabeth Bishop once suggested, for the next 24 hours I see the world through the lens of a poem. I see a poem as Donald Hall saw it, as a "language machine," and I like to get under the hood as well as drive the car.

One of my problems with contemporary literary theory is that it can see things through too narrow a lens. While I find theories valuable and interesting, in and of themselves they seem less powerful to me than looking at an aesthetic and formal framework of the poem at hand.

Feminist theory recognizes how the text bears witness to the patriarchal oppression and inequality of women in society. A reader can apply a feminist critique to Homer's *Odyssey* to show how Odysseus is not held to the same standard of marital fidelity as Penelope. One could argue that the entire story revolves around a wife's central role in the home. Clytemnestra, Helen, Arete and Penelope are all on display as either positive or negative examples. Men are held to no such standard.

Another popular theoretical framework, deconstruction, takes a typical reading of a work of art and turns it on its head; it tries to undermine received knowledge about a given literary work and see the work anew, often by making an opposite claim. We might take Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* and show how he is not actually a character of great independence and individuality, but one who is bound by society and culture as much as anyone else.

Another framework, psychoanalytic theory, views a text in the way that Freud might have: looking for its psychosexual connotations and exploring the difficult familial conflicts tied up in a poem or story. A reader might explore Robert Lowell's poems in *Life Studies* to understand how the poet's Freudian obsessions with his father and mother color the poems, even the poems that don't seem to be concerned with family. For instance, Lowell's poems "For George Santayana" or "Skunk Hour" can examine the various characters and speakers, or even the poet himself, psychoanalyzing them with view to trauma, sexuality, family and so on.

Most literary theories revolve around the idea that there are certain power dynamics in play within the work, associated with the cultures, characters, authors and readers involved. With this view of a novel or poem, theorists make a critique of the social order, then and now. That critique always involves someone or some group being treated unfairly. At its best, theory can help us come to terms with our social order through literature. It can help us understand how to become better people who understand more deeply social justice and the environment. While this is no doubt valuable for understanding our world, often the beautiful way the story is told or how the poem is sung can become altogether lost. And I have recently heard theoretical arguments that suggest aesthetics (the theory of beauty) actually gets in the way of social critique, that studying beauty can be harmful in and of itself.

This semester in my Introduction

> There is a divide between the approaches of contemporary academics and most of their students. Theory is divided against beauty.

to Poetry course, among many other things we have discussed the poems of Sylvia Plath and Homer in relation to the daily news of sexual misconduct in so many public institutions. There is no doubt that literature from antiquity to the present addresses head-on the violence perpetrated on our most vulnerable. But my primary aim in any poetry course is to appreciate beauty. How poems address sexual issues is only one part of what a poem might do.

At its worst, theory exposes dirty secrets, aiming to show the failings of the author, the text or the world around us. It tattles on bad behavior according to the current worldview. Theory can lead to a kind of false superiority (look how racist those other people were) or even schadenfreude, the morose delight in seeing others suffer. Sometimes the critic or scholar may end up merely subverting the text for the sake of subverting the social order. This technique is valuable to some, a kind of religion made of tearing down institutions and canons. In some perverse way, the reader/critic becomes intellectually superior to the writer (which is hardly ever true of any young student of literature, that he or she is more astute than the authors they study.)

But not even the best works of literature can stand up to someone bent on "subverting" or undermining them—at least not when that is the only measure of the text. Marxism, which offers another theoretical way of reading, suggests that the natural order of our lives involves social antagonisms between economic classes. Ultimately these conflicts result in the upper classes oppressing the lower and finally the lower tearing down the upper. So if we can see that a literary work is elitist in any way, we can and should tear it or aspects of it down. Some build sand castles, and some come along and knock them down. Both actions bring pleasure. But which is the more creative?

In the 21st century, human rights are more codified and recognized than ever. With these human rights come power to the individual and limits on authority. Civil disobedience is permitted, even championed. Ultimate authorities are checked and balanced, hopefully, to allow individuals freedom and mobility. Yet mere anarchy is a threat to the individual as well. Everyone needs protection. We must negotiate how authorities both defend and exploit us.

When it comes to reading poetry, it might be valuable to think about how religious believers approach Scripture. When we open up the Bible, those of us who have embraced the Gospel hope that the Holy Spirit will try to unite our minds with the writer (and with the God who inspired the writer) rather than coming to the verses with itching ears. Some readers want Scripture to be more of a Photoshopped selfie—only our best aspects reflected in its pages—rather than a lamp that might show our defects as well as good traits. To what degree, then, should a student or scholar of literature cultivate humility before a text, rather than looking to satisfy his or her own ends?

While no one thinks that an author's poem or novel is inerrant—as some think of Scripture—a little respect for the author as a creator of beauty might go a long way. If one is a believer in God, one recognizes the absolute majesty and almighty power of a creator who can make a world from nothing. Every time I am faced with the grandeur of a view from a mountaintop or the onslaught of a coming West Texas storm, I recognize authority as something not to be trifled with. Nature is not something to be subverted. As for poets and novelists, I would argue that a grand respect for their authority goes a long way in appreciating what good is happening on the page.

John Poch's *most recent book,* Texases, *(WordFarm Press) was published in April. His poems appear widely in magazines like Image, Poetry and The Yale Review.*

Undoer of Knots

By Dean Kostos

Enveloped in clouds
of drapery, the Virgin
perches between maimed

angels—pinions curved
like parentheses. Cherubim
polish scapular

feathers. A crescent
cradles her sandaled feet.
The tabernacled

multiverse: her realm,
her reign. Seraphs surround her
shoulders. With each thought,

a winged face alights.
Though the Virgin stands still, she's
in constant motion.

Her robe sways. Legions
of tutelary saints comb
plumes. Seraphic fists

bloom with anguish. Strand
by strand, they hand them to her.
She slips open pain's

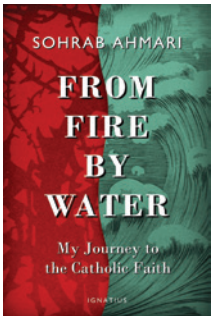
ribbons, webs, nooses.
Her eyes tilt into hands' work:
bouquets of knots.

Dean Kostos *has published eight poetry collections, including* Pierced by Night-Colored Threads *in 2017 and* This Is Not a Skyscraper, *which won the Benjamin Saltman Poetry Award. His writing has appeared in The Bangalore Review (India), Barrow Street, Boulevard, Chelsea, Cimarron Review and elsewhere.*

Models of the church

By Gregory Hillis

CNS photo/Paul Haring



From Fire, by Water
My Journey to the Catholic Faith
By Sohrab Ahmari
Ignatius Press
240p $22.95

I am drawn to stories of conversion. Perhaps this is because I became a Roman Catholic in my 30s and such stories fascinate and often move me as someone who went through a conversion myself. I regularly return to St. Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions,* and I credit Thomas Merton's account of his conversion to Catholicism in *The Seven Storey Mountain* with setting me on a road that would lead me into the Catholic Church.

Sohrab Ahmari's *From Fire, By Water: My Journey to the Catholic Faith* is, like the *Confessions* and *The Seven Storey Mountain,* an account of coming to faith. Ahmari is an Iranian-American journalist currently serving as the op-ed editor for the New York Post and as a contributing editor for The Catholic Herald. *From Fire, By Water* tells the story of how and why he became a Roman Catholic in 2016.

Ahmari writes beautifully, and the story he tells is fascinating. Born in Tehran, Ahmari moved with his mother to Utah when he was a teenager. His family was not overly religious; and by the time he moved to the United States, Ahmari considered himself an atheist. He developed intellectual interests in high school that led him to an enthusiastic reading of Nietzsche. In college, he turned to Camus, Kierkegaard and Sartre, among others. After graduation, he joined Teach for America.

A few years later, after a weekend of debauchery that demonstrated to him his profound unhappiness, Ahmari found himself entering a church in Manhattan for the Sunday evening Mass, and for reasons that were unclear to him, he found himself in tears. In the eight years that followed, Ahmari graduated from law school, was hired by The Wall Street Journal, got married and moved to London. After attending a Mass celebrated with elaborate ceremony in Latin at the Brompton Oratory in London, Ahmari made the decision to become a Roman Catholic.

Although Ahmari's context is a different one from Merton's, more than once while reading the book I saw correlations between their autobiographies. Like Merton, Ahmari grew up in an unconventional familial environment, displayed an intelligence that set him apart from his peers, went through a socialist phase, embraced a libertine life that led him to question the meaning of his existence and visited a parish where he would be transfixed by a liturgy he had never before experienced. And just as Merton would approach Father Ford at Corpus Christi to say, "Father, I want to become a Catholic," so Ahmari would approach a priest at the London Oratory and say, "I wish to become a Roman Catholic."

The similarities between their stories end there, however. While both became Roman Catholics, they did so for different reasons and with different conceptions of the church. Indeed, while there is much in *From Fire, By Water* that resonated with

Pope Benedict XVI is one of Sohrab Ahmari's heroes, in whom he sees "the principle of continuous, even absolute authority."

me as a fellow convert, I have to admit that many of the things that attracted Ahmari to Rome were not the things that attracted me. Ahmari found in the Catholic Church a way out of his self-destructive and chaotic existence. What attracted Ahmari to the church was its absolute authority, the order and continuity it offered in a world of chaos. It is, in other words, a church characterized primarily by the juridical characteristics of authority and stable law that appealed most to him.

This juridical understanding of the church has deep roots in the tradition and is one that many new and cradle Catholics embrace. Its shortcomings, however, were identified by the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, who recognized that a conception of the church focused on authority reflected only part of the church's understanding of itself throughout the centuries.

While recognizing and affirming the importance of authority and law, the Second Vatican Council reclaimed from early Christianity a eucharistic understanding of the church that emphasizes the ways in which we are bound together as Catholics—laypeople, religious and clergy—through the generous love of God poured out upon us in and through the Eucharist. What characterizes the church, therefore, is not just absolute authority but unending love. It was this vision of the church, a vision outlined by Henri de Lubac, S.J., and affirmed by the Second Vatican Council, that brought me as a young scholar of patristics into the church.

Given Ahmari's vision of the church, it is unsurprising, though disappointing, that there are no references to Vatican II in the book, even though the council was the most important event in the church in the past century. The church that attracted Ahmari was the Tridentine church, and the catechesis he received appears to have articulated a pre-Vatican II theological vision. This is interesting, given that Ahmari's papal hero, Pope Benedict XVI, was one of the most influential theologians at Vatican II and a figure who helped bring the council to recover and articulate an understanding of ecclesial unity rooted in the Eucharist.

But that is not the Pope Benedict XVI Ahmari knows. Ahmari describes looking at a portrait of Pope Benedict XVI in the church where he first experienced the liturgy and seeing "the principle of continuous, even absolute authority." When I looked at that same portrait in the church where I was received, I saw the figure who both represents and ensures the eucharistic unity we share as Catholics.

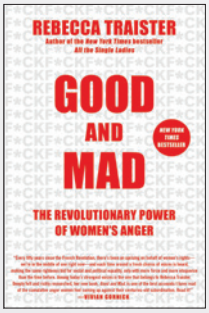
No doubt Ahmari would happily affirm this eucharistic understanding of the church, just as I affirm his juridical one. But we place the emphasis on different sides of that ecclesiological equation, and this difference is emblematic of the theological tensions currently on display in Catholicism, particularly in the United States. Rather than live within the complicated tension the Second Vatican Council offered to us in its portrayal of the church rooted in both authority and love, Catholics of all persuasions tend to put their eggs in one ecclesiological basket. And instead of engaging in the kind of dialogue that can and should be the fruit of this tension, we too often refuse to understand the perspectives of our interlocutors, who just happen to also be those to whom we are united through Christ's body and blood.

There are many who, in the midst of a chaotic world, look to the church primarily in terms of stability and authority. Ahmari's book shows how compelling this vision of the church is, and it is a vision that cannot be dismissed without doing harm to the tradition of the church passed onto us by Vatican II.

At the same time, and without dismissing this understanding of the church, the Second Vatican Council—and arguably, the five pontiffs prior to and including Pope Francis—urged us also to understand the implications of the church's eucharistic identity. That so many Catholics, and I include myself among them, put the juridical and the eucharistic conceptions in opposition to each other perhaps indicates that we as a church are still digesting the insights of Vatican II and that we need to engage the documents of this council more fully. And perhaps our catechesis needs to be rooted more fully in these documents.

All of this is to say that many will find Ahmari's account of coming to faith compelling and moving, while others may find his emphasis on an authoritative church confusing or even off-putting. Judging from my reading of *From Fire, By Water,* I think Ahmari is the kind of person who would be open to engaging in dialogue about this, and my hope is that one day he and I will be able to do just that, preferably over a beer after going to Mass together.

Gregory Hillis *is an associate professor of theology at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Ky.*



Good and Mad
By Rebecca Traister
Simon & Schuster
320p $27

Days of wrath

Almost 60 years ago, Valerie Saiving published an article titled, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in which she argued that mainstream Christian theological understandings of sin depended on an androcentric (male-centered) understanding of human experience, one that would change if the experience of women were taken seriously. Thinkers in this sexist framework had concluded that the root of sin was pride or overestimation of self, when in fact, for women, lack of self-worth or self-assertion was the central manifestation of sin.

Catholics learn early on that anger is a sin. Children are taught to channel their anger productively by using language to diffuse situations of conflict, and we are encouraged to include those times when we have been angry in our examinations of conscience and trips to the confessional.

Anger has also been hailed as a frame to understand the contemporary political reality in the United States. The anger of the white working class, pundits claimed in 2017-18, had propelled Donald J. Trump to the presidency; the mobilizing backlash of anger on the part of women, non-whites and other marginalized constituencies resulted in a wave of women candidates winning local and national elections in 2018. The productive power of rage, especially the once-taboo manifestation of women's rage, is the premise of Rebecca Traister's *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger.*

Traister traces how anger has shaped the American political imagination, from the righteous anger at tyranny expressed in the Revolutionary War through various waves of civil rights, the women's movement and finally the Tea Party and #MeToo movements. Throughout, Traister carefully notes the ways that white male anger is encoded in culture "as stirring, downright American, as our national lullaby," while women's anger remains shrill, toxic and an emotion that must be suppressed.

Traister posits that anger can be both fruitful and generative, and that social movements that are born of the anger of the marginalized have proven successful in gaining more equitable power-sharing arrangements in politics and in the private sector.

Traister's mapping of the double standard of tolerance for men's and women's rage, and her profound analysis of the structural "first violence" (as Gustavo Gutiérrez would say of poverty) that marginalization represents, serves as an excellent conversation starter for those of us who are fighting marginalization and abuse in the church today.

Natalia Imperatori-Lee *is an associate professor of religious studies at Manhattan College in New York and the author of* Cuéntame: Narrative in the Ecclesial Present.

Best. Movie. Year. Ever.
How 1999 Blew Up the Big Screen
By Brian Raftery
Simon & Schuster
416p $28.99

'Like it's 1999'

"We've got a problem. George is trying to pound David, and David is choking George."

That was the call an executive at Warner Brothers received from the set of the 1999 film "Three Kings." George Clooney and the director David O. Russell had finally come to blows.

If you were in high school or college around 1999, Brian Raftery's new book, *Best. Movie. Year. Ever. How 1999 Blew Up the Big Screen,* will probably strike a chord. Even if you don't fall into that thin demographic slice, Raftery weaves celebrity interviews, box office statistics and pop culture milestones into a fast-moving and generally convincing case that 1999 was indeed the Best. Movie. Year. Ever.

In the course of just over 400 pages, Raftery cites "Fight Club," "The Sixth Sense," "Cruel Intentions," "Office Space," "American Beauty," "Election," "The Blair Witch Project," "Being John Malkovich," "The Matrix," "Boys Don't Cry," "The Best Man," "Three Kings" and "Magnolia," among others, as signal cinematic accomplishments of 1999. He also includes "Star Wars: The Phantom Menace," but I suspect that onscreen

trainwreck would be better used in a counterargument.

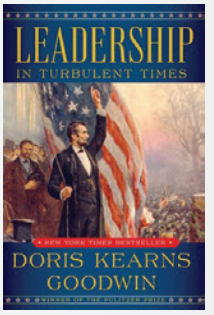
Quibbles aside, *Best. Movie. Year. Ever.* succeeds in dropping the reader into the lives of cast and crew alike on these films. Readers get a taste of what inspired writers, directors and actors to labor to move projects from scripts and storyboards to the big screen.

Part of Raftery's thesis is that movie executives were courageous in the years leading up to 1999. They bet large sums of money on interesting ideas. Most of them lost their bets when many of the films disappointed at the box office. But that makes 1999 even more significant: It is a year not likely to be repeated.

Box office success, however, is not the only evidence Raftery submits: What if a movie influenced others, if it became part of the cultural conversation or if it captured the zeitgeist of a generation? "Office Space" is a great example. It was not a box office success, but anyone who has ever worked in a sea of cubicles has probably quoted (knowingly or not) several lines from the movie.

While there are times when Raftery tries to score "geek points"—describing George Lucas's beard as "Hoth-white" or throwing readers down winding pop-culture rabbit holes—he can be forgiven because his deep geeky knowledge is also what makes this book work. Tying together themes and highlighting connections among many of the year's great films, *Best. Movie. Year. Ever.* makes me wonder: Why wasn't I able to connect all these dots back then?

Eric Sundrup, S.J., *associate editor. Twitter: sunnydsj.*



Leadership in Turbulent Times
By Doris Kearns Goodwin
Simon and Schuster
496p $30

Four presidential leaders

With *Leadership in Turbulent Times,* the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin has written another page turner about four of America's greatest presidents: Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson. Based on previous research (she has already written books about the four), Goodwin divides her study into four thematic areas: ambition and the recognition of leadership, adversity and growth, leadership and crisis management, and the post-presidential years.

The heart of the book focuses on crises that each president faced: Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862-63; Theodore Roosevelt's resolution of the coal strike in 1902; F.D.R.'s first hundred days of the New Deal in 1933; and L.B.J.'s efforts to push civil rights bills through Congress in 1964 and 1965.

The book is not without its flaws. The bibliography should have been organized separately around each president instead of as an alphabetical listing. Secondly, Kearns Goodwin cites a two-page bibliography of business books on leadership skills, but I do not know how these books informed her in her discussion of the ways that the four presidents managed their respective presidencies. Some mention is given to the way each president managed to combine transactional leadership (wheeling and dealing) with transformational goals that appeal to the highest ideals of the nation. Lincoln and Johnson, for example, aspired to eliminate slavery and segregation, while Theodore Roosevelt and F.D.R. fought to make the industrial system of civilization more humane.

A third criticism concerns the organization of *Leadership.* I found it easy to follow the four major headings—the presidents' early lives, pre-presidential crises, successful crisis management, and post-presidential careers—which lumped together all four presidents. But the general reader might have been served better if each president was treated in separate chronological essays.

In spite of these caveats, *Leadership* is a wonderful read. Goodwin's strength is in the way she captures the presidential scene with companionable prose that most professional historians are unable to capture. Picture, for example, the gangly six-foot four-inch Abraham Lincoln riding his horse three miles from the White House to the Soldier's Home, where he often slept. Or Theodore Roosevelt gritting his teeth, wishing he could throw out the window one of the industrial barons for his arrogant attitude toward the workers during the 1902 coal strike.

Larry Madaras *taught American History for 40 years at several colleges, and is the co-author of* Taking Sides: Clashing Views in United States History.

A dynamic and damaged power couple

By Rob Weinert-Kendt

"Fosse/Verdon," with Sam Rockwell and Michelle Williams, is a powerful corrective to the narrative of the difficult male genius.

The slash in the title is doing a lot of work. In the new, limited series "Fosse/Verdon" the brand-name director/choreographer of the stage musical "Chicago" and the film version of "Cabaret" is fused to his less famous muse, the quintessential Broadway hoofer Gwen Verdon. The series is a portrait of a creative power couple that insists, mostly convincingly, on seeing their successes (and failures) as inseparable. These two damaged overachievers needed each other, even or especially when they were not together.

But "Fosse/Verdon" is more than the sum of these two parts. A riveting-ly unstable compound of biopic, prestige cable drama and musical comedy, it is also a powerful corrective to the predominant narrative of the difficult male genius.

Indeed, it is easy to imagine a version of this story that puts the roguish anti-hero Fosse centerstage, orbited by his women and his addictions and his deadly compulsion to work. That is because it has been done—by Sam Wasson in his vivid 2013 biography *Fosse*, which is in part the basis for the new series, and by Fosse himself, in his own barely veiled 1979 autobiographical film "All That Jazz." Making equal time for Verdon is more than a gesture to the era of #MeToo: It enriches and complicates everything, from the personal dramas to the art-making (and deal-making).

It doesn't hurt the show's ambitious dual narrative that Williams is shatteringly good as Verdon, giving full due to her old-school glamour, her incisive smarts and her fine-grained emotional lability. (She is not a bad dancer either.) When the sleepy-eyed Sam Rockwell, as Fosse, first sees her, in a one-on-one audition for the musical "Damn Yankees," he lights up like a Broadway marquee. He has met his match, and she hers, and the rest is musical theater history.

Fosse and his pirouetting shame spirals get plenty of screen time, particularly in the fourth episode, "Glory," in which he glumly stares down a table of Emmys and Tonys and an Oscar, and realizes that no amount of acclaim can fill the black hole at his center. And Rockwell more than holds his own against the klieg lights of Williams's brilliance. Though he resembles a flinty Robert Duvall more than the lean, vulpine Fosse, he captures the man's watchful preoccupation, and the mix of orneriness and sweetness that made him, by most accounts, irresistible and pitiable in roughly equal measure.

How much pity should we extend to Fosse, though? The series doesn't quite answer that question. In one episode, as he makes his way through a show's young female dancers as if

he were the only diner at a sexual buffet, one of them has the temerity to push back against his advances—and is pointedly demoted from a lead spot in the next rehearsal. It is textbook quid-pro-quo harassment, and there is no shortage of stories like this, as well as tales of more garden-variety choreographic abuse ("Again from the top!"), in Fosse's bio.

While this arguably should not define his entire career, and his best work can be seen as an exorcism, not an exaltation, of these demons, it certainly tips the moral ledger. No amount of attempted balance—showing us Verdon's and Ann Reinking's agency, or the deliverables they and others received from their transactions with Fosse, or the great art that emerged from his punishing, obsessive work habits—can explain or absolve it. "It was a different time," goes one common excuse. No doubt! But the stories we tell now, and how we tell them, deserve scrutiny by today's standards.

By those lights, "Fosse/Verdon" wrestles this dilemma to a draw, and so far it is a spectacle as compelling and artful as any Fosse/Verdon dance, in which conflict and connection were embodied in the stretch of a leg or the angle of a pinky finger on a cocked bowler hat. That's the thing about the old razzle dazzle, and it is something Fosse (and probably Verdon) understood in his bones: A peek behind the curtain at the flawed humans sweating to make the magic may demystify it, but that is where the real drama is. Under the glitter is the gold.

Rob Weinert-Kendt *is an arts journalist and editor of American Theatre magazine.*

Made in the Bronx

My parents moved to New York City in 1991. First Queens, then the Bronx. I still remember what the borough felt like during that decade. I remember my first day at prekindergarten at Our Lady of Refuge School, the tears that fell from my eyes because I did not yet speak English and was terrified to leave my mother's side. I remember racing my sisters and cousins down 198th Street toward Valentine Avenue, the same street where my mother worked at a laundromat. I remember Girl Scout uniforms, softball games in Van Cortlandt Park, fire hydrants in the summer on Grand Concourse. While my motherland birthed me, it was the Bronx that made me.

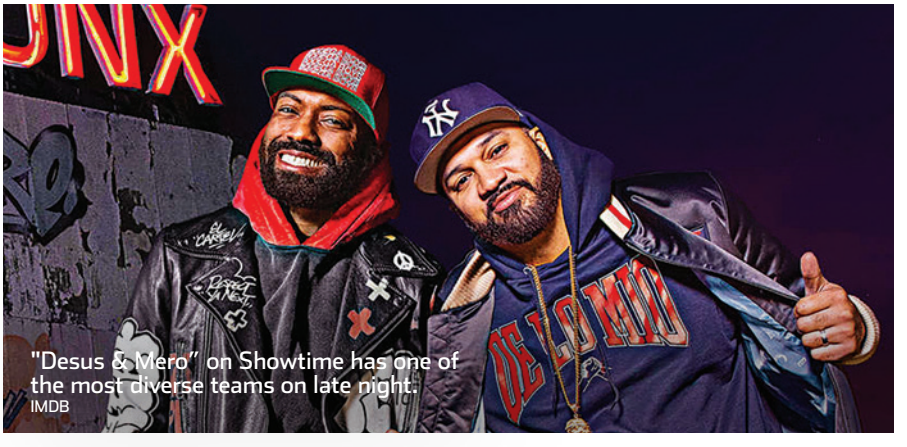
I loved this city, yet the older I grew, the more I noticed how the borough was depicted in the wider culture as something shameful. Aside from hip-hop—born in the Bronx—the pop culture I was consuming did not represent the borough I knew. Until the Bodega Boys.

The Bodega Boys are a comedic duo made up of Daniel Baker, known as Desus Nice, and Joel Martinez, The Kid Mero. In 2013 the pair starred in their first podcast and web series, "Desus v. Mero" on Complex TV. In 2015 they launched the "Bodega Boys" podcast, which features the two hosts discussing topical issues, from commentary on their beloved and beleaguered Knicks and Yankees to attending the MTV Video Music Awards and meeting Kanye West. One of the most enjoyable parts of the podcast for me has been recognizing the Bronx streets and locations sprinkled throughout 155 episodes.

In February, they launched "Desus & Mero" on Showtime. The series, a weekly 30-minute late-night talk show, features the Bodega Boys discussing news, culture and politics, along with an interview. In the series premiere, they talked with Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, another Bronxite. Along with solid numbers, Desus and Mero have one of the most diverse teams on late night—two hosts of color, one black, one Afro-Latinx; and of the six writers, half are women, including two black women.

The Bodega Boys have given me—and audiences outside of New York City—an opportunity to see the streets, communities and culture we know reflected in popular culture. They, like me and so many black and brown people in America, are members of the Caribbean diaspora, children of immigrants who left other countries behind. Their art is for us.

Olga Segura, *associate editor.*
Twitter: @OlgaMSegura.



"Desus & Mero" on Showtime has one of the most diverse teams on late night.
IMDB

Rise Up

Readings: Acts 14:21-27, Ps 145, Rev 21:1-5, Jn 13:31-35

Near the end of the German film "Downfall," as Soviet troops close in on Berlin, the focus shifts from the battlefield to the Führer's secret underground office. In a scene that helped earn the film an Oscar nomination, the actor Bruno Ganz delivers an epic tantrum that blames Germany's defeat on its military commanders, the SS, rank-and-file German soldiers and finally the German people themselves. Mr. Ganz does such a fine job channeling the rage of a defeated madman that it is easy to forget how little historical documentation remains from that event. Few of the people who witnessed the tirade survived the war, and only one wrote a firsthand account—of questionable accuracy. Mr. Ganz's riveting performance is believable not because it is historically well grounded but because it is the way most people expect a defeated man to behave. Recriminations, blame, rage and a sense of unimpeachability are all too common in leaders at every level.

The context of this Sunday's Gospel reading might have suggested a "Downfall"-style rant at this point in the John's narrative. After repeated controversies with authorities in Jerusalem, Jesus has gone into hiding (Jn 11:54). Now, having gathered covertly with his disciples, he announces his imminent betrayal and identifies his betrayer as one of the Twelve (Jn 13:27). Not much further into the narrative, he will reveal Peter's coming denials (Jn 13:36-38). The passage that the church reads this Sunday is the interlude between these revelations. One might have expected a statement of disappointment or regret, or a lashing out at the disciples for their disloyalty and cowardice. One might also imagine a leader who rallies his followers with calls for vengeance.

Instead, Jesus speaks to them of love. John goes to great pains to show how Jesus acted in love even as he faced death. In the lengthy discourse that starts in Jn 13:31 and continues to Jn 17:26, Jesus speaks of the love he and the Father share, of the love he has for his disciples and of the love they must have for one another. Jesus acknowledges the world's hatred (Jn 15:18-25) not to get a reaction from his disciples, but rather as a contrast to the gift that the Father offers. The hostility of the world is not a cause for concern as long as they trust in the coming Advocate and love one another.

'I give you a new commandment: Love one another.' (Jn 13:34)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What new thing has Jesus' love taught you?

How has your faith taught you to subvert human expectations?

"I make all things new." Now, at the moment of his own apparent downfall, Jesus does not behave as one might expect. There are no tantrums or demands for vengeance, but only commands for his disciples to love. This is the new thing that will remake creation.

In the face of deadly opposition, Jesus never swerved from his commitment to love. He remained loyal to the Father and humble among his friends. He opened a new path of human existence, freed from self-destruction and alienation.

Love is the key to discipleship. Without the love Jesus revealed, Christianity is a jumble of practices and rules, traditions and teachings that neither cohere nor inspire. With love, the teachings of Christ draw disciples ever closer to God and neighbor. For those who live as Christ did, death is no downfall. It is an invitation to a new life of eternal glory.

Michael Simone, S.J., *teaches Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.*

Love Divine

Readings: Acts 15:1-29, Ps 67, Rev 21:10-23, Jn 14:23-29

The New Testament writers faced a problem when they tried to describe Christian life after the resurrection. They wrote for an audience who were experiencing the risen Christ still at work. Nevertheless, each author had to acknowledge that, at some point, the risen Christ had stopped appearing in the flesh to his disciples. Their efforts to explain this contradiction produced some of the richest early Christian theology.

This was no academic exercise. Christ's disciples had taken on his mission, and with it the hostility directed against it. In addition, Jesus' message challenged their understanding. The presence was mysterious. Mark's Gospel reports it with no explanation: "The Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs" (Mk 16:20). Matthew and Luke go further and attribute this unseen presence to the Spirit (Mt 10:20; Acts 1:8), as does Paul (1 Cor 2:12-13), who also terms it "grace" (2 Cor 12:9) and "power" (Phil 3:10). These are just some of the terms New Testament authors gave to the mysterious reality that filled Christians with courage and wisdom.

Contemporaneous religious communities had more specific ideas about the unseen powers that influenced them. Members of certain Jewish sects spoke of angels guiding and strengthening believers. Romans understood each individual to have a *genius,* a guardian spirit that led each person through life. Some Greek authors spoke of something similar, a *daimon.* The *daimons* conferred supernatural abilities on heroes and divine wisdom on philosophers.

The Evangelist's discussion of the "Advocate" in this Sunday's Gospel reflects something from all these traditions. Like other early Christian writers, John understands Jesus to remain at work among his disciples. But unlike those other writers, John attempts to peer through the mystery. John's Advocate is much more than an angel or Greco-Roman demigod, however. The Advocate is nothing less than the Father's love. Of all the Father's attributes, love is the one that can communicate the divine nature perfectly. An encounter with divine love is an encounter with God's own self, and the Advocate is thus a personification of that divine love.

Throughout his Gospel, John had been careful to trace Jesus' relationship to the Father's love. God's love for a perishing humanity initiated salvation history (Jn 3:16), and Jesus' love for his disciples brought that history to its culmination (Jn 15:13-17). In every miracle Jesus gave a sign of divine love; and in every Gospel command, Jesus offered a way to conform one's life to love's example.

Gospel love makes God present. As the first disciples trusted in the Advocate, they found a love that gave peace to their hearts. In this peace, they continued to serve Christ's mission even in the face of hostility, and thus came themselves to embody God's love for others. Just so, Christians today will find in divine love everything they need for the world's salvation. In every word of the Gospel they can encounter Christ's peace once more, and in every loving deed they will reveal that Christ continues to visit the world with saving power.

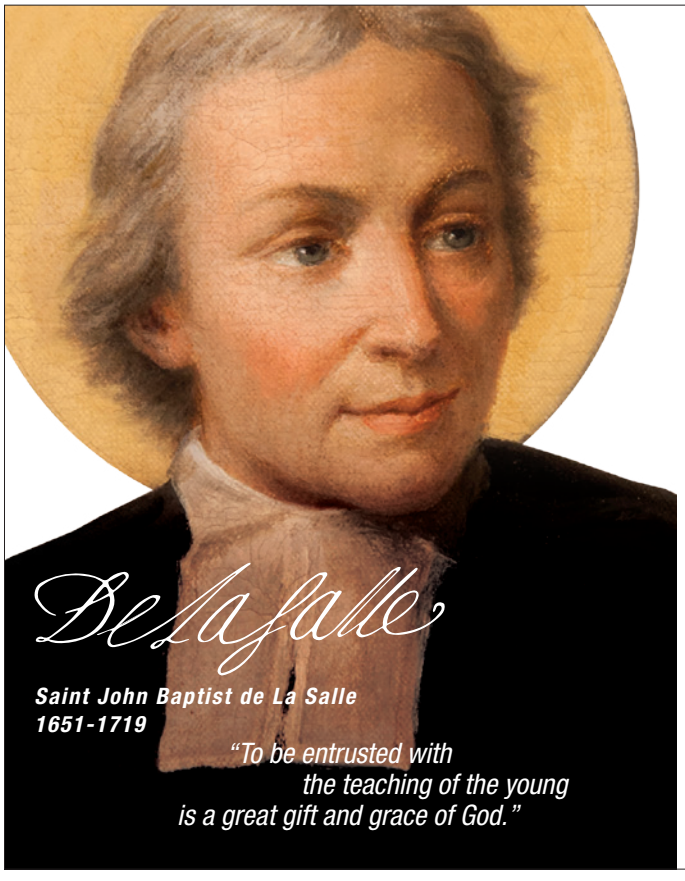
'We will come to him and make our dwelling with him.' (Jn 14:23)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How has divine love guided your life?

How have your own acts of love helped you encounter divine love?

Michael Simone, S.J., *teaches Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.*



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Theological Epiphanies

Diversity in the classroom can push us out of our comfort zones

By Maureen O'Connell

I became a theologian because I relished the epiphanies I experienced studying the Catholic tradition: the "aha!" sensations when a gift from that tradition would rock my theology nerd world. A big part of teaching at two Catholic institutions over the past 15 years has been the joy of creating epiphany experiences for my students.

In the last six years working at La Salle University in Philadelphia, however, I have also found myself to be a student again, one on the receiving end of epiphanic experiences. La Salle has an applicant pool that looks dramatically different from when I was applying to colleges in the early 1990s. Today, it is the rule—not the exception—that there are at least as many students of color in my classrooms as white students. In diverse classrooms, epiphanies do not necessarily come from the Catholic tradition itself but from the people trying to be together while engaging it.

There was Nasir, a black student who offered the gift of re-centering a course's authoritative texts away from readings and toward students' lived experiences. "When it comes to racism," he said, "I just wish people would believe me." And so I try to educate around the stories of the people in the room and not just of those in the tradition.

During a community organizing course, Miguel, a Latino student, requested that we make time and space for practices of self-care. Many of the students were not just examining social problems like cash bail or unequal public school funding but rather trying to live—study, work, take care of siblings—in the midst of them. Now I make time for the students to write haikus or practice mindfulness breathing exercises or name and celebrate our wins, no matter how small.

Then there are the epiphanies that disrupt us when the worlds within Generation Z collide. Exchanges among young people reveal chasms of estrangement. White student teachers describe deplorable conditions in the public schools where they are doing their field work, only to discover that a fellow classmate graduated from that school. A white guest speaker from a radical Christian community in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia spends five minutes describing the neighborhood—in the presence of a student who tells him she lives there.

In these moments, diverse classrooms reveal the truth that the Catholic tradition has often been used in a city like Philadelphia to keep us separate. We have become strangers to each other, whether through generations of church-assisted segregation in housing and schools and universities or through a mindset that approaches disadvantaged people primarily as people in need.

I also constantly need to remind myself that expecting students of color to teach me and their white peers about the injustices of a racialized society burdens them with yet another responsibility. Students of color deserve more than that. They deserve to see more people who look like them doing the teaching and agitating with them for structural changes that will make straight the crooked paths of higher education.

My epiphanies have taught me that white students also deserve more. They deserve more white educators willing to push them out of their comfort zones, to help them recognize the false boundaries and constructs they have inherited from several generations of racially segregated housing and education.

Last month, Maria, a Latina alumna, came back to campus. In talking about how to prepare for life after La Salle, she quoted a *mujerista* theologian who had given me one of my first epiphanies as a student. But Maria used her in an entirely new way. I encountered that theologian and her truth, myself and my vocation, and Maria's wisdom. The next day, I took a breath to reset and headed back into the classroom.

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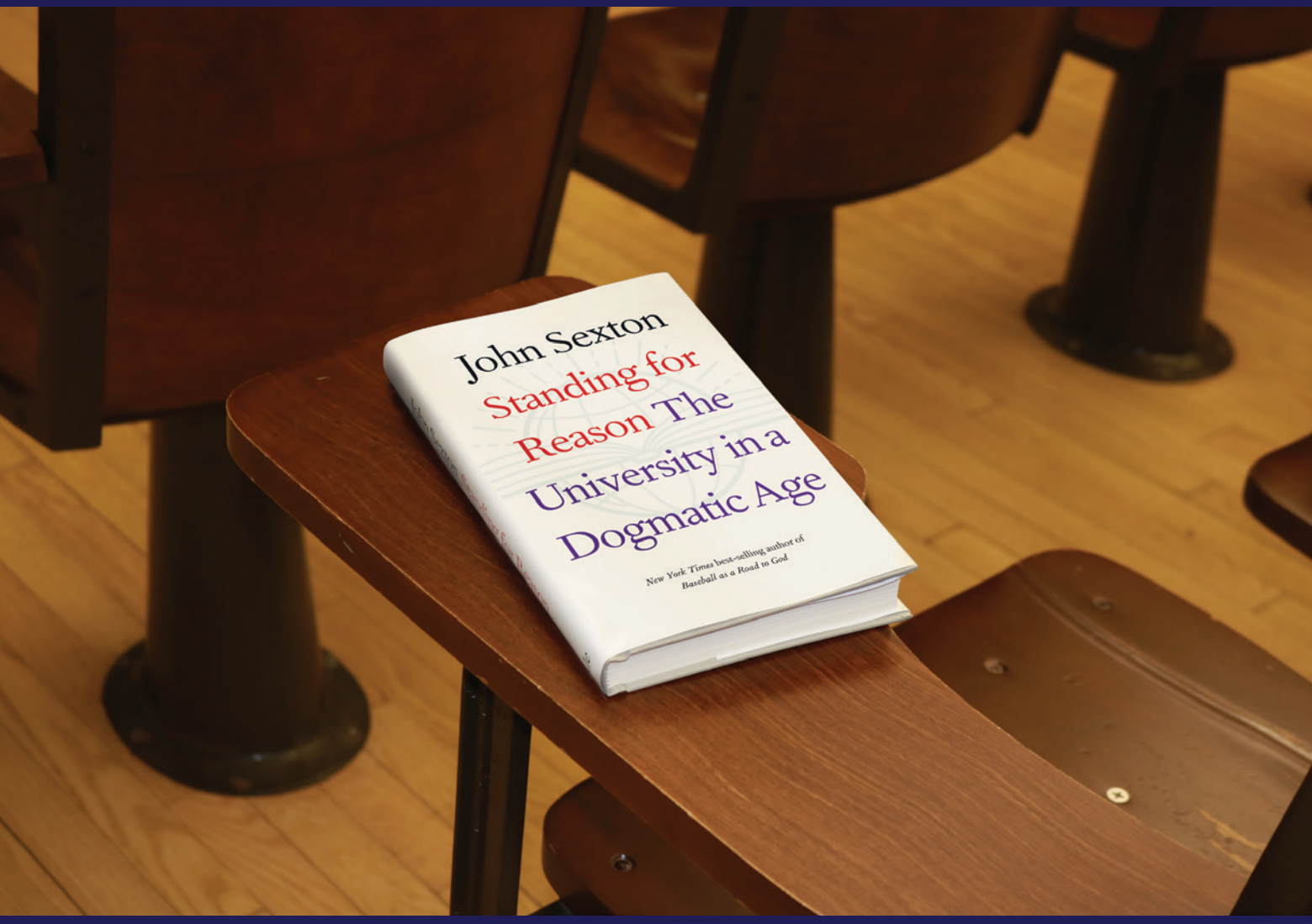

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